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**AN EXPLORATION OF THE COPING STRATEGIES OF BLACK
MINORITY HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS AT A GERMAN SPEAKING
SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND THE SUPPORT STRUCTURES
AVAILABLE TO THEM**

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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 Date: 3/4/06

ABSTRACT

In 1991, white schools across South Africa began opening their doors to children of all race groups. This marked a move from an education system of social exclusion and racial division towards one which celebrates inclusion and cultural diversity. It also brought with it many challenges. White school communities had to accommodate black learners for the first time and these learners had to learn to adapt and cope with a new school environment in which they were a minority.

This study sought to explore the experiences of black minority high school learners at a private, German speaking school in Cape Town. It set out to examine the ways in which they cope with integrating into a white majority school environment and the support structures which are available to them. Data was collected using pre-focus group and focus group interviews. Qualitative data analysis methods were used drawing on Tesch's eight step model, (in De Vos, 1998:343). A framework for analysis was developed in which four main themes related to stress and coping emerged. These included: relationships at school, school work, other demands of the school system and support structures. This thematic analysis revealed that integrating into this white majority school environment is stressful for black minority learners. It also revealed that these learners make use of a wide range of coping strategies in order to deal with this stress. These include problem-focused coping strategies, where learners do something active to alleviate their stress and emotion-focused coping strategies, where they attempt to manage the emotional consequences of the stressful event. Findings also revealed that a number of support structures exist within the school and home environment of the learners. Support needs were also identified and explored and recommendations were made which included some practical recommendations for ongoing intervention and support for these learners in the future.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter will be structured according to the following framework:

- 1.1 Introduction to the problem**
- 1.2 Background**
- 1.3 Rationale and significance of the study**
- 1.4 The research questions**
- 1.5 Objectives**
- 1.6 Clarification of concepts**
- 1.7 Ethical concerns**
- 1.8 Reflexivity**
- 1.9 Chapter outline**

1.1 Introduction to the problem:

This study explores the experiences of a group of black minority learners who attend a white, German-speaking school in Cape Town, South Africa. It is an attempt to gain insight into the difficulties which they experience within this context, the ways in which they cope and the various support structures which are available to them. The research topic is therefore stated as:

An exploration of the coping strategies of black minority learners at a German-speaking school and the support structures available to them.

Before discussing the rationale for this study, it is important to consider its background which will include the historical context in which it is located.

1.2 Background

In 1976 private schools in South Africa used their relative autonomy from the state and

began moving towards school desegregation. The 'open schools movement' marked a process whereby private white-registered schools broke with established apartheid policies and admitted students of all races, (Christie in Freer, 1991:57). Although these schools attempted to address the injustices of the apartheid system by providing learners from disadvantaged communities with access to a better education they were also criticized for admitting only those learners who were "socially and academically acceptable" by imposing high school fees and strict entry requirements, (Gaganakis in Freer, 1991:73).

The Deutsche Schule Kapstadt (DSK) is a private school in Cape Town which was established in 1883 in order to provide primary and secondary schooling for the German speaking community of Cape Town. Although the DSK became an 'open school' in 1971, it remained almost exclusively white and German-speaking. This was largely due to the fact that no formal structures had been put in place to facilitate the integration of non-German speaking learners into the school community.

In 1991, white schools in South Africa began opening their doors to children of all race groups and adopting a policy of multiculturalism. This marked a move away from an education system which promoted exclusion and racial division towards an inclusive system which values cultural diversity as a positive and enriching component of society, (Squelch, 1991: 61). In order to facilitate this process of desegregation and integration of schools throughout South Africa, a number of laws and policies were put in place by the newly elected democratic government in 1994.

Against this backdrop, and with the added pressure from the German Government, the DSK adopted a policy of multiculturalism in 1991 and sought to actively recruit and enroll children from all racial, cultural and language groups. In order to facilitate this process and provide support to non-German speaking learners, the school developed the "Neue Sekundarstufe" (NSS) programme and since its inception, non-German speaking children from a diverse range of communities have been enrolled into grade 5.

An initial interview with the current head of this programme revealed that its primary aim is to redress the inequalities of the past and contribute towards the development of South Africa by providing children with an equal opportunity in education. One way of doing this is to provide bursaries from the German government to black learners¹ who are attending schools in poor communities and who, due to poor socio-economic circumstances at home, are unable to attend a private school. Not unlike other previously white schools in South Africa, the enrolment of a greater proportion of black learners provided the school with the unique challenge of ensuring their successful social and academic integration into the school community. In order to address this issue, a number of support structures have been established by the NSS programme on an incremental basis over the years. One example of this was the establishment of a 'bridging programme' for grade 4 learners from 'partner schools'. Those who showed strong academic potential attended extra classes once a week in order to assist them with their Maths and English literacy. The purpose was to provide them with a greater chance of passing the entrance exam for grade 5 enrollments at the DSK.

Despite the support structures, my observations as the school counselor at the DSK reveal that these children find it difficult to integrate both socially and academically into a school environment which has high academic standards and where the majority of learners are white, privileged and german-speaking. This view has also been supported by teachers at the school and research conducted in other private and non-private school settings. The focus of this study will therefore be to explore the experiences of these children at the school and how they cope with the academic and social pressures placed on them.

1.3 Rationale and significance of the study

The main reason for undertaking this study arises from a need to gain a deeper understanding of the coping capacities of black learners who are a minority at the school

¹The term 'black learner' refers to African and so-called 'Coloured' learners at the DSK. "The terms 'black', 'coloured' and 'white' do not refer to a biological concept of race but to the political system of racial classification that underpinned apartheid education", (Zafar, 1998:3)

and it is hoped that these insights will allow for the more effective accommodation and support of these learners. The research is therefore significant for the school and, in particular, the NSS programme in that the findings can be used to build upon and improve the quality of support services available to the minority learners.

Access to education and training increases the productive capacity of people so that they are empowered to participate and contribute actively as citizens towards democracy and the economic growth of their country, (Seidman, 1985). In order to ensure that all its citizens have access to education, the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution (1996), states that one of the basic human rights is education for all within a system that promotes unity and inclusion, (Geyer and Moat, 2002:5). One way in which schools in South Africa have made this a reality is through adopting a policy of multiculturalism with the aim of promoting equal educational opportunities, preserving cultural identity, valuing human dignity and ensuring the peaceful co-existence of diverse lifestyles, (Squelch, 1991:61). However, the mere adoption of this type of system does not automatically ensure that learners are effectively included and Erasmus and Ferreira (2002:28) claim that there is a need for schools to create a stabilizing and accommodating atmosphere which will allow the learners to realize their scholastic potential without cultural or social constraints, (Erasmus and Ferreira, 2002:28). One way of doing this is to ensure that the correct support structures are put into place.

It has been over ten years since the NSS programme was initiated at the school and its head claims that there has been no formal research conducted into the experiences of the black learners at the DSK and the impact of the NSS programme on their lives. Support for the black learners has been provided on an ad hoc basis when needs or problems arise. The research findings will therefore contribute towards the knowledge base available to the school from which to improve and design new support interventions. It may also provide some insight into the impact of the NSS programme and how it meets their needs. It is hoped that in the long term this study will contribute towards the reduction of the number of black learners who leave the school because they are unable to cope with the academic and social pressures placed on them.

The significance of the research for the black learners is that an improvement of support structures could assist them in the process of reaching their full academic and social potential at the school. Thus a strengths-based perspective is adopted in this research whereby the capabilities and talents of the black learners are to be fostered.

The research is significant for the school community as a whole because it will provide its members with deeper insight and understanding into the experiences of black minority learners at the school. It is hoped that this will contribute towards developing more positive attitudes towards other cultural groups and promote the understanding and appreciation of the diversity within the school community, (Squelch, 1991:61).

Finally, it is also hoped that this research will contribute towards the body of knowledge which seeks to understand the complexities surrounding the integration of black minority learners into a white majority environment and how this impacts on the learners' reality and ability to make use of coping strategies.

1.4 Research questions

This is an exploratory, qualitative study with the emphasis being on two aspects of the experience of black minority learners within a german-speaking school environment: firstly, their coping strategies and secondly, the support structures available to them. In order to explore these, the researcher has been guided by the following questions:

With reference to coping strategies:

1. How do black minority learners interact with and relate to one another and with the rest of the school population?
2. How do black minority learners cope with their studies?
3. How do black minority learners cope with the other demands of the school system such as being taught in a second language, relationships with teachers, participation in sport and extra-mural activities?

With reference to support structures:

4. What structures and resources are in place to support the black learners?
5. How can these support structures and resources be improved?
6. What other interventions can be implemented to provide support?

1.5 Objectives of the study

The overall objectives of the research will be to gain a deeper understanding and insight into both the coping strategies of the black minority learners at the DSK as well as support structures available to them. More specifically an investigation will be carried out:

1. To explore the interaction and relationships between black learners, their peers and the rest of the school population
2. To examine how black learners cope with the academic demands placed on them.
3. To investigate how black learners cope with the other demands of the school system such as being taught in a second language, participation in sport and extra-mural activities.
4. To determine what support structures and resources already exist and are being utilised by the black learners.
5. To explore with the learners how they believe the existing structures and resources can be improved and maintained in order to ensure ongoing support for black learners at the school.
6. To investigate and explore with the learners what other interventions can be implemented in order to increase the support base for black learners.

1.6 Clarification of concepts

Black minority learner: In the context of the study the term black minority learners include 'African' and so-called 'Coloured' scholars who are a racial minority at the school and also a language minority because German is not their mother tongue. Race is

a social construct and was constructed in order to categorise people as a means of political and social control, (ELRU, 1997:5). Zafar, (1998:3) states that the terms 'Coloured', 'White' and 'African' do not refer to "a biological concept of race but to the political system of racial classification that underpinned apartheid education". While I do not wish to aspire to these classifications, I feel that it is still important to acknowledge the difference in experience of learners who have grown up in a country that was controlled by apartheid and the problems associated with this. As stated by Eyber et al, (1997:3), the terms African, Coloured, Indian and White are not "valid categories of classification but they have, in some ways, become part of people's identities in this country".

Coping strategies: Refers to the constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts people make in order to manage the circumstances which are appraised to be taxing or exceeding the resources of the person. There are two categories of coping which include: problem-solving strategies, where something active is done to alleviate stressful circumstances and emotion-focused strategies which include efforts to alleviate the emotional consequences of stressful circumstances, (Folkman and Lazarus, 1984).

Strengths perspective: An approach which stresses the importance of identifying and building upon the strengths of individuals. It therefore seeks to tap into talents, knowledge, resources, motivation and environmental assets of the individual, (Michalski, 1999).

Support structures: These refer to the different types of external resources which are available to the learners and utilised by them in order to meet the demands placed on them by the school system.

1.7 Ethical concerns

Outlined below are the ethical issues which have been considered during this study.

Exclusion of white learners: The selection of black learners as the target population raises the issue of the exclusion of other minority learners at the school, specifically the

white, English-speaking learners. In order to deal sensitively with this issue it is planned that this study marks the first phase of research intervention which focuses namely on the Black learners. The second phase, which will take place after this study, will target the white minority learners at the school and explore the strategies they utilize in order to cope within a German-speaking school environment.

Emotional harm: The sensitive nature of the research topic may evoke strong feelings in some of the participants. For this reason, the researcher undertook to remain sensitive towards the impact that the research process had on the participants and offered the option of individual debriefing sessions after the focus group sessions.

Informed consent: All of the learners in the target population are under the age of eighteen years and therefore parental consent to participate in the study had to be obtained. A letter was sent to each parent and a consent form was signed by them beforehand (appendix A:87). It was also important to ensure that participants received clear information about the research and were given the opportunity to make a voluntary decision to participate. For this purpose, the pre-focus group interviews provided a platform from which to clarify the purpose of the study, obtain consent from each individual learner and prepare them for the group meeting.

Confidentiality: In relation to the use of focus groups, issues of confidentiality are an important consideration because there can be no absolute guarantee that confidences shared in the group will be respected. In order to address this it was important to set ground rules prior to the sessions where issues of confidentiality and disclosure were clarified. Related to this is the participants' right to personal privacy and in order to respect this, the researcher had to ensure that the information shared remained anonymous, (De Vos, 2002:68).

Research report: The school will be given a copy of the report and the students have been informed of this. The examination copy will be assessed by the supervisor and the external examiners.

1.8 Reflexivity

The researcher's role as the school counsellor would have an impact on the validity of the study because of researcher-bias. Familiarity with many of the group participants and immersion in the school context may have impacted on the relationship with them as group facilitator and the way in which data has been interpreted. However, at the same time, this could prove to be positive because learners would feel more comfortable with the researcher because of familiarity and trust and this could have led to a greater sense of 'openness' and willingness to share in the group. It could also provide for a 'pre-understanding' of the data which has allowed for the researcher to deepen her submersion in the text while undertaking the analysis, (Kritzinger and Barbour, 1999:147). In order to control for these issues the researcher has needed to constantly monitor herself and maintain a sense of self-awareness in order to keep in check that the "insider perspective" did not skew the interpretations of the data.

1.9 Chapter outline

The structure of the research report will consist of five chapters.

Chapter One:	Introduction
Chapter Two:	Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
Chapter Three:	Research Design and Methodology
Chapter Four:	Presentation and Analysis of Findings
Chapter Five:	Main Conclusions and Recommendations

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This literature review will be structured according to the following framework:

- 2.1 Introduction**
- 2.2 School desegregation: a global perspective**
- 2.3 School desegregation: the South African context**
- 2.4 Desegregation and its impact on the psycho-social well-being of minority learners**
- 2.5 Desegregation and its impact on the school work of minority learners**
- 2.6 Stress and coping**
 - 2.6.1 Definition**
 - 2.6.2 Adolescence, stress and coping**
 - 2.6.3 Support structures**
- 2.7 Strengths perspective**
- 2.8 Summary**

2.1 Introduction

A review of the literature which documents and explores the experiences of minority learners reveals that it is located primarily within the context of school desegregation and the subsequent racial integration of learners. For this reason, the literature review will provide some background into the history of desegregation before moving on to explore its impact on minority learners. Stress and coping will also be defined with particular emphasis on support structures available to adolescents which assist them in managing stress. Exploring the strengths of the learners at the DSK is a central theme of this research and therefore the concept of a 'strengths perspective' will be discussed in the final section of this literature review.

2.2 School desegregation: a global perspective

Desegregation is described by Zafar (1998:11) as “the mechanical process of opening a school to students from all racial, ethnic and cultural groups”.

An examination of the global trends indicates that the difficulties and challenges related to the desegregating of schools are not unique to South Africa. An example of this is the desegregation of schools in the USA following the Civil Rights Movement and a decision by the United States Supreme Court in 1954 which led to the dismantling of the legal system which supported the segregation of schools. However, no desegregation in schools took place until 1966 when the Federal government enforced desegregation and practical steps were taken to realize the change. One obstacle in the way of this process was the residential segregation of different race groups which led to the tendency of desegregation being limited to neighbourhood schools (Epps, 1974:10). To overcome this, a system of ‘bussing’ was introduced in the early 70’s where transportation was offered to black pupils in order to bring about integration in the school system. Bussing is described by Epps (1974:11) as “transporting of students by bus to public schools outside their neighbourhoods in an effort to achieve racial balance”. It was within this context that problems and issues around the integration of black learners into predominantly white schools arose.

Support for children from ethnic minority groups was also an important issue for schools in the United Kingdom following a wave of immigration in the 1970s. In 1985 the Swann Report was released which emphasised the need for schools to develop long-term programmes and interventions to deal with the academic demands placed on them because of the increasing number of children from Afro-Caribbean and Asian descent, (Freer, 1991:17). Following the publication of the report, widespread consultation took place and black people were given the opportunity to express their views and articulate their needs. This information was used in order to develop an integrated schooling system in the UK which is based on the principle of “Education for All”, (Freer, 1991:19).

2.3 School desegregation: the South African context

Before the eradication of apartheid, a number of private schools in South Africa adopted policies of desegregated schooling from the mid-1970's. Private and religious schools, which were "white" schools, admitted a large number of black learners and were only recognized by the Government in the Private Schools Act of 1986, (Freer, 1991:94). On the one hand, these schools received widespread criticism from the political left because the move was seen as catering for the socially and economically elite and not effectively contributing towards the struggle for non-racial education in South Africa. However, on the other hand, it was claimed that private schools were playing an important role in providing opportunities for children from disadvantaged communities. Christie (in Freer, 1991:58) argues that open schools contributed towards an understanding of the experiences related to racial mixing in a segregated society and that these experiences influenced the final move to desegregate state schools in the 1990's.

Since 1991 a number of laws and policy documents have been developed in order to ensure the successful desegregation and integration of schools in South Africa. The most important of these include: The Constitution and Bill of Rights which outlines the right to equality and access to basic education for all; the National Education Policy Act (1996) which "ensures that all policies will protect the rights of people within and relating to the education system", (Geyer & Moat, 2002:19); the National School Policy Act (1996) which provides a framework for the integration of schools in South Africa and finally, the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (August 2000) which outlines the implementation strategies for building non-racism in schools and the values which underpin them.

Shortly after these laws and policies were established, a number of studies were conducted in order to gain deeper insight into the problems and issues related to the process of desegregation in South African schools. They were based on the rationale that an increase in diversity in school communities has an academic, social and emotional impact on the learners which needs to be explored. The Human Sciences Research

Council conducted research into the “Deracialisation and migration of learners in South African schools”, (2001). The aim of the study was twofold; to examine the migratory trends of learners since 1994 and to identify “key challenges and implications for the deracialisation and learner migration processes”, (Sekete et al, 2001: viii). Using questionnaires, it targeted 120 schools in 5 provinces and found that, while government policies have provided a framework for developing an open and accessible education system, they have not guaranteed a move towards the successful integration of learners. Instead, school communities face many difficulties and challenges. Furthermore, the impact of desegregation on minority learners is of particular concern.

2.4 Desegregation and its impact on the psycho-social well-being of minority learners

- **Peer relationships: issues of identity and alienation**

Berns (1997:333) states that the peer group is a “socializing agent” which contributes towards the social, cognitive and psychological development of young people. Through social interaction with another and engaging in processes such as recognition and approval, peer group members play an important role in shaping identity or self-concept.

Gaganakis (in Freer, 1991:73) explored the situation of black pupils who were a minority in wealthy private schools in Johannesburg. The study focused mainly on issues of identity and alienation and found that participants identified themselves as being part of an “excluded group”. It was acknowledged that many of the problems the pupils experienced were related to the disempowering and constraining structures they were exposed to because of their historical exclusion from access to resources and political power. Related to this is a key finding of the study that the pupils perceive the biggest difference between themselves and their white counterparts as being the different worlds in which they live. They experience stress and an “inability to cope” when they attempt to negotiate and reconcile these two “worlds”. On the one hand they are mixing with their white peers at school and yet still experiencing their “difference”. In their

communities they feel isolated and may even be seen as “different” by their black peers who are not attending private, mostly white schools. Thus, the learners’ identity and how they perceive themselves within the school and within their own communities also requires some adaptation and negotiation. This view is supported by Yeh (2000:423) who claims that a fundamental concern for ethnic minority youth is that of learning to negotiate contrasting cultural identities. Since their communication styles, interpersonal relationship norms and cultural values are very different from the dominant white culture, black minority learners are forced to negotiate a new “way of being” in order to reduce the stress.

- **Individual versus collectivist cultures**

Other studies also support this finding. More than ten years after official desegregation in schools, Erasmus and Ferreira, (2002:28) conducted research into the experiences of black grade 9 learners and their integration in historically white suburban schools. The study set out to obtain a deeper understanding of the real-life experiences of African learners and how this impacts on themselves and their learning. The findings reveal that African learners who live in physically deprived conditions are expected to integrate into an environment where the focus is on individual achievement. These expectations are in direct contrast to their traditionally held values of “collectivism” and therefore they need to adopt a new identity which leads to feelings of alienation, particularly in relation to their own communities.

Markus and Kityama (1997:50) claim that children from collectivist cultures must learn to be “assertive, independent and confident to succeed in schools” but when they return home they have to shift back and adapt to “culture-based role expectations of peers, elders and significant others”. This places enormous pressure on the coping capacities of learners leading sometimes to intense feelings of alienation. It has been argued by those who support the “alternation model of bicultural competence” that the challenge for children in this situation is for them to become “biculturally competent” by learning to “integrate two cultures without feeling the tension between the two”, (LaFromboise et al,

1993:410). In other words, learners need to adapt their behaviour in different social and cultural contexts without committing to a specific cultural identity. This includes being able to adjust to different contexts by adopting a number of strategies such as using different languages or adjusting interpersonal styles of interaction. Case studies conducted with minority learners by Nieto, (1992:232) in the United States had similar findings. Often these learners experience internal conflict on an unconscious level when there is pressure to 'assimilate' into the dominant culture at school. In order to cope with this they attempt to create new cultures by choosing from "an array of values and behaviours, selecting those that 'fit' in the new society and discarding or transforming others", (Nieto, 1992:232). In a similar study, Boykin (in Neisser, 1986:56), who conducted research into the schooling of African-American children, described the experience of the minority child at school as "The Triple Quandary". Within this framework, the learner has to negotiate the three realms of existence: the Black cultural experience, the minority experience and the mainstream experience.

- **Negotiating cultures**

Learning to become "biculturally competent" can become even more stressful for minority learners when pressure is placed on them from their own peer group. Freydenberg in McNamara (2000:38) also supports the notion that school relationships are common sources of stress for young people and are "an inherent part of adolescent transition". In other words they are normative stressors which provide developmental challenges for all adolescents. Perhaps this is because great emphasis is placed on factors such as "loyalty, confidentiality, trust and generosity" in peer groups. If these are not perceived, then an individual could be disqualified from the group causing distress and alienation. For example, these relationships can tend towards exclusion and social prejudice and this is particularly stressful for young people, (McNamara, 2000:41). Bullying amongst peers is one such stressor and Sullivan et al (2004:2) claims that bullying is a difficult problem for about one in six children. It occurs in all types of schools and is worst during early adolescence. There is also evidence that its impact can have lifelong debilitating consequences because it interferes with the normal

developmental processes. According to this author, victims of bullying are more lonely, worried and are usually more withdrawn. Evidence of bullying and being left out was found in a study conducted by Van Heerden, (1999:77) which set out to explore the theme of identity amongst black South African learners. The study found a high incidence of labelling amongst the 'in-group' when learners attempted to make friends with the 'out-group'. Fordham and Ogbu (in Nieto, 1992:230) had similar findings amongst Black students in the United States. They found that "students developed group loyalty by defining some attitudes and behaviours as 'white' and consequently unacceptable". This behaviour can also be understood within the context of "group pressure" as a means of enforcing "sociocultural expectations". Berns (1997:78) states that "because humans have a need to affiliate with other humans and because social approval determines whether or not one is accepted by the group, humans will tend to conform to the groups expectations". In order to cope with their stress, the black learners in Fordham and Ogbu's study, (in Nieto, 1992:230) adopted various coping strategies to fit in, such as underachieving in academic abilities or excelling in sports.

According to Berns, (1997:337), when this type of group pressure is placed on young people, they need to adopt coping strategies which revolve around managing to balance group with personal autonomy. In other words, they need to cope with this stress by being able to successfully negotiate the conflict between personal and group values. Within this context they will need to negotiate and distinguish between their personal values against group values and in doing so, they will achieve their identity successfully and forge a personal role within the group.

- **Need for acceptance**

Acceptance by peers from race groups other than their own is an important issue for minority children. In Du Toit's (1995:212) study into the problems experienced with the integration of black pupils into formerly white schools, the black pupils experienced feelings of rejection, alienation, non-acceptance and isolation. They also claimed that black and white pupils needed time to adapt to one another because they did not really

know one another. All these factors impacted negatively on their self-esteem and on their academic achievement. This supported the hypothesis that the adoption of an 'open school' system with a policy of multiculturalism does not mean that there will be guaranteed or immediate acceptance amongst pupils and teachers from different racial and cultural groups.

These findings were supported by a similar study conducted by Van Heerden's study (1999:67) which set out to explore the reality of desegregation in the South African public school system. It looked at "issues of attitude, behaviour and identity among black and white pupils in desegregated South African high schools". Some of the positive results revealed that black and white pupils acknowledged the benefits of desegregated schooling. Less positive findings revealed that, while most of the black pupils chose to attend desegregated schools in order to become well educated, they were also aware that they had to pay the price of having to adapt to difficult circumstances within a school environment where there is little meaningful interaction between black and white pupils. The study also revealed that Black learners experienced feelings of alienation and uncertainty at school. Both black and white pupils explained that they get along better with people of their own 'culture' and that they prefer to associate with those with whom they share interests and whose behaviour is familiar.

Further insight into this issue is provided by Berns (1997:296) who claims that socialization and the process of learning how to function in a group and thereby adapting to the group's expectations, is difficult for children from ethnic groups other than the major cultural group at the school. Patchen, (1982:113) studied the impact of "early experiences" of learners as a determinant of black-white social relations in the United States. It was found that "among black students, the absence of friendly contact with whites prior to high school led to avoidance of whites in high school". It found that the black students were apprehensive to make contact with the white students because they feared rejection. The findings state that "the key issue for blacks was whether white schoolmates generally were willing to accept them as equal" (Patchen, 1982:330).

- **Racism and stereotyping**

Another factor which places more stress on minority learners is the incidence of racism and stereotyping. In Geyer and Moat (2002:13), racism is defined as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin, which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise on an equal footing of human rights and fundamental freedoms in political, economic, social cultural or any other field of private life”.

Milner (in Klein, 1993:43) describes stereotyping as “the attribution of supposed characteristics of the whole group to all its members”.

In Du Toit’s (1995) study 42 per cent of black respondents indicated that the problem they disliked the most was the racist behaviour of white pupils. The data revealed that these incidents compound the learners’ level of stress at school and their feelings of alienation. This is supported by Gougis, (in Neisser, 1986:148) who studied the effects of prejudice on the academic performance of black learners in the United States. His findings proved that “recurring thoughts and feelings associated with race prejudice contribute to a reduction in their motivation to learn and to increased interference with the cognitive processes involved in learning”. Erasmus and Ferreira, (2002:32) also found that racist incidents at school affected the self-esteem of black learners and “steadily eroded any feelings of positive self-worth”.

- **Involvement of parents**

The situation is further complicated by the fact that often the minority culture is not recognized or sufficiently represented at white schools. For example, Du Toit’s study, (1995:212) one of the key findings was that at schools where black parents were unable to have much influence on the culture, customs and ethos of the school, black pupils were more likely to feel frustrated. Many studies conducted into parental involvement in schools, (cited in Berns, 1997:318) provide evidence of higher levels of academic success amongst their children. Some of the reasons given for this is: children develop a more

positive attitude to learning, there is better attendance of school and children develop a more positive self-esteem. This is further supported by Du Toit's study (1995:215) which also found that, on occasions where the culture of different groups is recognised, minority groups have a sense of recognition, acknowledgement and belonging. However, in its recommendations, the study warns that this, in itself, may not lead to a "profound understanding of the culture of another group, or automatically lessen prejudices".

2.5 Desegregation and its impact on the school work of minority learners

McNamara, (2000:42) claims that there is much evidence that school work is a major source of stress for young people and that feeling unhappy at school can have important consequences for the young person's personal and career development. However, as the previous research suggests, the stress experienced by minority learners goes beyond the normative stress experienced by most young people and is related to their unique experience of being a minority group in a white majority school environment. For example, research in the United States has shown that while the academic performance of minority learners in desegregated schools has improved, not all of them have had the same access to educational opportunities as their white peers because many of them were resegregated into special education classes, Orfield (1996).

- **Poor socio-economic circumstances**

The Swann Report, which focused on the integration of minority children into white majority schools in the UK, also highlighted the need to recognize the impact of poor economic circumstances of minority learners on their academic achievement. Similar themes were uncovered by Eckenrode, (1991:70) when studying the impact of school transition amongst black adolescents. He found that the biggest stressors experienced by these learners were related to an increase in workload and academic demands and increase in parental pressure related to scholastic achievement.

- **Communication and language**

A review of literature reveals that language is another factor which impacts on academic achievement of minority learners. Van Ryneveld Grove (in Du Toit, 1995:216) claims that communication and language play an essential role in multicultural education and if communication is affected by language differences and poor language proficiency then the education of the child is disadvantaged.

This is supported by de Witt et al (1998:118) whose research found that learners who do not receive education in their mother-tongue experience problems with reading when compared with those who receive education in their mother tongue. Stentson, (1994:109) also points to the important link between language, culture and thought and claims that language is the means through which thought is communicated and that thought is influenced by the life experiences of a person in his/her cultural setting. It is therefore argued that education which is taught in the mother tongue and in a familiar cultural setting will be more meaningful for the learner. According to this argument, the medium of instruction affects the level of understanding the learners attain.

- **Self-esteem**

This struggle with school work can have a direct impact on the learner's self-esteem. The term self-esteem is closely related to self-concept with the latter referring to "one's idea of one's identity as distinct from others". Self-esteem refers to "the value one places on that identity" as being either high or low, (Berns, 1997:553).

Studies conducted in the USA have shown that ethnic minority learners generally enter school with a strong positive self-concept, but failure to conform to the majority group's expectations of academic achievement lead to lower scores self-esteem measures, (Berns, 1992:559). Coopersmith (in Verman, et al, 1975:150) also found that poorly defined self-concepts amongst learners or the view held by the child that they cannot gain increased competencies at school tends to result in under-achievement or poor performance. The lowering of self-esteem can have a significant impact on learner's coping capacities. Having positive beliefs about oneself is a very important psychological resource for

coping. Lazarus and Folkman (1984:159) claim that a negative belief about one's ability and capacity to have any control in a situation or about the efficacy of a particular strategy to which one is committed, can discourage coping efforts.

2.6 Stress and Coping

2.6.1 Definition

One method of gaining insight into the internal capacities and assets of an individual is to explore their coping strategies. This refers to the specific efforts, both behavioural and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce or minimize stressful events. The person draws on the internal and external resources available to him/her in order to deal with difficult or stressful circumstances. The key in this process is the person's ability to match demands and resources. It is also important to note that when exploring coping strategies, the focus should be on the person's coping strategies or efforts rather than on his/her ability to cope successfully. This is because some stressful circumstances may be outside the control of the individual such as the loss of a parent or caregiver (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

The stressful event also needs to be perceived by the person to be stressful. This notion is supported by Eckenrode, (1991:1) who states that "a prerequisite for coping is the presence of an event or condition appraised as harmful or threatening to the individual". The term 'appraisal' is one of the basic tenets of the psychological model of understanding stress and coping. It refers to the fact that before a particular event is dealt with, it first needs to be appraised by the individual as stressful. This is because, people and groups are different in terms of their sensitivity and vulnerability to certain events and also their interpretations and reactions, (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984:22). Because of this, people engage in particular coping strategies when dealing with particular stressful situations and Eckenrode, (1991:3) claims that literature provides little evidence of standard coping styles or traits across different types of stressors. However, literature does distinguish between two different types of coping strategies. These are defined as

problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused coping strategies.

- **Problem focused coping strategies**

When a person attempts to alleviate the stressful circumstances placed on them by doing something active, then he/she is employing a problem-focused strategy. An example of this could be arranging support from a teacher or tutor when problems with schoolwork arise. Kahn et al (in Lazarus and Folkman, 1984:152) describe these as strategies which lead to motivational or cognitive changes such as learning new skills or shifting levels of involvement in activities.

- **Emotion-focused strategies**

These are drawn on when people attempt to manage the emotional consequences of a stressful event. An example could be attempting to reframe a difficult situation in a more positive light or changing the meaning of a situation without changing it objectively. This process is also referred to as “cognitive reappraisal” by Lazarus and Folkman (1984:151). McNamara (2000:16) refers to this as “positive reframing” and claims that this coping process has beneficial consequences for adapting to new situations.

The use of either type of strategy depends on a combination of two factors: the personal style and the type of stressful event, (Skinner,1994). A further distinction has also been made between active and avoidant coping strategies.

- **Active coping strategies**

Active coping means that the individual manages the situation by attempting to change the nature of the stressor or how he/she thinks about it.

- **Avoidant coping strategies**

Avoidant coping means that the person adopts strategies that prevent him/her from dealing directly with the stressful event. This strategy usually involves an element of psychological risk, (Moos, 1986).

“The Wheel of fundamental human needs”, (Hope and Timmel, 1996:89) can also be utilised as a tool for gaining a deeper understanding into the ways people cope with stressful situations. Manfred Max-Neef, in an effort to seek a new approach to addressing human needs, developed a framework consisting of nine fundamental human needs: creation, affection, understanding, protection, participation, subsistence, rest/reflection, freedom and identity. One of the underlying philosophies of this approach is that needs motivate people to find creative solutions. It can therefore be used to analyse the ways in which individuals and/or societies attempt to satisfy these needs. The types of behaviours and social practices can be examined in relation to how these needs are being met whether it is by “being”, “having” or “doing”, (Hope and Timmel, 1996).

2.6.2 Adolescence, stress and coping

According to Erikson’s Psychosocial stages, adolescence is a period of “identity versus role confusion”. In other words the individual needs to integrate their identity or otherwise face role diffusion and a lack of positive identity. The successful resolution of this life stage is the ability to form stable commitments and close relationships. Common stresses in this stage are identified as a conflict between dependence and independence and also continuing sexual conflict, (Erikson, 1977).

Freydenberg in McNamara (2000:38) found that school and relationships are included as common sources of stress for young people and are an inherent part of adolescent transition. In other words they are “normative stressors” which present generic developmental challenges which all adolescents encounter, (McNamara, 2000:37).

However, membership to a minority group is described as a “non-normative stressor”. In other words, it is an unexpected, demanding situation and is “attributable to the consequences of the macro environment”. Being part of a minority group is also a risk

factor in the process of coping. In other words, this pre-condition places young people more at risk of being more vulnerable to the negative impacts of stress, McNamara, (2000:46).

2.6.3 Support structures

- **Social support (peers and teachers)**

McNamara, (2000:19) has found evidence that social support is one of the most important factors in mitigating or buffering the effects of potentially stressful situation. This finding is supported by Eckenrode, (1991:4) who explores the social context of coping and states that the social environment, whether defined broadly in terms of social structure or narrowly in terms of close social relationships, exerts powerful influences on the stress and coping process. The family network, the peer group and teachers have all been identified as key sources of support in the process of coping for young people.

- **Peer group**

A review of literature on adolescence claims that the peer group provides different levels of support in times of need. These include: emotional support such as listening or being empathetic, intellectual support such as giving advice, social support such as friendship or companionship and also tangible support such as sharing of money, (Berns, 1997:337). Within this context, the peer group plays an important role in the process of coping and McNamara, (2000:41) states that “adolescent peer groups are highly influential in determining the sources and outcomes for stressful life events for young people”. The importance of the social support of friends in the coping process is recognised because it has a buffering effect on the negative impacts of stress. It also builds self-esteem because the individual’s sense of self-worth is reassured when they feel emotionally supported by others.

Applying Manfred Max-Neef’s theory of “Fundamental Human Needs”, (Hope and Timmel, 1996:89), it is clear that the peer group plays an important role in fulfilling the

needs of young people such as the need for participation or social interaction; the need for identity or a sense of belonging; the need for understanding and the need for affection. One example of fulfilling this need for young people is the provision of role models by the peer group. McNamara, (2000:53) claims that the identification with competent role models is a “protective factor” when coping with stress. In other words, the availability of role models within the environment of the learners enabled some learners to cope more effectively with the difficult conditions at school.

Eckenrode’s, study (1991:70) into school transitions highlighted the importance of peer support. It found that school transitions are described by young people as “a difficult, troublesome and stressful experience”, particularly because they mark a time when friendship groups are affected. This “dissolution of friendships groups” is one of the most potent stressors for young people. This is because change often indicates a loss of support and that “when youth cannot rapidly re-negotiate these or other ties, we might hypothesize that these conditions are antecedent to more severe problems of loneliness and isolation”.

- **Teachers**

Teachers can play an important role in providing support for minority students because of their role in assisting them to make positive cultural and social adjustments. However, in order to do so, school professionals need to understand the learners’ cultural influences such as values, beliefs, differences in behaviour, language, worldview and past power experiences with the dominant culture, Yeh (2000:422). They also need to become conscious of “the level of ethnocentrism that influences their evaluation of children” so that there is a shift away from stereotyping or pathologising the learners’ behaviour. This concern is highlighted by, Erasums and Ferreira’s study (2002:34) which recommends that emphasis needs to be placed on the importance of effectively accommodating black pupils in the school so that they reach their full potential both scholastically and socially. They suggest that the answer lies in recognising and respecting “the rights of the individual as well as the rights of any cultural or race group”.

These findings are strongly supported by proponents of multicultural education and a study conducted by Felmlee and Hallinan (in Patchen, 1982:70) found that in classrooms with organisational structures which allowed a high level of interaction amongst pupils friendship choices were more evenly distributed, with less evidence of clique formation. Patchen, (1982:334) also found that working together on common activities contributes towards providing learners with an opportunity for interracial contact and promotes friendly contact between races.

This can be related to theories around “person-environment fit”. As McNamara, (2000:42) claims, an unsupportive school environment which does not attempt to meet the growing needs of the adolescent will result in “a decline in motivation, interest, performance and behaviour”.

2.7 The strengths perspective

An important aspect of ensuring the effective accommodation of black minority learners is to focus on the strengths of those who are currently coping within the system despite the pressures placed on them. For example, Bempechat (1998) points out that there are many children who are at risk of school failure who are achieving well in school. These are children who “live in poverty, belong to ethnic or linguistic minority groups, or live in a single parent home, or have parents themselves who are not well educated” and yet they are able to achieve success at school. It is proposed that little is known about the achievement beliefs of children. Those who would be at risk of school failure should be encouraged to build on their strengths, thereby helping them to reach their academic potential. By exploring the coping capacities of minority learners, the research will tap into their strengths and therefore it is necessary to discuss the strengths perspective in more detail.

Cowger (in Saleeby, 1997:69) defines a strengths perspective approach in social work practice as “believing that the strengths and resources lie within the individual’s interpersonal skills, motivation, emotional strength and ability to think clearly”. This

approach is a shift away from focusing on problems, weaknesses or pathologies which create assumptions about the individual's capabilities. Instead, the focus is on their strengths, resources and problem-solving abilities and according to Saleebey (1997), almost anything can be considered a strength, including: what people have learned about themselves from coping with difficult situations; their personal qualities such as sense of humour, life experiences and knowledge of the world around them; talents; cultural and personal stories that provide them with strength and guidance. A focus on strengths should therefore involve "giving primacy to the client's understanding or view of the situation" and one way of doing this is to listen and learn about their stories which contain many examples of abilities, traits, life experiences and personal qualities.

According to Michalski (2000) a review of recent research into supportive interventions, reveals that "the most powerful and long-term impacts require increased attention to holistic interventions that build upon client strengths". It means that there is a shift away from defining problems as a starting point for intervention and a move towards identifying strengths and planning around these. This leads to a process of developing and maintaining individual and social resources. A guiding principle of this approach is to recognize and respect peoples' capacity for growth which is grounded in a belief that people have the knowledge and capacity to determine what is best for them.

This philosophy is supported within the framework of a social development interventions, which are people-centred, and involve a process of enabling people to realize their potential by focusing on their capacities and building self-confidence which, in turn, leads to a sense of dignity and self-fulfillment. An example of this type of intervention is the "asset-based model" which focuses positively on the "internal capacities and assets of communities and people" and sets out to discover these. It is fuelled by the belief that people have the capacity to overcome their circumstances and therefore "mobilizes them towards self-reliant development", (Nel in Weyers et al, 2002:64). Those who support this model argue that other models of community intervention, which focus on the felt needs and problems of the community, tend to emphasise a problem-solving approach which seeks to eradicate perceived deficiencies within the community. The result is "to

have a future that is like the past, minus the problems”, (Nel in Weyers et al, 2002:69). The alternative is an approach which is capacity-oriented and therefore begins with an understanding or inventory of its members’ skills, capacities, assets and abilities.

2.8 Summary

A review of literature and past research from other countries and from South Africa, reveals that the opening of previously white schools to all race groups does not lead to immediate acceptance of minority learners. In fact, it presents them with many difficulties and challenges and research in this field indicates that it can have an immediate impact on their identity, peer relationships and school work. In order to deal with the stress that this brings, minority learners need to draw on their internal and external resources and employ various strategies in order to cope. The strengths perspective is an important framework from which to acknowledge that minority learners possess special skills and abilities which allow them to survive in particularly difficult circumstances.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter is structured according to the following headings:

3.1 Research design

3.1.1 Description

3.1.2 Gaining access

3.1.3 Sampling strategy

3.1.4 Participants

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Individual pre-focus group interviews

3.2.2 Focus groups

3.2.2.1 Number of focus group sessions

3.2.2.2 Themes

3.2.2.3 Role of facilitator

3.2.2.4 Location

3.2.3 Recording of data

3.3 Data analysis

3.4 Limitations of the study

3.4.1 Limitations of the data collection tool

3.4.2 Limitations of research context

3.4.3 Limitations of data recording

3.4.4 Limitations of the researcher as group facilitator

3.4.5 Limitations of data analysis

3.5 Summary

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 Description

A qualitative research design has been adopted. A qualitative study seeks to understand phenomena and the meaning that people attach to it (De Vos, 1998:242). The study is also an exploratory one in that it seeks to explore the meanings that learners give to their experiences.

An inductive approach has been used where new theory was developed as the data was collected over time - grounded theories were generated. The methodology has been designed with the main research objectives in mind (chapter 1:6).

3.1.2 Gaining access

Access to the school was gained through the researcher's role as the school counselor. The principal's permission and support for the study was obtained. A meeting was held to discuss the purpose of the study with the principal and the head of the NSS programme.

3.1.3 Sampling strategy

Bearing in mind the data collecting strategy of using focus groups, the researcher chose the respondents carefully. When selecting participants for focus group interviewing, the researcher recruited "information-rich" participants with a range of experience and who share commonalities, (De Vos, 1998:317). The aim of this study has been to obtain specific information about coping strategies from a clearly identified group of individuals which, in this study, are the African and so-called "Coloured" high school learners. For this reason, a non-probability, purposive sampling technique was utilized to recruit participants.

- **Participants - number and criteria for selection**

The participants were drawn from the high school at the DSK. There were a total of 29 participants who were a mix of male and female learners between the ages of 13 to 18 years. They were selected according to the following criteria:

- *Racial classification:* The research question focuses specifically on black minority learners and therefore the participants were representatives of this group, i.e. African and so-called 'Coloured' learners.

- *Ability to provide insight into research topic:* In order to fulfill this criteria, high school learners from grade 8 to 11 were chosen as the research population because of their ability to reflect on their experiences of being at the school and the coping strategies used over a longer period of time. This is based on the assumption that their immersion in the school environment for a longer period has provided them with more experiences on

which to reflect and gain insight.

- *Availability to attend group sessions:* The grade 12 learners were not included in the study because they were completing their final exams at the time of the study and were to leave school shortly after their valedictory. They were therefore engaged in other activities and lacked the time and focus needed for the study.

- **Participants – selection procedure for inclusion in the study**

Selecting the participants involved the following process:

- obtaining class lists for grade 8 to 11 from the school secretary.
- going through each class list together with the head of the NSS and highlighting names of pupils who fit the criteria for the study.
- making personal contact with each learner in order to set up dates and times for the pre-focus group interviews.

- **Participants - sub-samples according to grade and race group**

The total sample was split into four sub-samples which were created according to grade and race. This is captured in table 1 below:

Table 1: sub-samples according to grade and race

Sub-sample	Racial classification	Grade level	Group size
A	African	8 and 9	9
B	So-called 'Coloured'	8 and 9	5
C	African	10 and 11	8
D	So-called 'Coloured'	10 and 11	7

The reason for splitting them according to race and grade level is based on the premise that they would be more likely to feel comfortable and open with members of their similar grade level, age group and racial background when reflecting on their experiences. It will also allow for a comparison of the coping strategies of two groups of

learners who come from different backgrounds. Also, a wider range of responses will be collected which will contribute towards the richness of data. This is supported by Knodel (in Morgan, 1993:40) who claims that focus group sessions with homogenous groups produces greater depth of information than heterogeneous groups because it is easier for the participants with similar characteristics to identify with each other's experiences.

3.2 Data collection

The data was collected through individual interviews and focus groups.

3.2.1 Individual pre-focus group interviews

Each participant was interviewed individually in order to collect basic demographic details and to prepare them for the focus group meetings (appendix B:88).

3.2.2 Focus groups

Focus group interviewing was used to collect the data. De Vos, (1998:314) describes focus group interviews as the purposive discussion of a specific topic which takes place between eight to ten individuals who have common interests and a similar background. Kritzinger and Barbour, (1998:4) state that focus groups are ideal for exploring people's opinions, experiences, wishes and concerns and the group interaction plays an important role in generating information and data.

Focus group interviews in this study were used to stimulate interaction and discussion amongst the learners in an enabling and supportive setting in order to gain insight into their experiences, feelings and perceptions and how they give meaning to their experience of being part of a minority group at the school. The reasons for using focus groups include:

- *Time constraints:* The technique allows for a larger group of people to be interviewed within a limited time period

- *Sensitive nature of the topic:* The group provides a safe space for members to partake in an uninhibited, animated discussion around various themes related to their coping at the school. It has been important for me, as the facilitator, to ensure that this safe space was created in the group setting.
- *Power issues:* Unlike individual interviews where the interviewer has control over the interview process, focus groups provide a less hierarchical and more supportive environment in which people are given a ‘voice’ and can share their experiences.

3.2.2.1 Number of focus group sessions

Each group met for two two-hour sessions. This provided sufficient time in which to explore and fulfill the research objectives. It was assumed that any other meetings beyond this would be of little use in eliciting new information because ‘saturation point’ would have been reached.

3.2.2.2 Themes

Different themes were explored in each group session and these were decided upon in conjunction with the learners during the focus group sessions and in relation to the objectives and key questions of the study. Focusing exercises were used in each group to facilitate discussion around the themes. An outline of the structure of the group meetings, including the themes and questions covered has been appended (Appendix C:89).

3.2.2.3 Role of facilitator

As the group facilitator, my role was to facilitate the interaction of members and balance the participation of all members of the group, (De Vos, 1998:320). As a trained social worker I possess interviewing skills and knowledge of group techniques which assisted me in this role.

3.2.2.4 Location

The groups were facilitated in a room at the school which is free from noise and distractions. Although this is not a neutral venue, the benefits of using this space were that it ensured attendance because it was accessible to learners and that it provided a familiar space in which learners could feel more at ease.

3.2.3 Recording of data

The following tools were used to record data:

Audio-taping were used to record the group sessions with the use of voice checks to ensure the identification of individual speakers.

Observation notes were taken straight after each group session in order to record body language, non-verbal communication and the researcher's thoughts and ideas.

Focusing materials, such as flip-chart paper and individual worksheets was used by the facilitator and participants to record the group's ideas and insights throughout the group process. Examples of the individual worksheets have been appended (Appendix D:92).

3.3 Data analysis

The focus group interviews were transcribed from the tapes. The transcripts were then analysed according to an adaptation of Tesch's eight step model of qualitative data analysis which are outlined below, (De Vos, 1998:343):

1. The researcher began by reading through all the transcripts in order to familiarise herself with the data and get a sense of the whole while jotting down thoughts and ideas.
2. Each focus group session was then read individually in an attempt to establish the underlying meaning and patterns in the information – thoughts and ideas were written in the margins.
3. A number of themes emerged from the text and these were clustered into lists of similar themes.

4. The themes were colour-coded and written next to matching segments in the text.
5. The total list of themes was then reduced into four main themes, namely:
 - *Relationships at school*
 - *School work*
 - *Other demands of the school system*
 - *Support structures*
6. Each of these themes was further broken down into categories and sub-categories and a framework for analysis was created (Chapter 4:40).
7. The data material belonging to each category was assembled in one place and a preliminary analysis was conducted.

2.4 The data analysis provided the researcher with interesting challenges. On the one hand, discovering themes and categories which emanated from the data could have been seen as a purely mechanical process, but on the other hand the voices that sprang from the text provided a deeper layering of meaning which also needed to be interpreted. The process of analysis was also cyclical in nature. Through the researcher's submersion in the text, new analytic categories emerged which were then applied back to the text, this generated a deeper understanding of the research problem which led to new analytic categories being discovered (Kritzinger and Barbour, 1999:148).

3.4 Limitations of the study

The researcher was cognisant of various limitations pertaining to the research design, the sampling strategy, the data collection approach, the data analyses, the research context and limitations of the researcher as group facilitator.

3.4.1 Limitations of the data collection tool

Data was collected from the individual interviews and some bias could have been found. In a focus group setting, dominant members may participate and voice their opinions

while the passive participants may be “unduly influenced or inhibited by active participants”, (De Vos, 2002:319). Some members may have felt the need to conform or comply with the group norm and may not have expressed their individual thoughts or ideas. The researcher’s skill as facilitator therefore played an important part in checking for this dynamic within the group process. An awareness of this issue was also essential when analyzing the data.

3.4.2 Limitations of the research context and the sampling approach

The research was conducted within the context of the DSK which is a private, german-speaking school and therefore the findings cannot be generalized or transferred to the situation of other black minority learners who attend other schools. Furthermore, the research focuses only on black high school learners and this limits the findings to their specific experience of coping and therefore they can not be generalized to other learners who are part of minority groups at the DSK or to the population at large. Given the fact that a non-probability, purposive sampling was taken, the findings are not generalizable.

3.4.3 Limitations of data recording

The use of audio-recording raised difficulties when capturing and transcribing the non-verbal gestures and pauses in the group and this could also affect the validity of the data. For this reason, the researcher undertook wrote observation notes throughout the group process.

3.4.4 Limitations of the researcher as group facilitator

The success of the focus group has depended largely on the skill of the facilitator. However, it is hoped that the researcher’s skill and experience in group work practice has been of benefit in this regard.

The researcher/group facilitator is also part of the school’s teaching staff. This ‘familiarity’ with the participants could have impacted on their responses in the group setting and lead to researcher bias. It was therefore important that the researcher reflect

on this dynamic throughout the research process.

3.4.5 Limitations of data analysis

Focus groups provide rich, complex and extensive data and this presents difficulties for data analysis. The challenge for the researcher has therefore been to retain the richness of the transcript data while at the same time ensuring that the large mass of data is analysed systematically. In order to minimize this problem from the outset, the researcher undertook to narrow the spectrum of analytical topics by focusing on particular themes in the group sessions, (Kritzinger and Barbour, 1999:145). The mass of information also meant that it is easy for the researcher to get sidetracked. For this reason, the researcher allowed the research objectives to guide the analysis so that primary attention was placed on the questions at the heart of the study.

3.5 Summary

This research design was based on the need to explore the reality of experiences of black minority learners. The need to collect rich, qualitative data has guided the research methodology towards the use of focus groups and the selection of information-rich participants as the sample group. Data analysis has presented the researcher with some interesting challenges but the use of Tesch's eight step data analysis model has proven useful for this process. There are a number of limitations to the study, however the researcher has attempted to account for them so as to acknowledge their impact on the validity of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This chapter will be structured according to the following framework:

4.1 Profile of the participants

4.2 Framework for analysis

4.3 Thematic analysis

4.3.1 Theme A: Relationships at school

4.3.2 Theme B: School work

4.3.3 Theme C: Other demands of the school system

4.3.4 Theme D: Support structures

4.4 Summary

4.1 Profile of the participants

For a full profile of the participants, refer to appendix E (p93). The main criteria for selecting the participants were based on race and grade level and for purposes of clarification, the table found in chapter three (p31) will be presented here.

Table 1: sub-samples according to grade and race

Sub-sample	Racial classification	Grade level	Group size
A	African	8 and 9	9
B	So-called 'Coloured'	8 and 9	5
C	African	10 and 11	8
D	So-called 'Coloured'	10 and 11	7

4.2 Framework for analysis

The framework for the analysis of the data is captured in table 2 for purposes of clarity. It outlines four main themes which are limited to the study's six objectives (chapter 1:6).

They are:

- Relationships at school
- School work
- Other demands of the school system
- Support structures

Under each theme, categories were identified which were broken down further into sub-categories in an attempt to explore the sources of stress and ways of coping linked to each major theme.

University of Cape Town

Table 2: Framework for Analysis

THEMES	CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES
A. RELATIONSHIPS AT SCHOOL	A.1 Relationships with peers A.1.1 Other black learners	Source of Coping: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide sense of identity and belonging • Provide informal mentors or role models for younger learners Sources of Stress and ways of coping: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullying and teasing • Pressure to conform to group norms
	A.1.2 White learners	Sources of stress and ways of coping: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with cultural differences • Dealing with socio-economic differences • Dealing with mixing in grade 8 • Dealing with pressure to adapt and fit in with the majority • Dealing with incidents of prejudice and stereotyping
	A.2 Relationships with educators	Educators as a resource for coping Sources of stress and ways of coping: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural misunderstanding and communication problems.
B. SCHOOL WORK	B.1 New school environment in primary school	Sources of stress and ways of coping: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusting to a new school environment
	B.2 New academic demands in high school	Sources of stress and ways of coping: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning in a second language • Difficulties with Science and Chemistry
C. OTHER DEMANDS OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM	C.1 Travelling	Sources of stress and ways of coping
	C.2 Sport & extra-mural activities	Sources of stress and ways of coping
	C.3 The black minority culture not being sufficiently recognised at the school	Sources of stress and ways of coping: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of representation on school committees • Lack of parent representation • Black minority culture not being recognised at the school
D. SUPPORT STRUCTURES	D.1 Existing support structures	Family, Friends, extra lessons, sport, teachers
	D.2 Support needs	Relationships, school work, other factors

4.3 Thematic analysis

Throughout the analysis, verbatim text will be used in order to support arguments and to re-create the voice of the learners by allowing them to ‘speak for themselves’. The questions asked in the focus group sessions can be found in appendix C (p89).

4.3.1 Theme A: Relationships at school

Introduction

Relationships at school are both a source of stress and a resource for coping. Two distinct groupings emerged:

- The dominant group includes peer relationships (category A.1).
- The secondary group is learner-educator relationships (category A.2).

Category A.1: Relationships with peers

Relationships with peers include those with other black learners (category A.1.1) and those with white learners (category A.1.2).

Category A.1.1: Other Black learners

Relationships with other black learners are described mostly as positive with strong bonds being formed with those who are in the same race group and grade. Lasting friendships are also developed within this group. The following response illustrates this point:

“Like in our class there are not really groups, but there are certain people who can hang out with each other. And I feel comfortable with each of those specific few people. The core group, I feel most comfortable with is these guys”.

They are also a strong source of support, particularly when first entering the school which is described as a time of being lonely and feeling alienated in an unfamiliar environment. This is reflected in the following quote:

“To the question of adjusting and adapting. What I saw in my own experiences was the fact that friends actually played a big role in how I turned out right now and in how I was able to stay in the hostel and stay strong. Friends are important because if you need help you know there are friends and in that way it helped me. If you know that you need friends, and they also need you and in that way you helped each other”.

The importance of the peer group as a source of strength and support has been highlighted by both Berns (1997:337) and McNamara, (2000:41). These relationships assist in the coping process by providing a sense of identity and belonging and providing informal mentors or role models for younger learners which are discussed in more detail below.

- *Providing a sense of identity and belonging*

There is strong evidence that the peer group provides a sense of identity for the learners. This is supported by the following statement:

“I have a white best friend but I have my black friends. There is a difference, a big difference with that. She might be my friend, but the thing is, she will never compare to LN (*black learner*), for example. Because LN is black with me, you know. She will always know me better, she comes from the same background. They are really nice you know, really nice people and everything, but there are some things they won't understand”.

The role of the peer group as a “socialising agent” has been found by Berns (1997:333). It also provides a sense of safety and feelings of comfort. This is reflected in the following comment:

“Having my friends, my black friends after school I can sit and chat with any one of these people, those other than my friends from class, it's nice to sit with my black friends after school and stuff and talk about the same things that we have in common”.

Another learner states:

“Well, there were lots of different groups in grade 5 – we all split up into lots of different groups and I tried to fit into every single group but it was only the one that I fitted into where I didn’t have to change anything to fit in. That was the black pupils”.

Related to this is the fact that the black learners, particularly in the grade 10 and 11 group, claim that they have formed a tight-knit group of friends. However, as was also found in Van Heerden’s study (1999:77), this often prevents them from developing meaningful relationships outside their own race group which leads to further alienation from their white counterparts and places more stress on cross-cultural relations at school.

- *Providing informal mentors or role models for younger learners*

Other black learners in higher grades, are also perceived as ‘role-models’ who assist younger learners to integrate into the school community. The following quote indicates towards the importance of older role models:

“DAF people, black people who encourage other black people and who told us you can go into the world of Germans and make it”

The importance of role models as a source of support has been acknowledged by McNamara (2000:53) and the availability of role models at this school has enabled some learners to cope more effectively with the difficult conditions at school, particularly when adapting during the first few years at school.

Sources of stress and ways of coping

While relationships amongst black learners are largely positive and a source of support in the coping process they were also identified as a source of stress which sometimes leads to exclusion and social alienation, (McNamara, 2000:41). Two ways in which this occurs is through bullying and teasing and through pressure to conform to group norms.

- *Bullying and teasing*

Learners claim that some of the older black learners teased and bullied them when they arrived at the school. One learner shares her experience of this:

“You know, when you come here, you expect that you can turn to the black people since you are black. But the thing is, sorry, the thing is, sometimes they are the ones who make your life terrible at the German school”.

Learners cope with this problem in different ways. In the following statement where the same learner explains how she dealt with the lack of support and being subjected to bullying from other black learners:

“Yes and when they didn't (*support you*) you felt disappointed but that also makes you grow. You don't say 'black, white, coloured' you just think they are just all people. It helps you to say they are just all people you know. You don't say, “no, I'm black, I'll sit with the black people”.

By reframing the situation this learner was able to deal with her negative emotions. Another two coping strategies which have also been recognised by Sullivan et al (2004:20) include withdrawing from others and seeking support from peers.

- *Pressure to conform to group norms*

While members of the same group help in the coping process by providing learners with a sense of identity and belonging, this choice of coping strategy can also lead to the creation of more stress. Peer pressure is often placed on learners to remain committed to the group and, as Freydenberg (in McNamara, 2000:38) points out, this pressure to maintain group loyalty is a common source of stress for young people. One example of this is where those who make friends with the white learners are sometimes labelled a 'coconut'. When asked for the meaning of the word, the following explanation was given:

"Like someone who's black outside but white inside"

One learner shares her experience of being labelled by the other black learners:

"Not to survive, it's the same for black or white, you must just know who your friends are. Another thing and something that made it tough for me was that I had white friends in the beginning. A white best friend, who's gone now. But it gets difficult because you are then labelled as a 'coconut' you know".

The respondent's perspectives on labelling those who make friends with white learners seem to concur with other research, including Van Heerden, (1999:77) and Fordham and Ogbu (in Nieto, 1992:230). While this pressure does lead to an increase in the levels of stress, learners appear to adopt common mechanisms for coping in the form of either dismissing the comments or not taking them seriously. For example, one learner said:

“It’s not what you are, it’s just because I get along with white people, more than some people do, like I’m a coconut, but I don’t care if I’m a coconut, then so be it, it’s just that I’m not going to not have white friends just because I’m scared of being singled out as a coconut. I know I have black friends who are my friends who won’t judge me”.

This also highlights the need for learners to manage the balance between group and personal autonomy (Berns, 1997:78).

Category A.1.2: White learners

For purposes of clarity, the sample of white learners in this study have been divided into two groups according to language and class, which is illustrated in table 2 below.

Table 3: Sample of white learners

Language/Race	Class	Integration
Non-German speaking white learners, also known as the “C” class	In the same class as the black learners from grade 5 to grade 7	All learners are integrated with one another in grade 8
German-speaking (home language) white learners	In separate classes from the black and the non-german white learners.	

Sources of stress and ways of coping

There are a number of sources of stress within the context of relationships with white learners. Each of these will be discussed below, including the ways in which the black learners cope with this stress.

- *Dealing with cultural differences*

The members of the C class are the first young people that black learners make contact with when they arrive at the school in grade five. For the majority of them, it is their first experience of sharing a classroom with learners from different racial and cultural backgrounds. The excitement and novelty this brings is captured in the following statement:

“In grade 5 it was a lot of fun. It was a lot of fun being in a class which had mixed races, it was like black, white, coloured, Portuguese, whatever, we were all mixed”.

Immersion in this multi-cultural setting often resulted in stress and conflict because learners had to adapt to people from different backgrounds. This is reflected in the following comment:

“I think all the conflict and fights was just a phase we went through because we were all in this unfamiliar environment and we all came from the different ethnic groups. Before, the blacks only knew the blacks and the coloureds only knew the coloureds. With the whites it was basically the same”.

To cope with this conflict, learners reported that they remained divided along racial lines until trust had developed amongst them and relationships were eventually built. This is reflected by one grade 8 learner in the following statement:

“I didn’t want to come to this school. At first I thought of it as a white school but then after staying here a few years I got used to it”

Similarly, Du Toit’s study (1995:212) also found that black learners needed time in order to build trust and adapt to the school situation.

Adapting to a different set of cultural values and norms in a white, German-speaking school is particularly stressful. All but four of the learners attended black and so-called 'coloured' schools in their communities where the race group of the other learners was the same as their own. The move to the DSK therefore marked a move from a familiar racial and cultural environment to one that was unfamiliar and unknown. One learner sums up this experience:

“So I had difficulties adapting to white people as I was in a black school and when I came here I found it difficult to make friends with white people because we're not from the same background”

One factor that reinforces this finding and gives insight into how some of the learners coped with this situation was that the four learners out of the total of thirty who attended white schools all reported that it was easier for them to adapt to the new school environment because of familiarity with other learners. As one of these learners commented:

“I'd say personally, for me to fit in was not a difficult thing, coming from my community with black friends and going to class with white friends because of my history of being in another school where I was also constantly surrounded by white people”

This supports Patchen's (1997:296) argument that the absence of friendly contact with white children prior to school can affect black-white contact in school later on.

Learners reported that they coped with the cultural differences by relying on support from the 'C class' and by using this sense of "belonging" as a protection against the other grades. This is reflected in the following comment:

“Yes, in our class, we were like a gang against the other classes. Whatever we did it would be our class against the rest of them. Even though there was tension in our class, when it came to them, we didn’t care about that”

As discussed previously, this choice of coping strategy provides comfort and support, however, it can also lead to further alienation from the rest of the school population and thus an increase in the levels of stress experienced within the context of these relationships.

- *Dealing with socio-economic differences*

The minority children at this school are mostly from economically disadvantaged backgrounds with their school fees being subsidised by the German government. This means that the socio-economic differences between these learners and the rest of the school community are vast. This difference places stress on learners when interacting with the white learners. This is reflected in the following quotes:

“If I was trying to associate myself with them, I had that thing that I’m not like them, not in terms of my colour, but that they can afford better than me. I can’t afford what they have. We can’t go to the same places where they go, like cinemas because we don’t get pocket money to go to cinemas”

“It’s difficult, because we didn’t grow up with the same advantages. Like they always talk about computer games and here we come with the old floppy disks...(laughter). Playing records on your father’s record player. TV games instead of playstation”.

This provides evidence of learners having to negotiate the “two worlds” in which they live, (Gaganakis in Freer, 1991:73) and the need to adapt to this situation. Two coping strategies used to deal with these differences were cited, namely: seeking advice and

support from parents and taking part in joint sporting activities that do not depend so much on money.

- *Dealing with mixing in grade 8*

When the black learners reach grade 8, their class is integrated or “mixed” with other classes. This social transition is a stressful experience for learners as the following quote indicates:

“One thing that was bad was that, it was a good thing but a bad experience, was mixing with the classes. It affected friendships and most of the people that I used to be good friends with were in the other classes”.

The change leads to a shift in friendships and separation from friends and the security of the ‘C class’. For example, one learner states:

“In grade 7 nobody wanted to split up because nobody wanted to leave the classes and mix with the Germans. Everybody just wanted to stay in their class because everybody was friends and they didn’t like the other classes”.

This loss of support leads to loneliness and isolation. As one learner states:

“It was difficult because you didn’t know what to expect from the person and you don’t know if they’d like you or not and you don’t want to try anything funny”

Similarly, Patchen (1982:330) found that acceptance by their white counterparts is a key issue for black learners.

In order to deal with the initial stress of mixing in grade 8, learners relate that they adopted three main strategies to cope. These include: ‘holding back’ and not initiating friendships, isolating themselves and attaching themselves to other black learners.

However, as time progresses, learners become more familiar with one another and the process of coping with integration and building friendships becomes easier. The following statements reflect this sentiment:

“So it was difficult to adapt at the beginning but I think later we looked past these things and started to like each other for who we are and today we are much better than we were then”.

Another learner comments about the need to change one’s perceptions of white learners and viewing people as individuals rather than part of a group:

“For me, you put apartheid behind and you just speak to a person as a person, not being a white person or you being a black person. I think by doing that it really makes a good friendship”.

Taking part in co-operative activities facilitated the process of coping with mixing in grade 8. These included classroom activities, sports activities and camps organised by the school. In the following statement, one learner explains how classroom interaction assisted in building relationships with the other learners:

“But then there was class activities. Like projects and stuff and you get to know the people and how they are and that forced us to speak to each other and learn to like each other”.

The pre-focus group interviews reveal that the majority of the learners had partaken or are currently involved in sports or extra-mural activities at the school and this is also seen as contributing towards building friendships across the racial divide, particularly amongst the boys. As one learner states:

“I think for me, sports helped a little bit. You know, all the guys came together and we made friends”.

The role of sport in promoting positive cross-cultural relationships has also been found by Patchen, (1982:334) and Thomas, (1984:70).

- *Dealing with pressure to adapt and fit in with the majority*

Besides the cultural adjustments, integrating or 'fitting in' is made more stressful because these learners perceive themselves to be different from the rest of the school. These differences, as highlighted in some responses are related to attributes such as their skin colour or accent:

"You can't fit in, you're always going to look different"

"The first thing you notice about me is my skin colour and if I stand there with the others in the school, I'm going to stand out obviously. You can't fit in physically"

"I speak a different language. They speak proper English and sometimes I don't speak properly and they just laugh at me. Because of my accent".

Religion is another factor that sets learners apart from the majority. Three of the thirty learners who participated in the study are Muslim and believe that their religion has impacted on the way in which they are perceived by other learners. This was particularly stressful for one learner who shared his experience in grade 7 and 8:

"Last year and the year before I felt very different because I was the only Muslim in the entire grade until this year. In my old school, all my friends were Muslim. But it was difficult because when the people in the class found out I was Muslim I could see they were a bit shocked. Then their whole attitude changed when they knew"

In order to cope with being different learners attempt to adapt to the situation by adopting aspects of the dominant culture such as language and dress code in an attempt to fit in and become accepted.

Paradoxically, this choice of coping strategy leads to more stress because learners feel that they will lose their sense of identity when they change themselves. In the following statement, one learner shares her experience of how expectations were placed on her to change:

“When you come to the school they always want to change you to be more like them, if you want to keep your roots, they're like, no change your accent, change this, change the way you think about white people, and then you have to change yourself and you don't feel comfortable, you don't want to come to school, so what's the use of like changing yourself”.

The internal conflict experienced by black learners who need to adapt to a dominant white culture was also found in studies conducted by Nieto, (1992:232). Furthermore, and in a similar vein to the findings made by Gaganakis (in Freer, 1991:79) and Erasmus and Ferreira, (2002:30) learners also have to enter into a process of negotiating two separate realms of reality. This is reflected in the following statements:

“Now, when you go home, you are different from your friends. They like to call me ‘whitey’ sometimes. I don’t know what to feel. Here I’m definitely coloured but when I go home then I’m different”

“Because here you are coloured and when you go home it’s like ‘mmm, she goes to a white school – white and arrogant’. People think I’m very stuck up”

These statements also provide evidence of Boykin’s (in Neisser, 1986:56) theory of “The Triple Quandary” because learners perceive themselves to be different in different settings and need to deal with the internal conflict this causes for them. In order to cope

with this alienation and fear of rejection, learners have to become “biculturally competent”, (LaFramboise et al, 1993:410). For example, one of the grade 11 learners states:

“At first you don’t know how to act there and you don’t know how to act here. I have friends who are in similar situations and those that are not like me at all. You just mix and you find a common ground”.

In response to the tension this creates, learners need to adopt another layer of coping and this is done largely through seeking support from one another. In the following statement, one learner reveals her way of coping with this tension:

“And in 2003, which is now, I'm still managing, I still feel the pressures of being outcasted socially at times and I'll just think, well I'll use this opportunity to hang out with NS (black learner) because I know she'll be alone because somehow I think we are both starting to realise that there's something going on in the class, something against the both of us. So we just entered this viva black thing. And ZS (black learner) came which is a good thing for me, 3 more black people”.

As mentioned previously, these learners tend to associate only with those who originate from the same race group as a strategy for coping with feelings of alienation and being different from the mainstream population at the school.

- *Dealing with incidents of prejudice and stereotyping*

Within each of the groups the issue of racism was raised as a source of stress. It manifests itself as once-off incidents of name-calling, racial slurs and remarks. An example of this is shared by one of the grade 8 learners while recounting her past experiences at the school:

“I came in the school when I was in grade 5, 1999, it was okay and it was very nice because we had to come to the hostel and it was a new school and stuff, but there was one problem, one school boy from our grade called us kaffirs and Mr M (teacher) spoke to him and he got into trouble”

Incidents related to stereotyping were often raised in the groups where learners reported being ‘labelled’ by other learners. For example, they reported that they believe they are often perceived as being “black and poor”. In the following example, one learner shares a classroom experience of this:

“Once I said something to Mr S (teacher), something like ‘sir, you’re wasting my time, I also pay for the school’ and one of the other pupils started laughing and said ‘with what money?’”

Learners made reference to the fact that during their school career they feel they have been targeted as suspects when there are incidents of stealing at the school and that this entrenches the misconceptions and stereotypes which people have of their race group. Their perspectives on this seem to concur with other research including, Du Toit (1995) and Erasmus and Ferreira, (2002:32). Furthermore, the fact that it causes stress for black learners is supported by Gougis, (in Neisser, 1986:148).

In order to cope with incidents of stereotyping and racism, learners adopted the following problem-focused coping strategies: ignoring the incident, reporting the incident to a teacher, seeking support from other black learners, adopting an ‘aggressive attitude’ in order to ‘scare’ the others. One example is given by one of the learners:

“When we are having discussions about racial issues, you’ll find that the white people will agree with us, they’ll stick to the black person’s point of view and not actually theirs. I think that is happening but some of them might be afraid of what could happen if they opposed us in any way. Because, we dominate, we have this aura that says, “if you mess with me, you don’t know what is coming”.

Emotion-focused coping strategies through reframing the situation are also adopted. As one learner states:

“The thing is, I believe there are certain individuals in every grade that will be outsiders who struggle, who will always believe that black people should always be down there, at the bottom of the food chain. People like that, there is nothing you can do against them”.

By reassuring themselves that not all of the white learners feel the same about black people or by viewing these white learners as ‘ignorant’, they are better able to cope with the incidents as they arise. This is supported by Du Toit, (1995:15) who made a similar finding. The following section will provide a summary table of coping strategies used to manage stress in peer relationships.

Summary Table

Table 4: Coping strategies used by learners to manage peer relationships

Stressor	Coping strategies
Bullying and teasing from black learners	<p><i>Problem focused:</i> Withdrawing from the group Seeking support from peers <i>Emotion focused:</i> Reframing: minimizing the impact it has on self</p>
Pressure to conform to group norms of black learners	<p><i>Emotion focused:</i> Dismissing comments Negotiating conflict between personal and group values</p>
Cultural differences	<p><i>Problem-focused:</i> Remaining divided along cultural lines Relying on comfort, support and sense of belonging in the 'C class'</p>
Economic differences with white learners	<p><i>Problem-focused:</i> Seeking advice and support from parents Taking part in joint activities which don't require money</p>
Mixing with white learners in grade 8	<p><i>Problem-focused:</i> Holding back and not initiating friendships Isolating the self Taking part in co-operative activities Taking part in sport Attaching self to other black learners <i>Emotion-focused:</i> Reframing: viewing white learners as individuals</p>
Pressure to adapt and fit in with the majority	<p><i>Problem-focused:</i> Adopting aspects of the dominant culture Seeking support from black friends <i>Emotion-focused:</i> Becoming "biculturally competent"</p>
Incidents of prejudice and stereotyping	<p><i>Problem-focused:</i> Ignoring the incident Reporting to a teacher Seeking support from other black learners Adopting an 'aggressive attitude' <i>Emotion-focused:</i> Reframing: blaming racist behaviour on 'ignorance' of perpetrators</p>

Category A.2: Relationships with educators

Within the context of the learner-educator relationship, educators are viewed as both a resource for coping and as a source of stress.

Educators as a resource for coping

Relationships with educators are viewed predominantly as a source of support and assistance in the coping process. Learners relate that educators facilitate the coping process by providing emotional and academic support and by being patient, understanding and giving advice when needed. Evidence of this is reflected in the following statement made by a learner who describes her experiences in grade 8:

“In grade 8, we already mixed together so it wasn’t that bad to mix with other children. Our German teacher changed and that was the first time we understood German and that was after 3 years and we learnt German properly. She was the first person to understand and put herself in our shoes and everything”.

This support was described as being particularly important when they first enter the school and are overwhelmed by the new environment. The following statement highlights this:

“In grade 5 I wasn’t there the first day so I came on the second day and it was probably the worst day of that year because everyone knew each other already and I didn’t know anybody and so it was really junk for me. Then I found that the teachers were really nice and they always understood us in grade 5. That was one of the only years we had such a nice teacher. I enjoyed everything in that year – it was one of my best years”.

Sources of stress and ways of coping

Relationships with teachers also leads to stress because of cultural misunderstanding and communication problems.

- *Cultural misunderstanding and communication problems*

The learners believe that many of the educators struggle to understand their cultural background. It was cited that this was particularly prevalent amongst the German educators who have not taught within the South African system beforehand. Many of these educators are also not fluent in English which compounds the situation. This often results in conflict and feelings of frustration. This is summed up by one of the learners in the following statement:

“That’s a problem with many teachers. They come from Germany and have these BA’s, B whatevers and are very smart and then they get here and they don’t understand the South African system. Or they don’t understand our brains – I don’t know, but I think there is a huge confusion and miscommunication. Especially the teachers that do come from Germany”.

One way in which to cope with this stress by withdrawing attention in the classroom.

One learner describes the communication problems he has with one of his teachers:

“It just frustrates you, it makes you not want to work and then you just sit in class and ignore the teacher”

This finding is supported by McNamara, (2000:42) who highlights the importance of a supportive school environment. Other coping strategies include: making complaints to the head of NSS and school counsellor and seeking advice and support from parents. A brief summary of the strategies used to cope with stress experienced in the context of the learner-educator relationship is found in table five.

Summary Table

Table 5: Coping strategies used by learners to manage relationships with educators

Stressor	Coping strategies
Cultural understanding and communication problems	<i>Problem-focused:</i> Withdrawing attention in class Making complaints to head of NSS and school counselor Seeking advice and support from parents

4.3.2 Theme B: School Work

The data reveals that stress related to school work is most prevalent at two points in the learner's school career: while making the transition to the new environment in primary school (grades 5 to 7) and during the transition to high school (grades 8 to 11).

Category B.1: New academic environment in primary school (grade 5 –7)

The new academic environment in grade 5 places stress on the black learners because of the need to adjust and adapt.

Sources of stress and ways of coping

- *Adjusting to a new school environment*

When entering the school in grade 5, learners find that there are a number of differences between their previous school environment and that of the German school. For example, the school is much better resourced with more facilities such as a library, two computer rooms and a swimming pool and some learners report that they received text books for the first time. There are also more extra-curricular activities and different subjects which had not been offered at their previous schools such as Art and Music. One learner shared her excitement at entering the school for the first time:

“It was a big new school and the future was so bright we needed to wear shades, there were clean toilets, no swearing...”(laughter)

The classroom environment is also different. For example, the learner-educator ratio is much smaller than at previous schools. Teaching methods are also different with learners citing that for the first time pressure was placed on them to work more independently.

The following quote highlights this:

“With everything, I struggled with the whole...I feel its another mindset, the way you have to think here at the school. You know you are not spoonfed, there’s a lot of things you have to do extra, on your own and that’s not what I was used to”.

Related to this is the general perception amongst learners that the German-school has ‘higher academic standards’ compared to other schools. Much reference was made to the school having “higher standards” and therefore “more work” or a greater workload. Many received homework for the first time. For example, one learner describes his experience of this:

“The bad thing was the workload compared to our old schools and the intensity of work was much higher and the standards were much higher – what was expected of me was much higher”.

Another learner also describes the expectations placed on him:

“The standards went up and you have to achieve goals you never had to achieve before and the work was much harder and much more work...”

These changes and the subsequent stress led to a dramatic drop in marks for most subjects during their primary school years. This was particularly stressful for most of the

learners who reported that they were high achievers at their previous schools. This is reflected in the following statement:

“At my previous school, there were two top children in the class. Me and Siyanda, another boy in the class, and we were the brightest and I remember my lowest mark ever was 98 out of 100. And now I get to the German school and it’s like, 28 (laughter)”.

Another learner shares his experience:

“Grade 8 – all my marks dropped. In maths I had 99% and I got 60%. Lots of different marks dropped. I didn’t like to be in that class, it was the worst class”.

Learners have had to cope with the negative impact of this drop in marks, particularly on their self-esteem and sense of self-worth. This is reflected in the following statement:

“It’s difficult to cope with the fact that you were once good and then you were dumb”.

The impact of poor school performance on learner self-esteem was found in similar studies conducted by Coopersmith (in Verman, et al, 1975:150) and in studies cited in Berns, (1992:559).

The lowering of self-esteem could have a significant impact on their coping capacities (Lazarus, 1984:159). This was often reflected in learners citing feelings hopelessness or helplessness about the situation and one way to cope with this is to withdraw attention in class. The following quote highlights this:

“Then you get sick of school and if you don’t do well you get lazy, because I try, and if I don’t succeed anyway and then you think, “what’s the point”.

Despite these difficulties, learners manage to adapt and cope using the following strategies: working hard so that they eventually 'get used' to the standard expected of them and drawing on support from a number of people within their environment such as educators, school friends, family members and older siblings or relatives who attended the school previously.

As was also found by Eckenrode, (1991:70), parents also place added pressure on learners to achieve academically which causes added stress. This is reflected in the following comment:

“My dad was like that, 100% every time, but it's very different from like location school, and you feel so shallow because it's the first time you're opening a book and having to study and things like that, but my dad always tried to push me into this, but it never happened, I kept going lower and lower to the 40's”

Category B.2: New academic demands in high school

Black learners experience the transition to high school in grade 8 as stressful. Besides mixing with the German-speaking learners for the first time, learners also have to deal with a number of new stressors related to school work which are discussed below.

Sources of stress and ways of coping

The two greatest sources of stress include having to learn in a second language and difficulties with Science and Chemistry.

- *Learning in a second language*

The issue of language presents the biggest challenge for learners at this point in their schooling. Mixing with German-speaking learners means that most of the lessons are

taught in German and the textbooks are also in German. Together with this move, is an expectation amongst some of the educators that the English-speaking learners should have already fully mastered the German language. This is reflected in the following statement:

“When we first came everything was in English and then in grade 8 we got mixed and they expected us from grade 5 to grade 8 to learn German”.

Another learner provides some insight into these expectations:

“But the thing is, the German in the different lessons, the German in the DAF class is different to the German we speak in the classrooms with other subjects. The teachers who teach DAF understand that you are learning it so they speak slowly and allow time for us to catch up what they are saying. But in the Chemistry class they just assume that we speak German and they talk fast and you have to understand”.

Educators do not give sufficient time to explain German concepts to those learners who are not following the lesson. The reason for this is explained as follows:

“Last year the teacher could take the time to explain to us because we were all in one class in at the same level, but this year the classes are mixed”.

The role of language and its impact on black and second-language learners concurs with other research including de Witt et al (1998:118), Du Toit (1995:216) and Stentson (1994:109).

In order to cope, learners rely largely on assistance and support from a number of people. These include: those educators who either incorporate English into the lessons or provide learners with lists of words and german-speaking classmates who can better understand

the lessons. However, this support is limited and sometimes learners feel they are imposing on others. This is reflected in the following statement:

“And you know, sometimes people.....you can’t go everytime asking people because they also get sick of it. They start thinking, “where were you, we were all in class together?” so they get irritated....”

Support from family members is limited because there is often no-one in the family or their community who is able to speak German and assist with translation and homework.

- *Difficulties with Science and Chemistry*

In grade 8, Science and Chemistry are introduced as new subjects which are taught in German. Learners explain that because of this it is difficult to grasp the key concepts. This leads to a poor foundation of knowledge which is an important requirement for in these subjects. One grade 8 learner shares the stress he experiences with this subject:

“I was doing chemistry and physics for the first time this year, and like in 5c we did biology, it was in English so it was easier for us, now they throw us in the deep end with physics and chemistry and it's all in German, they hardly ever explain it in English, which I find is very stupid”

The result is poor academic achievement with learners having to drop Science and Chemistry in grade 9 when subject choices are made. An analysis of the pre-focus interviews with the grade 10 and 11 learners reveal that only three out of the 15 learners are doing Science as a matric subject. This could also affect future career choices. As one grade 9 learner relates:

“It’s difficult because I chose Science for next year because I really want to become a doctor more than any other profession and at the moment I’m lost in Chemistry. The way it’s been explained, I just don’t understand”.

In order to cope, learners make use of “problem-focused” coping strategies which include: seeking assistance from teachers, asking questions in class, attending extra lessons (all of the learners reported that they have attended or are currently attending the extra homework lessons) and attending extra lessons outside of school on a regular basis. An examples of this is ASSET, a community-based learning support programme.

Providing assistance to others such as creating informal study groups is another coping strategy. Learners report that it leads to increased feelings of mastery and self-worth, builds relationships with other learners and increases their own levels of understanding. One learner describes her experience of this:

“Also helping each other with work. If you don’t understand something and you ask and that person explains something to you or you explain something to them to help them understand and you share that and you bond”.

Participating in sport is another way of coping and managing the pressure and stress experienced at school. This is highlighted in the following statement:

“I did soccer and then basketball and swimming. It takes your mind off school for a while, you forget about school completely”.

“Emotion-focused” strategies are also used in order to cope with school work. The use of humour in order to relax is often used. This finding was also made by McNamara, (2000:52) who found that the use of humour has proven to have protective effects for boys and girls in the coping process.

In similarity to Van Heerden’s study (1999:67), viewing education as an investment in the future is another coping strategy. Learners state that school will provide them with upward mobility in life and therefore this helps them cope with stress and motivates them to continue working. This is reflected in the following statement:

“You just know that you have to work hard and I have this thing that says I am just working hard so that I can pass matric because everyone rates this school as the best school for matric and everything. That’s the only thing I’m grateful for....”

In conclusion, learners make use of a vast range of “problem-focused” and “emotion-focused” strategies to cope with the stress of school work. These are summarized in table six below.

Summary Table

Table 6: Coping strategies used by learners to cope with school work

Stressor	Coping strategies
New academic environment in grade 5-7: increased workload	<p><i>Problem-focused:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Withdrawing attention in class Working hard to achieve better results Seeking support from educators, school friends, family members
<p>New academic demands in high school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning in a second language • Science and Chemistry 	<p><i>Problem-focused:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeking support and assistance from educators and german-speaking classmates Asking questions in class Attending extra lessons after school and on weekends Offering support and assistance to other black learners (informal study groups) Participating in sport to release stress and tension <p><i>Emotion-focused:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using sense of humour to ‘laugh it off’ Reframing: Viewing education as ‘an investment in the future’

4.3 Theme C: Other demands of the school system

Introduction

The data reveals that, besides relationships at school and school work, there are a number of other factors which cause stress within the school system. These include the stress related to travelling, sport and extra-mural activities as well as the perception that the black minority culture is not being sufficiently recognised at the school.

Category C.1: Travelling

Travelling long distances to school was noted as source of stress by the learners.

Sources of stress and ways of coping

For many of the learners, the move to the DSK meant having to travel longer distances to and from school. As one grade 8 girls states:

“I wake up at half past five and I leave school at 5 o’ clock. That’s ridiculous. Then everyone asks why you’re so tired. Wouldn’t you be tired?”

The school provides a bus service which collects and drops most of the learners within walking distance from their homes, however, they still had to adjust to waking up earlier to catch the bus and leaving school later to go home as a means of coping.

Category C.2: Sport and extra mural activities

Learners also experience stress in relations to sport and extra mural activities.

Sources of stress and ways of coping:

Discussion of sport also revealed that there is often pressure placed on minority learners to perform. One learner reported that pressure has been placed on him to because of his skin colour. His comment sums this up:

“When they notice that you can do something, plus they notice that it’s a sports person of colour, it’s a good image for the school”.

In order to cope with this, learners claim that they withdraw from the sports teams and choose not to participate in sports activities.

Access to transport to and from extra-mural activities was cited as the main reason for dropping out, a means of coping with the situation. In the next statement, a learner sums up her difficulty with this:

“So I couldn’t make it to the various houses in Camps Bay and Hout Bay and wherever from Mitchells Plein and we don’t have a car so I just decided not to do it anymore”

In another example, one learner explained that she was unable to continue her membership with the debating society because she lives far away and did not have transport to and from the competitions in the evening. Another learner stated that she had to leave the Interact Club because she was unable to find transport for most of the meetings which take place on weekends. These factors could also impact on issues of representation of the minority learners at the school which is explored further in the next section.

Category C.3: The black minority culture not being sufficiently recognised at the school

The lack of representation of black learners and their parents at the school was also acknowledged as another source of stress.

Sources of stress and ways of coping

Being a minority group, the issue of representation at the school was raised as a source of stress. This occurs on the three levels which described below.

- *Lack of representation on school committees*

Learners report that they, as a race minority, are not being fairly represented on the current school committees such as the student representative committee or matric dance committee. There are currently two African learners out of twelve members of the SRC but no so-called 'Coloured' learners. The following statement is given as a reason why there is limited representation:

“The reason why they are always on all the committees is because they are the majority and then they get nominated themselves”

The frustration at not being represented was also found in Du Toit's study (1995:214).

- *Lack of parent representation*

Although there is currently a parent representative for the NSS programme on the school board, there are no black parents who are involved in the management board or the parents representative committee. This is different to their previous school settings where some parents were more involved in their schooling. One learner offers an explanation for this:

“Our parents have to work hard and they won't have time. They work hard to pay our school fees”

Another explanation is given in the following statement:

“All the meetings are all in German and that’s why my mother doesn’t bother coming to a meeting anymore because she never understood anything”.

Over time, the lack of parent involvement at school could have a negative impact on the learners as has been shown by studies cited in Berns, (1997:318).

- *African and so-called ‘Coloured’ cultures not being recognised at the school*

The third issue is related to ‘cultural representation’ at the school and the responses of the African and so-called ‘Coloured’ learners differ in relation to this area.

The African learners agree that their culture is represented at the school with regular activities such as sports contact with the “partner schools” from the townships, the marimba band and Xhosa as a subject. However, similarly to Du Toit’s study (1995:215) they still believe that an understanding of their culture and traditions needs to be cultivated amongst the majority of learners and parents.

When discussing the issue of representation amongst the so-called ‘Coloured’ learners, they explained that, unlike the African learners, their culture is not being acknowledged and represented. This is illustrated in the following statement:

“When culture is acknowledged, it’s always only black culture. They always have traditional dance and stuff and they invite black marimba bands. But I have no problem with that – it’s really cool, we enjoy it as well. But we would also like to see coloured pop groups. People from our areas who also come to our schools because those groups, we always hear them going to other schools. We have friends in our coloured areas and we hear about them going to their schools.”

One way of coping with this, especially amongst so-called “Coloured” learners” at the school, is to ‘join forces’ with one another so as to create a sense of identity. The following comments illustrates this point:

“It’s better to stick together, we don’t like to split up - it’s our survival skill – safety in numbers”.

Ignoring and withdrawing from the situation are other coping strategies. This is reflected in the following statement:

“You can talk, but no-one is going to change the situation. So you’ve got to say “I’m black and I’m proud of it and I am not going to show up my roots. I’m not going to show that I’m proud of being black. You just go on and show what you believe in”. You know what’s going on around you and you have to ignore it. Not ignore and not talk about it but sort of ignore it so that you can go on and finish your matric. Not really stress about it that much”.

Besides relationships and school work, there are a number of other demands placed on black learners at school. In order to cope with these stressors, they have developed a number of “problem-focused” strategies which are summarised in table seven below.

Summary Table

Table 7: Coping strategies used by learners to cope with other demands of the school system

Stressor	Coping strategies
Travelling long distance to school	<i>Problem-focused:</i> Waking up earlier
Sport and extra-mural activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure to perform • Lack of access to transport 	<i>Problem-focused:</i> Withdrawing from sports teams and activities Dropping out of extra-mural activities
Black minority culture not being sufficiently recognized	<i>Problem-focused:</i> ‘Joining forces’ with other black learners to create a common identity Withdrawing and attempting to ignore the situation

4.3.4 Theme D: Support structures

Discussion on support structures focussed on two main areas, those structures which already exist and provide ongoing support and those which are still needed and would therefore assist learners with the process of coping.

Category D.1: Existing support structures

In a discussion of support available to them, learners were asked to reflect upon those areas or structures in their lives which assist them in coping with the stressors of school life. These are captured in table eight below.

Table 8: Summary of support structures

Support structure	Location	Type of support/benefits offered
Family	Home environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional support and encouragement • Academic support (although limited)
Friends	Home and school environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering advice and emotional support • Provide a sense of identity and belonging • Academic support and encouragement
Teachers	School environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showing an interest in minority learners • Emotional support – understanding problems • Academic support
Extra lessons after school	School environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistance with homework • Extra tuition
Sport	School environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps learners ‘de-stress’ • Helps build friendships

Category D.2: Support needs

Within the context of support, learners discussed some of their needs and shared their ideas about the types of interventions which could be initiated in order to improve the existing structures and mitigate some of the negative impacts of stress. These are related to the three themes covered in this research and are presented in table nine below.

Table 9: Summary of support needs and ideas identified by learners

Support needs	Ideas shared in groups
Relationships: - Adapting to a new school environment - Establishing meaningful cross-cultural relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organising cultural events• Initiating more activities with the German-speaking learners from grade 5 such as team-building exercises• A 'buddy system' for new learners• An 'orientation programme' for new grade 5 learners
School Work: Assisting learners with academic demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching Science and Chemistry in English• Extra lessons• Homework groups or study groups• Teachers trained to assist minority learners with their specific needs.
Other demands: Better representation of minority learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A support group or organisation to represent the needs of the minority learners• The employment of more black and so-called 'coloured' teachers

4.4 Concluding Summary

The findings of this study have revealed that integrating into a white majority school environment is stressful for the black minority learners. A wide range of coping strategies are utilised in order to deal with this stress and these have been divided into two types, namely "problem-focused" and "emotion-focused" strategies. Also significant is that a number of paradoxes exist in terms of resources for coping. For example, the peer group is viewed as a strong resource for support but at the same time, it is also a source of stress. The outcome of this for the learners is that they have to adopt different

layers of coping to deal with the different pressures placed on them. Learners also draw on support structures in the environment to assist in the coping process which shows that there is a significant amount of support available to them. However, it emerged that more support is needed and learners were able to share some important insights and ideas around this issue. The next chapter presents the main conclusions of this study and offers recommendations for future intervention.

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CHAPTER FIVE: MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter will be structured in the following way:

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Main conclusions

5.3 Recommendations

5.4 Concluding comments

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the main conclusions in relation to the key objectives of the study. It will also offer some recommendations and include some practical suggestions for future interventions at the DSK.

5.2 Main Conclusions

In this section, the conclusions will be discussed in relation to the key objectives of the study (chapter 1:6).

Objective 1: To explore the interaction and relationships between black learners, their peers and the rest of the school population.

The main conclusions related to this objective are:

- that relationships with other black learners are mostly a source of support because they provide a sense of identity and belonging and informal mentors and role models for one another, (chapter 4:41)
- that relationships with other black learners can also be a source of stress because of the pressure to conform to group norms and because of the bullying and teasing which sometimes takes place amongst learners within this group, (chapter 4:44)
- that interaction with white learners at the school can lead to increased levels of

stress amongst the black learners particularly when the classes mix in grade eight, (chapter 4:46).

- that dealing with the cultural and socio-economic differences within the context of the black-white peer relationships is stressful for black learners who are required to adapt and fit in with the majority culture, (chapter 4:47).
- that the once-off incidents of prejudice and stereotyping compounds the levels of stress experienced by black learners at the school, (chapter 4:54).
- that relationships with educators are largely positive with much support being offered, however, some areas of stress do exist within the context of the learner-educator relationships especially in the form of cultural misunderstanding and communication problems, (chapter 4:58)
- that black learners utilize a number of “problem-focused” and “emotion-focused” coping strategies in order to cope with the stress related to peer relationships and learner-educator relationships, (chapter 4:57 and 60)

Objective 2: To examine how black learners cope with the academic demands placed on them.

The main conclusions emanating from this objective are:

- that adjusting to a new school environment when entering in grade five is both an exciting and stressful experience for black learners, (chapter 4:60).
- that the increase in workload and academic pressure placed on black learners when they enter the school for the first time is stressful and can lead to a drop in school performance which has a negative impact on their self-esteem, (chapter 4:60).
- that the transition to high school is stressful, largely because of pressure to learn in a second language and the difficulties experienced with Science and Chemistry, (chapter 4:63).
- that, in order to cope with the academic demands placed on them, black learners draw largely on a broad range of coping strategies, most of which are “problem-focused” in nature, (chapter 4:67)

Objective 3: To investigate how black learners cope with the other demands of the school system such as being taught in a second language, participation in sport and extra-mural activities.

The main conclusions linked to this objective are:

- that there are other demands of the school system which place added stress on the black learners and these include the far distances they need to travel to and from school, the pressure to perform in sport, (chapter 4:68).
- that there is a lack of representation and recognition of the black minority culture on different levels at the school including the absence of black learners and parents on school committees and school governing bodies, (chapter 4:69).
- that, in order to cope with the stress these demands place on them, learners draw mostly on “problem-focused” coping strategies, (chapter 4:72).

Objective 4: To determine what support structures and resources already exist and are being utilised by the black learners.

The main conclusions linked to this objective are:

- that there are a number of support structures which are available to black learners and these include family, friends, teachers, extra lessons and sport, (chapter 4:73).
- that these structures assist in the coping process because they offer different types of support such as emotional or practical support, (chapter 4:73).

Objective 5: To explore with the learners how they believe the existing structures and resources can be improved and maintained in order to ensure ongoing support for black learners at the school.

Objective 6: To investigate and explore with the learners what other interventions can be implemented in order to increase the support base for black learners.

The main conclusions connected to these two objectives are:

- that there are a number of additional structures which could be put in place in order to improve the support available to black learners which would assist them in the process of adapting and fitting in at the school, (chapter 4:74).
- that the areas of support required by learners seem to coincide with the main themes of this research which include peer relationships, learner-educator relationships, school work and improved representation of minority learners, (chapter 4:74).

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 General recommendations

Based on the findings and main conclusions of this study, the following general recommendations have been proposed:

5.3.1.1 It is recommended that the school system becomes familiar with these findings in an effort to address some of the issues raised by the learners themselves.

5.3.1.2 It is recommended that these findings be disseminated to a broader public for the following reasons:

- To raise awareness of issues that affect minority learners in other private or former Model C schools.
- To inform future policy on macro and a micro level which aims to address issues of racial integration of learners in private or former Model C schools.
- To assist in the development of programme interventions which aim to tackle issues of integration of minority learners in private or former Model C schools.

5.3.1.3 It is recommended that future research be undertaken in the following areas

- to further explore the experiences of white minority learners and how they cope in a german-speaking school environment in order to tap into some of their strengths and support structures which could further support the black minority learners

- to further explore the experiences of black minority learners in other private and former Model C schools in order to compare the experiences of learners in different school settings
- to further explore initiatives and programmes which promote racial integration in schools and the impact these have on the learners in order to develop future interventions which aim to deal with diversity in innovative ways

5.3.2 Practical recommendations

As the findings of this study suggest, there are a number of support structures within the school environment which assist black minority learners in the coping process. It is therefore recommended that the importance of these structures be acknowledged and strengthened by the school.

A number of practical recommendations have been highlighted in table 9 (chapter 4:70) such as gaining an awareness of the issues of identity through cultural evenings that celebrate difference; alternative language options for learners in Science and Chemistry so that these subjects are taught in English and not German for minority learners; the need for an orientation programme and a buddy system; greater representation of minority learners via an organisation; representation on the school board to be addressed; more representative staff to be employed.

5.4 Concluding comments

This research has begun to explore the experiences of black minority learners in a private, german-speaking school setting. It has found that these learners have to cope with a number of different stressors which go beyond those faced by other adolescents in the same age group. It has become evident that they have adopted a wide range of strategies in order to cope, indicating that they possess the strengths to survive despite the difficulties they face at school. It was also uncovered that an important protective factor in the coping process is the availability of support structures. In other words, the support

provided within the school and home environment play an important role in mitigating the negative impacts of stress. It is therefore recommended that the importance of these structures be acknowledged and a long term, holistic intervention programme be developed which will aim to ensure the ongoing support and integration of black minority learners into the school environment in the future.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARENTS

Date:

Dear

I am writing to request permission for _____ to attend two focus group meetings at the school.

I am currently completing a Masters Programme in Social Development at the University of Cape Town and am doing my research study at the school where I will be exploring the different ways in which black and coloured high school pupils cope at the DSK. It is hoped that the information provided by the pupils will help us to improve the support structures that are available to the NSS pupils.

Could you complete the attached reply slip and return it to the school indicating if you will or will not give permission for your son/daughter to attend the group meetings. If you have any questions or wish to discuss the study, please feel free to call me at the school.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Searle (School Counsellor)

Reply slip

I give permission/do not give permission for my daughter/son _____ in grade _____ to attend to focus group sessions at the DSK.

Signed:

Date:

APPENDIX B: PRE-FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Name:

Date:

Grade:

Class Teacher:

Address:

Home Language:

Family details:

Name

Relationship

Work/school

Year and grade that you were admitted to the DSK:

Name of previous school:

Extra-curricular activities:

At school:

Outside school:

School subjects and average marks:

Subject	Average Mark

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP THEMES AND QUESTIONS:

The main topic of the sessions is the coping capacities of the learners and the support structures which are available to them. In order to elicit a wide range responses on this topic, a series of sub-topics or themes will be explored. Although the themes were determined beforehand the participants were given an opportunity at the in the first session to decide on important themes. The group sessions were therefore semi-structured and a series of open-ended questions or activities related to each theme was developed in order to facilitate and guide the group discussion. The structure of the group sessions is outlined below.

SESSION ONE

Introduction: Explain purpose of meeting and what is expected from learners.

Group rules: Establish rules of mutual respect and confidentiality.

Theme A: Reflecting on the past

Purpose: To allow learners to begin reflecting on their experiences within the German school context and to establish the sources of stress for black/so-called 'coloured' learners.

Activity: Timeline

- Draw a timeline starting with your first day at school (grade 5) and ending with where you are now. Include all your "ups and downs" (good and bad experiences) at school.
- Each participant provides feedback to the bigger group with facilitator summarising important themes on newsprint.

Questions:

How was your first day at school?

What made it difficult?

What helped you cope with your first day?

How have you changed since then?

Are there other things which cause stress specifically for black/coloured learners who attend the DSK?

Theme B: “Fitting in” at the German school

Purpose: to establish learners’ experiences of adapting to the school environment and how they have coped with the process and to establish issues related to identity.

Questions:

What makes it difficult to ‘fit in’ at the school?

What makes it easy to ‘fit in’?

What helped you to fit in?

Can you be yourself at school?

Are you different at school from how you are at home? (explore coping strategies).

Theme C: Making friends

Purpose: to establish participants’ experiences of building relationships with the ‘in-group’ and ‘out group’

Activity: Family of my heart

- Draw a picture/symbol of yourself surrounded by all the important friends in your life and rate them on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 representing the closest and 10 representing the furthest.
- Each participant gives feedback to the group and explore any patterns that emerge with the group.

Questions:

Describe how you went about making friends at the school.

How would you describe your core group of friends?

What has made it easier when making friends at school? (explore)

What has made difficult to make friends at the school? (explore)

Are you able to make lasting friendships?

SESSION TWO:

Theme D: School work

Purpose: to establish learners' experiences related to school work, including sources of support available to them.

Questions:

How would you describe the level of work at the school?

Are there any subjects you struggle with?

Describe what makes these subjects difficult?

How do you cope with school work?

Who do you turn to for support for school work?

Is there any other support which you make use of?

Theme E: Support structures

Activity: My support network

- Think of a time when you were having difficulties at school
- Write down all the things which you did to cope
- Write down all the people you would turn to for strength and support
- Feedback to the group, write answers on newsprint and facilitate discussion

Questions:

What things motivate you to attend school?

Describe things inside or outside the school that helps you

Is there anything else you would like to change?

Is there anything else the school could do to give you more support?

APPENDIX D: EXAMPLES OF LEARNER WORKSHEETS

University of Cape Town

nozukomab

(no)
language is
easy

(strong words)
easy to help

ability

Great things!
helps me with
easy...

ME
Nozuko

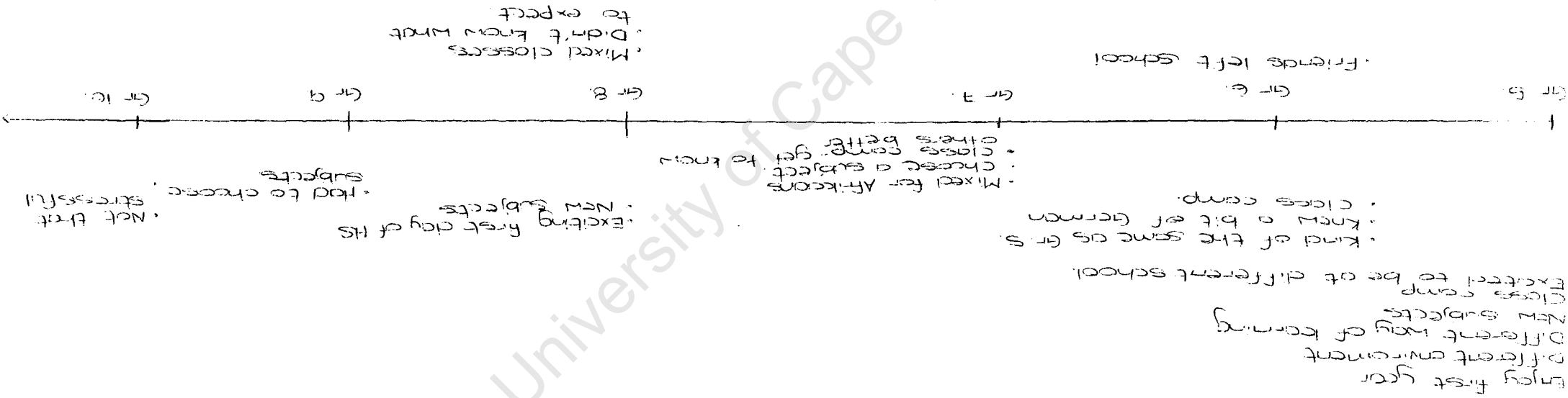
Ability (stronger up to come from)
stronger to learn & not be into a political

Learn
to be a
stronger

Myself (I understand myself?)
ability: capability
(more complex)

nozukomab

Timeline Zafraah



University of Cape Town

SKILL & LUCK

B-BALL

→ HELPS & STRESS

FRIENDS

Nozuko, Zandile, Luvuyo
Napule

ME

GIRL

I'M SHINING

MOMS
(Xhosa)

ME

(Loyiso)

STAR

BIG SISTA

(Mathis)

HIP HOP

MUZIK

R & B



MY BRETHER LYING
HERE DIED OF

APPENDIX E: FULL PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Sample description	Gender	Age	Year admitted to DSK (grade 5)	Current grade	Home language
Sub sample A Black learners: grade 8 and 9 Total participants: 9	1. Female	16	1999	9	Xhosa
	2. Female	16	1999	8	Xhosa
	3. Female	15	1999	8	Xhosa
	4. Female	14	1999	8	Xhosa
	5. Female	15	1999	9	Xhosa
	6. Female	14	2000	8	Xhosa
	7. Female	13	2000	8	Xhosa/English
	8. Female	14	2002	9	Zulu/Tswana
	9. Male	14	2000	8	Xhosa/English
Sub-sample B So-called 'Coloured' learners: grade 8 and 9 Total participants: 5	1. Male	14	1999	9	English
	2. Male	15	1999	9	English
	3. Male	14	1999	9	English
	4. Male	13	2000	8	English/Afrikaans
	5. Female	13	2000	8	English
Sub-sample C Black learners: grade 10 and 11 Total participants: 8	1. Female	17	1996	11	Xhosa
	2. Male	18	1996	11	Xhosa
	3. Male	18	1996	11	Xhosa
	4. Female	17	1996	11	Sotho
	5. Female	16	1997	11	Xhosa
	6. Female	16	1998	10	Xhosa
	7. Female	16	1998	10	Xhosa
	8. Female	16	1998	10	Xhosa
Sub-sample D So-called 'Coloured' learners: grade 10 and 11 Total participants: 7	1. Male	16	1997	11	English/Afrikaans
	2. Female	16	1997	11	English
	3. Female	16	1997	11	English
	4. Female	17	1997	11	English
	5. Male	16	1997	11	English
	6. Female	15	1998	10	English
	7. Female	15	1998	10	English