Meta-synthesis on learners' experience of aggression in secondary schools in South Africa

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This meta-synthesis is on research conducted by different researchers in a team research project on learners' experience of aggression in secondary schools in South Africa. The objective was to obtain a broader understanding of their experience of aggression in different contexts in South Africa, as well as possible ways to assist learners to address the experienced aggression. Eleven completed research projects were purposively sampled. Data were collected utilising the following headings: objectives, sampling, research design, research method, and research results, and guidelines. At the end of the meta-synthesis process the results are described, with supporting direct quotations from participants and a literature control. Guidelines for learners to cope with aggression are described.

Keywords: aggression; experience; meta-synthesis; secondary schools

Background and rationale

Qualitative meta-synthesis has developed as a research method to interpret research on the same or similar phenomena to contribute to the development of knowledge. The outcome of meta-synthesis contributes to a common understanding of a specific phenomenon. The interpretive synthesis of data often results in novel interpretations of findings from these research studies. Meta-synthesis methods can include constant comparison, taxonomic analysis, and reconceptualisation. Meta-synthesis contributes to coming to a point about a specific phenomenon in practice. Phenomena must be understood as contextual and relational. Researchers should acknowledge boundedness within theory and practice. The knowledge claims provided by meta-synthesis should be presented humbly and be assessed by criteria derived from science and art. Meta-synthesis should provide a clear description of the socio-historical context of a specific phenomenon (Thorne, Jensen, Kearney, Noblit & Sandelowski, 2004:1323-1325; Bondas & Hall, 2007:115-116; Burns & Grove, 2005: 114-115).

Eleven research studies were completed between 2002 and 2009 within the project "Aggression in secondary schools", a project funded by the National Research Foundation in South Africa, under the leadership of Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2002). These research studies are used in the meta-synthesis described in this article. The socio-historical context in South Africa at the time this research was conducted was during the years after 1994, the year of the first democratic election, and it is viewed as the post-apartheid era. In this context, South African society was exposed to social stress such as high inflation rates, increasing divorce rates, rising suicide, and mortality

rates related to AIDS. This could have contributed to the increasing aggression observed in the society, and particularly aggressive behaviour by learners in secondary schools. Learners exposed to such aggression may also expose other persons like their peers, parents, teachers and school managers to aggression and violence. This could be an obstacle to their mental health and their ability to contribute to their society in a productive manner. Research into the phenomenon of aggression in secondary schools could significantly contribute to understanding and developing practical strategies to facilitate mental health in secondary schools (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2002).

Problem statement

It is possible that there is diversity in learners' experience and perception of aggression. To date, 11 research studies have been completed regarding learners' experiences of aggression in secondary schools (Botha, 2007; Geyer, 2007; Mosia, 2004; Musekene, 2005; Jacobs, 2006; Moosa, 2008; Naicker, 2009; Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007; Prins, 2009; Schoeman, 2004; Snyman, 2006). Two research questions arise from these research studies:

- What common themes can be derived from the results of these studies?
- What common guidelines can be derived to assist learners in managing aggression in secondary schools to facilitate their mental health? (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007).

Objectives

The objectives in this meta-synthesis are:

- To meta-synthesise 11 research studies on the phenomenon of aggression in secondary schools in South Africa;
- to identify common themes in the conducted research;
- to facilitate the synthesis of the process of theory building regarding the aggression experienced; and
- the constructive management of aggression by secondary school learners.

Assumptions for this meta-synthesis

Mental health involves constructive intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental relationships (Uys & Middleton, 2004:753). In the individual's intrapersonal relationships, Frankl's (1962; 1967; 1978; 1980; 1985) "discovery of meaning" is important. Being exposed to aggression poses mental health challenges to an individual, but these challenges can be addressed constructively by bearing in mind that

- Each individual has freedom of choice. An individual is in charge of a situation — a situation is not in charge of the individual. This freedom of choice is value-based; authentic living is only possible if an individual is responsible for his/her own actions. Freedom of choice means that an individual has the opportunity to be selective and choose a certain way of coping that can be constructive or destructive; meaningful or meaningless; responsible or irresponsible.

- Motivation to discover meaning is essential. An individual who is motivated to discover meaning in a challenging situation is also able to cope with the situation.
- Attitude when confronted with a challenging situation is important. Constructive coping with a challenging situation depends on the attitude that an individual adopts towards a situation that cannot be changed. This attitude, according to Poggenpoel (1997:142-147), is positive when there is an understanding that
  – assisting others is a positive way of coping with a challenging situation;
  – the love of God and one's fellow human beings ought to direct one's actions; and
  – one can choose to take a positive stand in an unalterable situation.

A mentally healthy individual demonstrates the ability to establish and maintain positive relationships; responsibility for terminating relationships that may be viewed as harmful; validation of feeling; collaboration; acceptance of compromises; direct communication; and the use of body language to facilitate communication and respect for others in interpersonal relationships. In relation to the environment, a mentally healthy individual has the ability to organize the environment; exert control over or modify the immediate environment; adapt to change; engage in planned thoughtful responsible activity; and resolve power struggles by means of co-operation and compromise (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007).

In the next section the concepts used in the various projects are identified and clarified for the meta-syntheses that will follow.

Clarification of concepts
Different concepts were utilised in the research studies. They will be clarified, defined and demarcated for the purposes of this meta-synthesis (see Table 1).

In this meta-synthesis the clarified concept definitions related to experiences of aggression that will be utilised in further discussion are perception; facilitation which will include management; strategies which will include guidelines and psycho-education; and aggression which will include bullying, disruptive behaviour and violence (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007).

Research methodology
Sampling
The criteria for the selection of studies include studies from peer-reviewed journals and unpublished dissertations. It is recommended that at least 10 to 12 studies should be purposively included in the meta-synthesis to create a meaningful and valid meta-synthesis (Bondas & Hall, 2007:117). One peer-reviewed article had been published (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2006:70-90) and several dissertations and theses were included in this meta-synthesis.

Table 1   Clarification of concepts

Experience is any event through which an individual has lived, has gained knowledge from such participation in that event and the sum total of knowledge he/she accumulated. Experience involves personal knowledge, personal involvement and first-hand knowledge and exposure (Johnson, 1997:21).

Perception is a product of a secondary encounter with objects and events. It involves the processing and interpretation of the sensory input (Hartup, 1994:43).

Learners in this meta-synthesis refers to secondary school learners who receive education from a teacher (Potgieter, Visser, Van der Bank, Mothata & Squelch (1997:vi).

Teacher: A teacher is somebody who is trained in teaching in a school situation. A teacher is somebody who takes responsibility for the learners up to adulthood and somebody who is expected to know more than the one who is led (Fraser, Laubser & Van Rooy, 1999:5).

Facilitation: Facilitation is a process to enable things to happen such as helping people to identify the cause of the problem, as well as solutions, in order to simplify matters, actions or process, to identify goals and objects, and to improve work effectiveness (Meyer, 2004:24).

Management refers to the process of managing. To manage means to be in charge of, administer and regulate, succeed in doing or dealing with, succeed despite difficulties, cope (The Readers Digest Word Power Dictionary, 2002:587).

Informal settlement: This is a community without formal structure such as running water, electricity, tarred roads and built houses.

Guidelines: Guidelines are directions on how to manage a situation (The Oxford Thesaurus, 1991:187).

Strategies: Strategies are a set of principles put forward to determine or to chart a course of action (Hanks, 1979:650).

Psycho-education: This refers to the education and training of people in the psychological aspects that are relevant to facilitating their mental health. It is a helping strategy that provides psychological guidance to individuals and teaches them about their emotional and relationship functioning by means of didactic teaching (Okun, 1997:292; 1832).

Constructive means helpful, useful, beneficial and positive (The Oxford Thesaurus, 1991:70).

Aggression implies the intent to harm or otherwise injure another person, an implication from events preceding or following the act of aggression (Kaplan & Sadock, 1997:154). Verbal aggression refers to spoken words or verbal statements that are motivated by anger and to verbal behaviours used to express aggression (Hawkins, 1998:496). Physical aggression involves hitting, punching, kicking and the use of weapons by individuals towards their victims (Baron & Byrne, 1994:464).

Bullying: This is the activity that occurs when a weaker person is being hurt, intimidated or persecuted by a stronger person (Collin's Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2005:17). Verbal bullying includes name-calling, threatening gestures, stalking behaviour and malicious phone calls to the individual's house, repeatedly hiding someone's belongings, leaving people out of desired activities and spreading rumours about someone (Rigby, 2000:20). Physical bullying includes attacks on the victim, kicking, hitting or slapping (Baumeister, Smart & Bodem, 1996:5). Bullying consists of four essential elements: the behaviour is aggressive and negative; it is carried out repeatedly; the behaviour is a relationship where there is an imbalance of power between parties involved; and the behaviour is purposeful (http://en.wikipedia/org/iki/bully).

Disruptive behaviour includes talking out of turn, hindering other learners, making unnecessary noises, calculated idleness or work avoidance, not being punctual and getting out of a seat without permission (Charlton & Kenneth, 1993:8).

Violence: Violence is to inflict harm, damage and injure (The Oxford Thesaurus, 1991:538).

Data collection

According to Bondas and Hall (2007:117) systematic attention should be paid to each of the studies that have been included in the meta-synthesis. Data collection forms suitable to support data analysis can be developed (Bondas & Hall, 2007:118).

The following data collection formats were utilised in this meta-synthesis: objectives; sampling; research design; research methods; research results: experiences of aggression by learners in secondary schools, and guidelines.

Data analysis

Synthesis is achieved by maintaining the central concepts of each study and comparing them to other key concepts in the results. Researchers have the potential to interpret the strengths and limitations of the study and to provide alternatives. Fittingness is reached when the meta-synthesis findings can fit into other contexts as well as reflect elements of life experiences (Bondas & Hall, 2007:118).

Recontextualisation into the literature

The description of mental health as being a relationship, simultaneously an intrapersonal, an interpersonal and an environmental relationship was utilis-

ed to recontextualise the results within the literature (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007).

Application of ethical principles
The studies included in the meta-synthesis need to be ethically analysed and referred to (Bondas & Hall, 2007:120).

Validity
"The criteria of clarity, structure, coherence, scope, generalisability and pragmatic utility are proposed for all qualitative research" (Bondas & Hall, 2007: 118). Bondas and Hall (2007:119) identify criteria of validity as involving the following questions. Does the report clarify and resolve rather than observe inconsistencies or tensions between materials synthesised? Does a progressive problem shift results? Is the synthesis consistent, parsimonious, elegant, fruitful, and useful? Is the purpose of the meta-analysis explicit? Are the research questions clearly stated? The inclusion criteria procedures for data collection, description of the sample, and the methods for data analysis and interpretation should be clear (Bondas & Hall, 2007:119). These questions were addressed during the meta-synthesis process reflected in this article.

Results
The headings utilised in the data collection formats describe the results of the meta-synthesis.

Objectives of research studies
All the 11 research studies had two overall objectives, which were to:
• explore and describe learner experiences of aggression in secondary schools; and
• describe strategies to facilitate the constructive management of aggression by learners to promote their mental health (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007).

Research sample realisation
All the studies had utilised purposive sampling (Merriam, 1998:61) till data saturation was demonstrated, as evidenced in repeating themes. The participants ranged from 13–20 years of age, were in Grades 9–12; were of different race groups; and were of both genders. They came from four provinces in South Africa: Gauteng, North-West Province, Mpumalanga, and Eastern Cape, where they lived in formal or informal settlements. All were learners in public secondary schools. In total, 446 learners participated in the 11 research studies (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007).

Research design
Qualitative, exploratory, descriptive and contextual designs were utilised in the research studies. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) qualitative

research can be used to provide understanding of a specific phenomenon. The focus in all the research studies in this meta-synthesis was on learners experiences of aggression in secondary schools. Exploratory studies are a valuable means of finding out "what is happening"; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light (Sanders, Lewis & Thornhill, 1997:78). All of the studies were exploratory as they aimed to gain new insights into the learners' experiences of aggression at secondary schools. The research studies were descriptive (Sanders, Lewis & Thornhill, 1997:79) to provide a dense profile of the learners' experiences as well as guidelines to address their experiences. The research studies were all contextual as they were carried out within specific secondary schools.

Research method
Two phases were used during the implementation of the research method. In phase one a field study was conducted and in phase two guidelines were derived from the results of phase one.

Phenomenology (Merriam, 1998:15-16) was used as the approach in all the studies. The focus was on describing what all the participants had in common as they experienced a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007:58). Phenomenological interviews were utilised as the primary method of data collection. The interviews were conducted individually and in groups. Naïve sketches (Mella, 2002:233) were also utilised to elicit the learners' experience of aggression in secondary schools. Observation and field notes (Schurink, 1998:258; Merriam, 1998:104) were kept. The question posed to learners was: "How is aggression in this school?" This overall question focused on both teacher–learner aggression and learner–learner aggression. Data were collected till data saturation (Parse, Coyne & Smith, 1985:18) was achieved, i.e. no new information appeared in the data. All researchers utilised open coding and the learners' responses were recontextualised into the literature. All the researchers applied measures to ensure trustworthiness and ethical principles.

Guidelines were derived based on the results of the phenomenological interviews, naïve sketches, and field notes (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007).

Research results from phase 1: Lived experiences of aggression by learners in secondary schools
Learners' experiences of aggression include learner to learner aggression; learner to educator aggression; and educator to learner aggression. When interpreting the results of learners' experience of aggression in secondary schools, it becomes clear that learners face challenges to their mental health. The learners' experience of aggression in secondary schools results in challenges to their mental health as reflected in their intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental relationships (Kreigh & Perko, 1983:5-6). The mental health challenges resulting from learners' experience of aggression are described.

Learners' intrapersonal experiences of aggression
These experiences include negative feelings, negative perceptions, and nega-

tive ideas as the utilisation of defence mechanisms (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007).

Negative feelings of learners resulting from their experience of aggression are anger, hatred, outrage, violence, humiliation and rage; sadness (hurt, sad, disappointed, discouraged feelings, worthlessness and depression), and fear (scared). The following are direct quotations from learners to illustrate the negative feelings of learners:

> *Ek voel heeldag depressed en dit gaan nie weg nie. Dit het begin vandat daai twee (leerders) weer so met my aangaan in die klas. Ek raak gou kwaad ook en voel of ek nooit iets kan reg doen nie" (I feel depressed the whole day and it does not go away. It began since those two (learners) went on with me again in class. I also get angry quickly and feel as if I can't do anything correctly)* (Geyer, 2007:110).

> *I am scared, okay, in a way I am scared and in a way I am not scared, because sometimes I feel tense because I am not the fighting type, I never fought in my life, if they come and attack me. They are a lot and I am alone. They can all hit me and then what am I going to do* (Jacobs, 2006:73).

> *…you just feel very much angered* (Prins, 2009:67).

Owens, Slee and Shute (2000:368) and Potterton (2005:10) support the findings that learners' experience of aggression can cause painful psychological effects like embarrassment, anger, worry, humiliation and sadness.

Negative perceptions of learners, resulting from their experience of aggression, are loss of opportunities, feelings of helplessness, poor self-concept and self-esteem. The following are direct quotations from learners:

> *Children who are bullied usually have a low self-esteem and they usually feel self-conscious. They dislike coming to school because of their fear of being bullied* (Jacobs: 2006:73).

> *Ek het so kleinlik gevoel teenoor die ander kinders (I felt small in comparison with the other learners)* (Prins, 2009:68).

> *…want ek voel waardeloos en niks werd (I felt worthless and useless)* (Prins, 2009:70).

> *They think I am just useless …* (Moosa, 2008:100).

Byrne (1994:12) and Weingarten (2003:52) are of the opinion that experienced aggression by learners can lead to a lowering of their self-esteem and their feeling worthless. Learners can feel shame and make the assessment that they are unworthy.

Negative ideas of learners resulting from their experience of aggression are suicidal ideas, being demoralised and poor boundaries. The following are direct quotations from learners:

> *Sometimes I did want to harm myself … I felt like doing it* (Jacobs, 2006:80).

> *Yes, I have thought of wanting to harm myself …* (Jacobs, 2006:80).

Severe bullying of a learner could lead the learner to contemplate suicide (Smith & Sharp, 1994:7). In the UK there have been several reports of learners, who were exposed to bullying, contemplating suicide (Rigby, 1996:57).

Learners' utilisation of defence mechanisms as a result of aggression experienced are repression of own inner feelings, rationalisation about other individuals' aggression and denying responsibility for own behaviour (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007). The following are direct quotations from learners:

I like hitting and making people feel, pain mostly, it makes me feel I am not the only one (Moosa, 2008:89).

I don't know if she was looking for attention or what, or she was craving attention or something. Because it was just me she was going on with and nobody else or she is looking to make my life miserable (Jacobs, 2006: 84).

And hmm in this school I've had a few fights and I don't necessarily want to fight with them but they come and force the issue and then you get so tired of keeping quiet and keeping it to yourself and then you burst out and sometimes it's maybe the wrong person and then you lash out at someone you don't mean to (Moosa, 2008:102).

These defence mechanisms enable learners to safeguard themselves against anything that poses a threat to them including experienced aggression (Gouws, Kruger & Burger, 2000:89).

Learners' interpersonal experience of aggression

These experiences include the experience of aggression as physical actions, verbal actions and indirect actions; aggression is experienced as disrespect and learners' reaction to aggression (Poggenpoel & Myburgh). The following are direct quotations from learners:

Aggression experienced as physical actions takes the form of biting, pulling hair, kicking, hitting, pinching, pushing, scratching, spitting, destroying personal property, coercion for sex, rolling eyes and pulling faces.

They keep on attacking me, anywhere in class, on the soccer field and even in the toilets. They slap me, kick me, hit me or they take my lunch and run away. It never stops (Geyer, 2007:83).

Mr ... he is very physical, you know, I think he's got like. He's got like temper problems, you know he loses his temper and when he loses his temper he's gonna slap someone, he's gonna hit someone (Botha, 2006: 103).

The children in my class. They use to stab me, not only me there's other children in the class that they used to bully (Moosa, 2008:88).

Individuals who use aggression have an intent to cause harm. They are not concerned with the merits of an issue, but are only interested in winning (Felson & Tedeschi, 1993:147; Olivier& Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2000:235). It is a very common experience for learners to witness or experience assaults, stabbings, and shootings and therefore they are desensitised to it. Learners accept aggression as a way of life to manage problems (Snyman, 2006:106; Zulu, Urbani & van der Merwe, 2004:170).

Aggression experienced as verbal actions takes the form of swearing, threatening calls, intimidation, threats, teasing, cat-calling, racist remarks, sexual remarks, gossiping, spreading untruths, sending nasty sms, sending

insulting letters, sending nasty e-mails, making insulting and belittling remarks. The following are direct quotations from participants:

> *My mother says sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me. But for me this is far from the truth. In my class a group of girls do not like me and they call me ugly names and they tease me. If they would even punch me it would be better* (Geyer, 2007:93).

> *Then her friends knew this was going on and then they started spreading rumours about her and then they said I was speaking bad about her and this boy and so I am telling people that the two of them is* [sic] *having sex ... and she believed I was speaking bad about her and this man* (Jacobs, 2006:69).

> *... racism like they call us koelie or something ...* (Botha, 2006:114).

> *Toe begin x (onderwyser) vloek en gaan op ons af en sê, ag los die dan net die werk, moet dit dan nie doen nie ..." (then x (the teacher) started swearing and shouted at us and said that we should leave the work and then not do it)* (Prins, 2009:51).

Hassandra, Bekiari and Sakellariou (2007:2) are of opinion that verbal aggression leads to an attack on a learner's self-concept. It does not matter in what form the verbal aggression takes place, it always leaves the recipient with a feeling of humiliation, anger or depression.

Botha (2006:1140) states that swearing and name-calling by learners and educators have become almost an everyday phenomenon. It is generally the most upsetting form of verbal aggression. Sullivan (2000:11) is of opinion that verbal aggression includes telephone calls, extorting material possessions, intimidation and threats of violence, racist remarks or teasing, sexually suggestive or abusive language, and spreading false and malicious rumours.

Aggression experienced as indirect actions. These actions are experienced as manipulation, ending of other learners' friendships, isolating, ignoring, cutting out of decision-making, making rude remarks during conversations, intimidating, dominating, mocking, provoking anxiety, making a noise inside and outside the classroom, arriving late for school, selling and using drugs, gangsterism, carrying weapons, and not doing schoolwork. The following are direct quotations from learners:

> *... there are certain individuals that teachers will never talk to like this individual ... I mean he could stand up in the hall and just talk and I'm sure no-one, everyone acts as they can't see him ...* (Botha, 2006:141).

> *Ja, wat die onderwysers nie baie van hou nie dan, jy kan nie met hulle gaan praat nie, jy kan hulle nie iets vra in die klasse nie ... en partykeer kyk hulle jou net so aan as jy hulle vra oor die werk (Yes, what the teachers don't like a lot, you cannot go and talk to them, you can't ask them something in class ... and sometimes they just look at you when you ask them about the work)* (Prins, 2009:52)

Aggression experienced as disrespect. This disrespect is experienced by learners as being beaten by educators; educators arriving drunk at work and parallel monologue between learners and educators during which learners are not listened to by educators. The following are direct quotations by learners:

... they (educators) beat us with a stick ... (Botha, 2006:108).

Sodra jy oor n situasie wil redeneer dan word daar op jou gegil en jy het nie respek nie (as soon as you want to argue about a situation, you are yelled at and you don't have any respect) (Prins, 2009:42).

Ek weet nie, die onderwyser wil glad nie luister na rede nie, soos ek sê, hulle is altyd ... of in hulle oë is hulle altyd reg ... (I don't know, the teacher won't listen to reason at all, like I said, they are always, or in their eyes they are always right) (Prins, 2009:47).

Mrs ... when you just came to the school , she never liked us, I don't know why. Like my friend, she threw paint over him. She told him that he got the wrong work, so she threw paint over him (Botha, 2006:107).

Berkowitz (1993:15) is of opinion that educators' aggressive behaviour can be distinguished as verbal actions as well as physical actions, like grabbing learners, hitting, throwing paint over a learner, beating learners with sticks and even slapping the learners. Learners experience this as disrespectful behaviour. When learners experience that an educator does not listen to them they experience it as disrespect and a loss of trust (Prins, 2009:47).

Learners' reaction to aggression experienced can take the form of acting out and fighting; learners experience barriers between learner–learner and learner–educator (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007). The following are direct quotations from learners:

Sodra 'n onderwyser aggressief word, word ek aggressief om myself te verdedig (As soon as a teacher becomes aggressive, I become aggressive to defend myself) (Prins, 2009:69).

... soms bars ek in trane uit (sometimes I burst into tears) (Prins, 2009:66).

I got angry and started hitting him (Moosa, 2008:89).

... I really lost my contol ... (Moosa, 2008:101).

Learners experience a sense of loss of control because of experienced aggression (Moosa, 2008:101). Losing control could encourage learners to deceive themselves, reject themselves and abandon themselves. The loss of self is the result of a sense of despair and helplessness (Fisher, 2005:56; 166).

Relationships between learners' environment and their experience of aggression

Learners exposed to aggression experience distrust towards educators and parents; their schoolwork is negatively affected; they experience an unsafe learning climate; as well as lack of discipline and inconsistent application of discipline (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007).

Learners experience distrust towards educators and parents as a result of their experience of aggression. Learners think that adults will not be able or willing to assist them in addressing aggression. The following are direct quotations from learners:

I didn't tell the teacher. I was scared if I told the teachers, they would speak to them (the bullies) about it and then they are going to get me afterwards ... (Jacobs, 2006:57).

I did not want to tell my mother because she would have come to the

school and sort them out ... and the teacher ... I was too scared just now; it is a very big thing (Jacobs, 2006:59).

Learners are not inclined to report their experienced aggression to educators because they are of the opinion that educators will do nothing about it or not keep the information to themselves. They are also afraid to tell their parents (Rigby, 1997:239).

Learners' schoolwork is negatively affected by their experience of aggression. Learners are pre-occupied because of their negative feelings, ideas and reactions as a result of experienced aggression. The following are direct quotations from learners:

... as 'n onderwyser aggressief is wil ek sommer net skool los, want ek voel waardeloos en niks werd (if a teacher is aggressive I just want to leave school, because I feel worthless and worth nothing) (Prins, 2009:70).

... almal doen nou swak daaroor en ek en my vriendin sal haar mock en al sulke goeters oordat sy altyd so pik (everyone does poorly now because of it and my friend and I will mock her and stuff like that because she always picks) (Prins, 2009:78).

And that names they used to call me also affect my schoolwork. So I could never concentrate because I would think about it all the time or they would tease me in the classroom (Jacobs, 2006:56).

Learners are unable to concentrate on their schoolwork because of their experience of aggression. The learners' schoolwork is negatively affected (Rigby, 1996:540).

Learners experience the learning climate as unsafe as a result of their experienced aggression. Learners experience that other learners are acting disrespectfully to educators and learners by threatening and disturbing behaviour; not listening; acting disobediently, and they also see that educators react with ineffective management of learners. The following are direct quotes from the learners:

There are certain students that teachers are afraid of ... there are students who will talk back to them (Botha, 2006:141).

There was a ... school child ... who hit a teacher ... (Botha, 2006:107).

At the school it can happen anywhere. In class, on the fields, even in the office. It can happen anywhere (Snyman, 2006:99).

Learners feel insecure and fear for their safety at school (Larson, 2005:4).

Learners experience inconsistent discipline by educators as having a disempowering effect in the school. Educators are not able to take charge and there is a loss of control in the school. The following are direct quotations from learners:

X (onderwyser) gaan altyd op hulle af maar dan word daar nie met die meisies gepraat nie, maar net op die seuns en in klasse dan is daar soos sekere kinders wat goed mag doen en ander kinders wat dit nie mag doen nie ... (X (teacher) always goes at them but then the girls are not spoken to, just the boys and in classes there are certain children who may do things and other children who may not do it) (Prins, 2009:81)

Inconsistent behaviour from educators causes challenges in their relationship

with learners because it breaks down their trust in the relationship (Prins, 2009:81). The learners also lose their respect for such an educator.

Research results from phase 2: Guidelines to assist learners to manage aggression in a secondary school

Guidelines are suggested, derived from the results of phase 1, to assist learners in managing aggression in a secondary school. These can assist learners to facilitate their mental health. Experiential learning is utilised as an educational approach.

Facilitation of healthy intrapersonal relationships of learners can be achieved by:
- enhancing a positive self-concept of the learner, by facilitating self-awareness, self-identity, self-knowledge and self-disclosure;
- mastering stress management through deep breathing exercises; relaxation with music; regular exercises, cognitive reframing; problem-solving skills and tips on survival;
- taking responsibility for own behaviour, internal locus of control; and
- demonstrating consistent behaviour (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007).

Facilitation of healthy interpersonal relationships of learners can be achieved by:
- mastering interpersonal skills such as listening, hearing, open verbal and non-verbal communication; and attitudes such as respect, empathy and unconditional acceptance of other people;
- building and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships;
- managing of conflict; and
- mastering assertive behaviour (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007).

Facilitation of healthy environmental relationships of learners comes about through:
- engaging in planned, thoughtful activity;
- organising the environment; and
- managing change (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2007).

Conclusions and recommendations

In this meta-synthesis common themes in learners' experience of aggression and guidelines were utilised in the ongoing process of theory building. During the meta-synthesis, clarification of the consistency between the materials synthesised was assessed. The synthesis was consistent, parsimonious, fruitful and useful. The objectives of the meta-synthesis were stated explicitly. The research questions were clearly stated. The inclusion criteria procedures for data collection, sample description and methods for data analysis and interpretation were clearly presented.

Recommendations for practice, research and education
- **Practice:** Educators and learners need to be assisted with skills on the constructive management of aggression in secondary schools. Special attention should be given to the facilitation of their self-awareness; posi-

tive self-concept; coping with stress; internal locus of control; constructive interpersonal relationships; assertiveness; addressing conflict, and managing their environment.

- **Research:** Further research needs to be conducted on educators' experience of aggression in secondary schools.
- **Education:** Policy makers in education should be sensitised to manage aggression in secondary schools.

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