

**EXPLORING THE DROPOUT PHENOMENON IN  
A SECONDARY SCHOOL SITUATED IN A HIGH-  
RISK COMMUNITY**

**DIANA INGLIS**

**Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Education (Educational Psychology)  
(MEdPsyh)  
at  
Stellenbosch University**

**Supervisor: Dr. A. Lewis**

**December 2009**

***Declaration***

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

---

Name

---

Signature

---

Date

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to gain a contextual understanding of the dropout phenomenon in a specific school in a high-risk community. An applied, interpretive, qualitative research design was used. This involved an investigation of the subjective experiences of learners at risk of dropping out of school during the post-compulsory phase of their education at a specific school. Informants were purposively selected according to specific criteria. Data were collected through eight semi-structured interviews with learners at risk of dropping out of school; a semi-structured interview with a member of the community; a focus-group interview and collages. The data was transcribed and analysed using a qualitative thematic analysis, and compared to previous research gleaned from an extensive literature review. Results that emerged from this study indicated that the participants experienced several barriers to learning embedded in the interconnected systems, which could cause them to drop out of school. This included issues such as single-parent families, family conflict, lack of parental support, emotional difficulties due to home circumstances, substance abuse and socio-economic issues. Although results showed that the school of study had seemingly adopted an inclusive policy and had made some adaptations to accommodate learners, it became evident that the existing support structures within the school and the community were experienced as insufficient. Due to the nature of unsupportive and conflicting family systems reported by some learners, teachers are expected to perform additional nurturing roles that add pressure to an already overburdened educational system. The practical implications of the results are that, in order to support adolescents in a high-risk environment and to prevent them from dropping out of school, the focus should be on protective factors. This could be achieved through, for example, early identification and targeting of learners at risk of dropping out of school, the implementation of strategies aimed to increase engagement of all learners in the school, the implementation of an ongoing supportive drug-free programme in the school and the community in conjunction with supportive organisations, professional development workshops and in-service training for teachers, altered school schedules, and career guidance and work internships for interested learners that could be arranged in union with the local university. The results from this study therefore highlighted areas that could receive attention in the specific school to address the problem for learners at risk of dropping out of school. Further qualitative research is recommended to investigate this phenomenon in a broader spectrum of South African learners.

## OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie studie was om 'n kontekstuele begrip te kry van die uitsak-verskynsel in 'n spesifieke skool wat in 'n hoërisiko-gemeenskap geleë is. 'n Toegepaste, vertolkende, kwalitatiewe navorsingsmodel is gebruik. Die gevolg was 'n ondersoek van die subjektiewe ondervindinge van leerders wat die risiko geloop het om op skoolvlak uit te sak gedurende die naverpligte fase van hulle opvoeding aan 'n spesifieke skool. Informante is doelbewus volgens spesifieke kriteria gekies. Data is versamel deur middel van agt semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met leerders wat 'n risiko geloop het om op skoolvlak uit te sak; 'n semi-gestruktureerde onderhoud met 'n lid van die gemeenskap; 'n fokusgroeponderhoud en plakskilderye. Die data is getranskribeer en geanaliseer deur gebruik te maak van 'n kwalitatiewe tematiese analise en is vergelyk met vorige navorsing wat versamel is uit 'n uitgebreide literatuuroorsig. Resultate wat uit hierdie studie geblyk het, het daarop gedui dat die deelnemers verskeie leerhindernisse ondervind het wat veranker is in die onderling-verbonde stelsels wat kon veroorsaak het dat hulle op skoolvlak uitsak. Hierby was ingesluit kwessies soos enkelouergesinne, gesinskonflik, 'n gebrek aan ouerlike ondersteuning, emosionele probleme as gevolg van huislike omstandighede, dwelmmisbruik en sosio-ekonomiese kwessies. Alhoewel resultate gewys het dat die studieskool skynbaar 'n inklusiewe beleid volg en 'n paar aanpassings gemaak het om leerders te akkommodeer, het dit duidelik geword dat die bestaande ondersteuningsstrukture binne die skool en gemeenskap as onvoldoende ervaar is. As gevolg van die aard van nie-ondersteunende en teenstrydige gesinstelsels soos meegedeel deur sommige leerders, word daar van onderwysers verwag om bykomende opvoedingsrolle te vervul wat spanning veroorsaak in 'n reeds oorlaaide opvoedingstelsel. Die praktiese implikasies van die resultate is, dat die fokus op beskermende faktore moet wees, om adolessente in 'n hoërisiko-omgewing te ondersteun en te verhoed dat hulle op skoolvlak uitsak. Dit sou bereik kon word deur byvoorbeeld, vroeë identifisering en teikengroepvorming van leerders wat die risiko loop om op skoolvlak uit te sak, die implementering van strategieë wat daarop gemik is om die betrokkenheid van alle leerders in die skool te verhoog, die implementering van 'n deurlopende ondersteunende dwelmvrye program in die skool en gemeenskap in samewerking met ondersteuningsorganisasies, professionele-ontwikkelingswerkswinkels en indiensopleiding vir onderwysers, veranderde skoolskedules en beroepsvoorligting en werk-internskappe vir belangstellende leerders wat gereël kan word in samewerking met die plaaslike universiteit. Die resultate van hierdie studie het areas in die spesifieke skool uitgewys wat kan aandag kry om die probleem van leerders wat die risiko loop om op skoolvlak uit te sak, aan te spreek. Dit word

aanbeveel dat verdere kwalitatiewe navorsing gedoen word om hierdie verskynsel in 'n breër spektrum van Suid-Afrikaanse leerders te ondersoek.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to acknowledge the following people for their contributions to this project:

- My husband, mother and children – for their ongoing patience, motivation, emotional support and belief in my abilities.
- My friends and colleagues for their continuous advice, encouragement and support.
- My supervisor, Dr. Andrew Lewis, whose support, guidance, critical thinking and patience are much appreciated.
- Liezel de Vries, Emmely Herbst and Tara Carney for their advice and language and technical editing.
- The participants – for your enthusiasm and willingness to share your life experiences so that others can gain a better understanding of the dropout phenomenon.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE

### CONTEXTUALISATION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1	INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY.....	1
1.1.1	The South African context.....	1
1.1.2	International contexts.....	4
1.1.3	Possible risk factors.....	4
1.1.3.1	Socio-economic circumstances.....	4
1.1.3.2	Individual factors.....	5
1.1.4	In conclusion.....	5
1.2	RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY.....	6
1.3	AIM OF THE STUDY.....	7
1.4	STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	8
1.5	RESEARCH DESIGN.....	8
1.6	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS.....	9
1.6.1	Research method.....	9
1.6.2	Data collection.....	9
1.6.2.1	Individual interviews.....	10
1.6.2.2	Focus group interview.....	10
1.6.2.3	Personal documents – collages.....	11
1.6.3	Data analysis.....	11
1.7	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	12
1.8	CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS/DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	12
1.8.1	Dropouts.....	13
1.8.2	Adolescence.....	13
1.8.3	At risk.....	13
1.8.4	High-risk community.....	14
1.9	OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS.....	14

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.1	INTRODUCTION AND AIM OF THE CHAPTER.....	16
2.2	SCHOOL DROPOUT.....	17
2.2.1	Definitions.....	17
2.2.2	Prevalence.....	18
2.2.3	Consequences of dropping out.....	18
2.2.3.1	Economic consequences.....	19
2.2.3.2	Psycho-social consequences.....	19
2.3	ADOLESCENCE.....	19
2.3.1	Social development during adolescence.....	20
2.3.2	Parent-adolescent relationships.....	20
2.4	THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF ADOLESCENCE.....	21
2.4.1	Psychological theories.....	21
2.4.1.1	Erikson's theory of human development.....	21
2.4.1.2	Marcia's identity status theory.....	24
2.4.1.3	Piaget's cognitive developmental theory.....	24
2.4.2	Social theories.....	25
2.4.2.1	Social constructivism.....	25
2.5	ECOLOGICAL AND BIO-ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORIES.....	26
2.5.1	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological and Bio-Ecological Theories.....	27
2.5.2	The bio-ecological model.....	29
2.6	OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA.....	31
2.6.1	The education system during the <i>Apartheid</i> era.....	31
2.6.2	The education system after 1994.....	32
2.6.3	The emergence of a new approach.....	33
2.6.4	Barriers to learning.....	35
2.7	FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SCHOOL DROPOUT.....	35
2.7.1	Social context – socio-economic and other environmental influences.....	35
2.8	ECOLOGICAL RISK FACTORS FOR SCHOOL DROPOUT.....	38



2.8.1	Individual learner characteristics.....	38
2.8.2	Academic factors and behaviour.....	40
2.8.3	Family system (family structure, relations, resources and involvement).....	40
2.8.4	Peer group system.....	41
2.8.5	School system.....	42
2.8.6	Substance use.....	45
2.8.7	Teenage pregnancy.....	47
2.9	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....	48
2.10	FURTHER RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES.....	49

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

3.1	INTRODUCTION.....	50
3.2	PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH AIM.....	50
3.3	RESEARCH DESIGN.....	51
3.3.1	Purpose of the research.....	51
3.3.2	Applied versus basic research.....	52
3.3.3	Qualitative research.....	52
3.3.4	Phenomenology.....	53
3.3.5	Research paradigms.....	53
3.3.6	Context of the study.....	54
3.3.6.1	School setting.....	55
3.4	METHODOLOGY.....	56
3.4.1	Case study design.....	57
3.4.2	Participants.....	58
3.4.2.1	Selection of participants.....	58
3.4.2.2	Procedure .....	58
3.4.3	Data collection.....	59
3.4.3.1	Literature review.....	59
3.4.3.2	Triangulation.....	60

3.4.3.3 Individual semi-structure interviews.....	60
3.4.3.4 Focus group interview.....	62
3.4.3.5 Personal documents.....	63
3.5 DATA ANALYSIS.....	64
3.6 RESEARCH BIAS – REFLEXIVITY.....	65
3.7 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY.....	66
3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	67
3.9 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER.....	68

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS**

4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	70
4.2 PARTICIPANTS.....	70
4.2.1 Background of participants/Participant characteristics.....	71
4.2.2 Backgrounds of the focus group participants.....	76
4.3 DATA ANALYSIS.....	77
4.3.1 Data collection.....	77
4.3.2 Data analysis.....	77
4.4 FINDINGS.....	78
4.4.1 Individual characteristics contributing to and mediating dropout.....	79
4.4.1.1 Personal beliefs and responsibilities.....	79
4.4.1.2 Personal attributes.....	82
4.4.1.3 Personal challenges.....	85
4.4.2 Family systems factors contributing to and mediating dropout.....	89
4.4.2.1 Family difficulties.....	89
4.4.2.2 Family support.....	95
4.4.3 Peer group systems factors contributing to and mediating dropout.....	96
4.4.3.1 Peer relationships.....	97
4.4.4 Environmental and community issues contributing to and mediating dropout.....	99
4.4.4.1 Issues concerning wellness and safety in the community.....	100
4.4.4.2 Socio-economic issues.....	102

4.4.5	School system factors contributing to and mediating school dropout.....	105
4.4.5.1	Learner/Teacher Relationships.....	105
4.4.5.2	Barriers to Learning.....	109
4.4.5.3	Motivators for learning.....	112
4.4.5.4	Consequences of high school dropout.....	117
4.4.5.5	School resources and facilities.....	118
4.4.6	Educational system factors contributing to and mediating school dropout.....	121
4.4.7	Macro-system factors contributing to and mediating school dropout.....	121
4.5	COLLAGES.....	122
4.6	OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS.....	122
4.7	SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER.....	123

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	124
5.2	SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 1, 2, 3 AND 4.....	124
5.2.1	Chapter One: Contextualisation and orientation to the study.....	124
5.2.2	Chapter Two: Literature review.....	124
5.2.3	Chapter Three: Research design and methodology.....	125
5.2.4	Chapter Four: Data analysis and interpretation of results.....	125
5.3	DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS.....	125
5.3.1	Individual characteristics contributing to and mediating dropout.....	126
5.3.1.1	Academic difficulties and school retention.....	126
5.3.1.2	Future goals.....	126
5.3.1.3	Internal locus of control and self-concept.....	127
5.3.1.4	Personal difficulties.....	128
5.3.1.5	Substance use.....	128
5.3.2	Family system factors contributing to and mediating school dropout.....	129
5.3.2.1	Family support.....	129

5.3.2.2 Family difficulties.....	129
5.3.3 Peer group system factors contributing to and mediating dropout.....	131
5.3.4 School system factors contributing to and mediating school dropout.....	132
5.3.5 Local-community factors contributing to and mediating dropout .....	135
5.3.6 Educational system factors contributing to or mediating dropout.....	136
5.3.7 Macro-system factors contributing to and mediating school dropout.....	137
5.4 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS.....	138
5.5 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY.....	139
5.6 REFLEXIVITY.....	140
5.7 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	140
5.8 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	141
5.9 FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES.....	143
5.10 CONCLUSION.....	143
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>144</b>

## LIST OF ADDENDA

APPENDIX A:	Age specific enrolment patterns obtained from surveys and censuses, 1993-2006, for the age group 7 to 20	154
APPENDIX B:	- Age-specific enrolment rates from various surveys and censuses: Whites - Age-specific enrolment rates from various surveys and censuses: Coloureds	155
APPENDIX C:	Attainment Profiles of Individuals Ageds 15-19: South Africa in International Perspective	156
APPENDIX D:	STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY – CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH	157
APPENDIX E:	SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR LEARNERS	160
APPENDIX F:	INTERVIEW WITH FOCUS-GROUP	163
APPENDIX G:	CATEGORIES AND THEMES	165
APPENDIX H:	VAKGETALLE – 2008 – C.S.S.S.	168
APPENDIX I:	APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL	169

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **CONTEXTUALISATION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

More children are educated than ever before, with schools that are required to educate and teach children from various different social, cultural and language backgrounds (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter & McWhirter, 2007). This puts pressure on educational institutions and learners resulting in learners leaving school before having graduated (Masitsa, 2006). Worldwide statistics show that more children are attending high school than ever before, even in the poorest nations (Berger, 2005). Despite these claims, many children from different nationalities still drop out and leave school without completing their studies.

Research indicates that high school dropout is a phenomenon that occurs in all countries with formal educational systems and several studies have been conducted to explore why learners would leave school before completing their studies. Orther and Randolph, (1999, as cited in Randolph, Fraser & Orther, 2006), reported that individual, family, neighbourhood, school environment and educational engagement and other societal factors have an influence on the academic achievements of learners and their decisions to remain in school. Suh and Suh (2006) referred to a connection between lack of school involvement among adolescents and substance use, teenage pregnancy, criminal activities, and school dropout. In South Africa, the Ministerial Committee on learner retention in the South African schooling system identified grade repetition as the single most powerful predictor of dropping out, and indicated that dropout is preceded by academic or behavioural difficulties that often start in primary school. Furthermore, they found that the educational levels of parents related strongly to dropout, and that the risk of dropping out is very high for learners who are older than the median age when entering secondary education (Progress report, 2007).

#### **1.1.1 The South African context**

Since the election of the first democratic government in 1994, South Africa has made significant changes to improve access to basic education for all learners. The Constitution of the Republic of

South Africa states that all children have a right to basic education, and identifies the period of compulsory schooling from grade one to nine (Bill of Rights, 1996; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001).

Despite this, dropping out of school has, according to South African media reports, become a major problem in both Africa and South Africa. Prof Jonathan Jansen, former Dean of the Faculty of Education at Pretoria University, and incumbent Rector of the Free State University, identified economic factors, a lack of stimulation and teacher training as possible reasons for this phenomenon (SAFM Interview – 09 April 2007). This concern about dropout resulted in the appointment of the Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention by the Minister of Education, Mrs GNM Pandor, to investigate the extent of retention and dropout in the South African schooling system. As mentioned, according to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the compulsory school phase is from grade one to nine. This report states that the dropout rate of learners below grade nine is statistically insignificant, but that it increases sharply from grade nine onwards (Keating, *The Argus*, 26 February 2008). Statistics from this study revealed that out of a thousand learners born between 1980 and 1984, 456 of the 984 entering grade one eventually reached grade 12. Findings indicated a significant increase in dropout rates from grade nine upwards, reaching 24% in grade 11 in this particular cohort. Age-specific enrolment figures published in this report revealed high enrolment rates of 95% or above until the ages of 15 or 16, after which enrolment falls rather sharply to about 50% by 19 years of age (see Appendix A). Age-specific enrolment statistics, broken down by race, indicated that the Coloured population showed the earliest trend towards dropping out of school compared to other population groups in South Africa, before completion of high school (see Appendix B). This is important as the participants of this study were from a predominantly Coloured school (Progress report, 2007).

A national representative community survey, conducted in February 2007, suggested that access to basic education in South Africa is improving. Results indicated an attendance rate of 95,4% for grades one to nine, with a large increase in the attendance rate of six-year-olds. Despite this, it showed that there were still large numbers of learners who were out of school. For example, in 2007, 4.6% of children aged seven to fifteen years were not attending school. This study indicated that dropping out of school mainly starts at 15 years of age and then continues on an increasing scale between 16 and 19 years, for reasons such as teenage pregnancy and gang involvement (*Sunday Times*, June 21, 2009).

It is important to consider that in the South African context many learners may decide to leave the schooling system after the compulsory school phase to make use of different opportunities

such as further education and training at Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges. Their decision to leave school before matriculating may therefore be to pursue their careers at such colleges.

Furthermore, the legacy of apartheid and a history of power relationships have disadvantaged many groups in the South African society. Despite the major political changes towards social justice that have taken place since 1994 with the end of the *apartheid* system, many communities are still experiencing considerable challenges placing many learners at risk of dropping out of school. Examples of such challenges are poverty, violence, crime, sexual and substance abuse and unemployment. According to Normand (2007), these challenges could have an effect on the physical, social and emotional development of the youth and often result in the breakdown of traditional families and lack of parental support for the youth.

McWhirter et al. (2007, p.6) point out that dysfunctional families, poor schools, negative social interactions, and other psychological stressors can place the youth *at risk* of future negative outcomes. In the educational context, *at risk* refers to situations where the cause-effect dynamics could cause learners to drop out of school unless effective intervention takes place. Youth living in such conditions may therefore be regarded as *at risk* of possible negative outcomes, and communities where such conditions exist may therefore be regarded as *high-risk communities*. Bruner (1996, as cited in Berger, 2005, p.373) is of the opinion that adolescents jeopardise their own futures by leaving school prematurely due to a *volatile mismatch* or *lack of it* between their own current needs and the traditional structures of the school they attend. Poverty is one of the external factors that could place learners *at risk* of dropping out of school. McWhirter et al. (2007) note that it has been found that learners who left school prematurely were more likely to be from poorer backgrounds, where they have less access to study aids and fewer opportunities for out-of-school-related learning.

Poverty is widespread in South Africa, and in 2000 it had been estimated that 28.5% of households earned less than a *poverty line* of R800 per month (SAIRR, as cited in Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002, p. 201). Poverty can be defined as *the denial of opportunities and choices, most basic to human development, to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and respect* (Statistics South Africa, as cited in Visser, 2007, p.221). Additional external challenges linked to poverty may present in the form of unstable home life, personal and family problems, HIV/AIDS, social violence and peer pressure at school. If combined with low self-confidence, lack of self-esteem and an inability to make decisions during adolescence, these challenges can lead to teenage pregnancy, vandalism,



early alcohol and drug abuse, poor school performance and **school dropout** (Van der Merwe, 1996).

### **1.1.2 International Contexts**

According to Berliner and Biddle (1995, as cited in McWhirter et al. 2007), the American educational system has been very successful in their efforts to reduce the number of learners who drop out of high school, and many more learners from diverse backgrounds are completing their education. In 2000, it was estimated that 11% of American 16 to 24-year-olds left school without having graduated (Kaufman et al., 2001, as cited in McWhirter et al. 2007). More recent comparisons of data from 2002-2003 and 2005-2006 showed an increase of 4% and more in the number of high school graduates in certain states, such as Kentucky (5.9%), New Mexico (4.2%) and New York (4.2%) (Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008). The high school dropout rates were highest for American Indian Native students (7.4%), and lowest for Asian Islander students (2.4%). Dropout rates among other population groups were 2.7% (White/Non-Hispanic); 6 % (Hispanic and 6.1% (Black/Non-Hispanic). Results across the 48 reporting states showed an increase in the dropout rate in 27 states and a decrease in 21 states (Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008). See section 2.2.2 for dropout rates in other countries.

### **1.1.3 Possible Risk Factors**

#### **1.1.3.1 Socio-economic factors**

The dropout phenomenon is linked to socio-economic factors, such as poverty, high crime rates, and alcohol and drug abuse. Studies focusing on socio-economic circumstances show that poverty and economic challenges of the time contribute to lack of motivation, negative self-concept in terms of academic abilities, failure at school, domestic violence, delinquency, and higher dropout rates (Prinsloo, 2004). Gordon (1987, as cited in Donald et al., 2002) claims that economic factors are often viewed as the most influential factors causing learners to drop out of school, as children are expected to leave school to take on family and social responsibilities. Education in poor communities is costly and being at school limits the contributions that learners can make towards the immediate survival of families. If the learner is not making progress at school, the immediate needs of the family often outweigh the advantages of education (Donald et al., 2002). It therefore appears that the usefulness and relevance of schooling affect whether and for how long learners remain at school (Donald et al., 2002). The attitude of parents, educators and the community towards the relevance of schooling may therefore also have an influence on the dropout rate (Khayar, 1979; Palme, 1994, as cited in Donald et al., 2002).

### **1.1.3.2 Individual Factors**

This phenomenon is, in addition, linked to individual factors, such as self-concept, gender, race, giftedness, and challenging behaviours that may manifest in aggression. Involvement with juvenile crime has for instance emerged as being related to high school dropout both internationally and nationally (Coombe 2001; Johnson & Dorrington, 2001; Sweeten, 2006). In order to address the problem, it thus appears necessary to consider external factors as well as individual characteristics when exploring high school dropout (Knestling, 2008).

### **1.1.4 In Conclusion**

Irrespective of the reasons, school dropout is an area of concern for educators and counsellors who care about the well-being of schools, family, individual students and society in general as it results in low-level academic abilities, limited employment opportunities, and higher unemployment rates (Vaughn, Bos & Schumm, 2000; Boon, 2008). Leaving school before studies have been completed has a considerable impact on the life of the individual, and consequentially has substantial economic and social repercussions on society (McWhirter et al., 2007). Donald (1993, as cited in Donald et al., 2002) argues that it leads to a waste of potential that could possibly be prevented.

In order to explore this phenomenon comprehensively in the South African context, it is necessary to acquire an ecological social systems approach where the interrelationships of the individual to a multiple other systems are acknowledged (Donald, 1994, as cited in Sharratt, 1995). This approach will help to create an understanding of how the individual learner's development is shaped by his/her social context (Donald, et al., 2002). Even though several political and social changes have taken place in South Africa during the past fifteen years, the effects caused by the previous policies and practices are still prevalent and will take a long time to redress. Communities in South Africa differ substantially in terms of their resources and their values that could in turn have an effect on individual, social and interpersonal problems. Living in a high risk community for instance, where issues such as conditions of poverty, high crime rates and dysfunctional families are prevalent, may negatively impact on children's growth and development. As negative cycles of disadvantage could cause and sustain further disadvantage, such as dropping out of school, it is imperative that the contexts of the learners are explored from a systemic perspective in order to intervene using effective preventative measures (Donald et al., 2002). This approach will allow for suggestions and interventions at all the levels of the system, from the individual learner, to the classroom, the school and at school-community level.

The social systems approach is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems model and will be explained in more detail in Chapter 2 (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, as cited in Swart & Pettipher, 2005). This approach makes three assumptions, namely 1) that individuals and their environment are interacting and influencing one another on a continuous basis; 2) that individuals are active participants in their development; and 3) that changes in one ecological system (such as public policy decisions) may influence changes in systems more immediate to the individual (the community) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989, as cited in McWhirter et al., 2007, p.19).

The use of the constructivist learning theory will help to situate the constructed realities and experiences of learners and teachers with regard to the dropout phenomenon.

## **1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

High school dropout appears to be a local, provincial and national problem in South Africa. Gert Witbooi, spokesperson for the Western Cape MEC for Education, Cameron Dugmore, was quoted in a local Western Cape newspaper as saying that *almost 50 percent of learners who start in grade 1 leave school by grade 12* (Cape Times, April 2, 2008). Furthermore, the Afrikaans Teachers' Union expressed concern about the reported 24% matriculation success rate, in 2007, of pupils that started grade 1 in 1995. They quoted the 2008 success matriculation rate as 22% (Cape Times, Wednesday, March 18, 2009). A recent survey conducted by Statistics South Africa in February 2007 indicated that, despite the recent changes in legislation towards improving access to education as mentioned in section 1.2.1, 400,000 children are still out of school (Fleisch, Shindler & Perry, 2009).

It is therefore regarded as important to establish what the reasons are for learners not attending school in order to reach the ideals of the current inclusive education system in South Africa. These ideals will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Recommendations made by the Ministerial Committee on learner retentions in the South African schooling system suggested that interventions should focus on the post-compulsory school phase as they found conclusive evidence to suggest that higher dropout rates take place from the age of 16 upwards (Progress report, 2007). According to recent statistics obtained from the school where this research was conducted, only 50% of learners enrolled in grade 8 eventually matriculate (Interview with acting headmaster, 12 March 2009). In my experience as an Intern Psychologist working with adolescent learners who live in this particular high-risk community, I have found that many of these learners encounter severe difficulties. These difficulties include

poverty, violence, single and/or inconsistent parenting, teenage pregnancies, and drug and substance abuse. Some of these learners find it difficult to cope at school and are often in conflict with the system, which may result in them dropping out of school.

Results from a recent pilot study I conducted during 2007 to investigate the high school dropout phenomenon in the particular school, teacher/learner relationships emerged as an important theme. Teacher/learner conflict, teacher support and teachers' attitudes towards learners in general emerged as important factors that could influence learners' decisions to either attend or drop out of high school. A lack of interest, caring, and support from teachers, were further identified as important reasons for children dropping out of high school. Socio-economic reasons such as financial constraints, home and family circumstances, substance abuse, violence and crime were further identified. Personal aspirations, concerns about the future, parental encouragement, positive learner/teacher relationships and academic support were, on the other hand, identified as factors that encourage high school attendance. As school dropout appeared to be a growing concern in the specific school, I believed that the reasons why learners leave school prematurely warranted a deeper understanding and decided that this area of research is worth expanding on.

My motivation for engaging in this study was to explore and develop a more in-depth understanding of the high school dropout phenomenon during the post-compulsory school phase in a particular community. As results from the pilot study suggested that supportive and positive relationships seemed to encourage school attendance in this specific community, I aimed to expand this research and get a more thorough understanding of the dropout phenomenon. It appears that there is no one factor that can be identified as the cause for school dropout. Factors are complex and often so interwoven that they make generalisations difficult. The researcher believes that a deeper understanding of the reasons for high school dropout is essential in formulating suggestions for possible interventions; thus helping to support the youth in this specific community, or in other similar communities.

### **1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study is to explore the dropout phenomenon of high school learners within a specific high-risk community. This involved an investigation of the subjective experiences of learners at risk of dropping out of school during the post-compulsory phase of their education at school. The ideal is that a more thorough understanding of this phenomenon would enable an

educator to inform strategies to address the problem in the particular school from the perspectives of an Educational Psychologist and an Educational Department.

## **1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In order to explore the aim of the study as described above, the main problem statement is: **What is the dropout phenomenon of high school learners within a certain context – in this instance a specific high-risk context, and what places them at risk of dropping out?**

In addition to the main statement problem, there were four sub-research questions:

1. What is the dropout phenomenon?
2. What do the adolescent learners regard as the reasons for high school learners within a certain context dropping out of school?
3. What are the perceptions of teachers and other stakeholders in this context regarding this phenomenon?
4. What can be done to address this issue?

## **1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN**

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), research design involves the planning of scientific inquiry: in the first instance, to specify what needs to be investigated, and secondly, to determine the best way to go about this.

This study was conducted within the qualitative paradigm. Qualitative research is based on interpretations of specific issues, in this case, high school dropout in a specific context, where the researcher is central to the process. It is thus process orientated, relies on active participation of subjects, and fits within the social constructivist philosophy based on the view that reality is actively constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. As qualitative researchers, we are interested in the meaning that individuals have constructed, which helps them make sense out of their experiences and the world around them. The aim is therefore to develop an understanding of the high school dropout phenomenon in a certain context during the post-compulsory school phase by drawing on the personal experiences of the participants and their perspectives through interpretive research methods. The interpretive paradigm posits that multiple realities exist for individuals who view reality as an internal reality of subjective experience (Merriam, 1998). It is mainly concerned with how individuals and members of societies understand and make sense of events and situations in their lives (Merriam, 1998; 2002). This methodology provides an appropriate perspective from which to investigate and gain

an understanding of all the systems that could be involved in the lives of individual learners and which could play a role in their decision to drop out of school.

Qualitative research is naturalistic as it studies real-world situations without manipulating and controlling them, holistic as it often focuses on complex interdependencies, and inductive as it explores issues and builds theory on understandings gained from the research rather than testing theoretical hypothesis (Merriam, 1998). This research design was suitable for this study as it allowed for the investigation of the dropout phenomenon in the particular school context without disrupting the school routine of the participants to a great extent. The learners were interviewed on the school premises at suitable times during normal school days. Qualitative research allows for flexibility and is responsive to change. This was useful in this particular study (Merriam, 1998) as it enabled the researcher to adapt research methods when necessary during the course of the study.

## **1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

### **1.6.1 Research Method**

This study explored the dropout phenomenon in a specific secondary school situated in a high-risk community in the Stellenbosch area of the Western Cape. In accordance with the discourse of qualitative methodologies that construct meaning from the language that present the data, a case study method was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the constructed experiences and meanings of the teachers and learners at this particular school. The case study method allows for intensive exploration of a phenomenon within a “bounded system”. This system refers to “any social entity that can be bounded by parameters and that shows a specific dynamic and relevance, revealing information that can be captured within these boundaries”(Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004, p.32). As it allowed for the interpretation of context, the case study method supported the theoretical framework and qualitative approach of this study (Henning, et al., 2004).

### **1.6.2 Data Collection**

In a basic qualitative study, data is usually collected through interviews, observations and/or document analyses (Merriam, 1998). Together these methods should provide a *thick description* of the theme studied (Holliday, 2001; Geertz, 1973, as cited in Henning et al., 2004, p.37). For the purpose of this study it was decided to collect data by applying multiple methods, namely mainly individual interviews, focus-group interviews and individual collages. This method,

known as triangulation, is generally considered one of the best ways to enhance reliability and validity in qualitative research (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). It allows for the interpretation and sourcing of data in a variety of ways, which helps to build a more complete picture of the phenomenon under discussion (Henning et al., 2004).

### **1.6.2.1 Individual Interviews**

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with eight learner participants. This method of interaction between an interviewer and a respondent allowed for the exploration of complex issues without being tied to codes of standardisation. Qualitative interviewing allows for flexibility, as questions can be redesigned and adapted throughout the research process (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The learners in this study were selected through purposive sampling, which ensured that the most suitable learners were interviewed (Henning et al., 2004). The eight learners identified as *at risk* of school dropout were selected through consultation with the school counsellor and the acting headmaster. The following selection criteria were used: low grade performance; being older than the median age or grade repetition; behavioural problems and low school attendance. In addition, an interview was conducted with a member of the community in order to gain a more thorough contextual understanding of the dropout phenomenon in the specific school. The community member was purposively selected after consultation with the staff at the Child Care Unit in the area.

### **1.6.2.2 Focus-group interview**

A focus group can be described as a type of group interview led by a moderator to discuss a specific topic (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Babbie & Mouton (2001) explain the main advantage of focus group interviews as providing an opportunity to observe interaction on a topic in a limited period of time. They state that it may provide less depth than individual interviews, but that it is effective in providing evidence about similarities and differences in participants' experiences and viewpoints (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

A focus group with six participants was planned, but due to demands on teachers, it was conducted with two participants, namely the school counsellor and the acting headmaster (who is also a teacher at the specific school). These participants were employed at the particular secondary school in the identified high-risk community. After data analysis and consultation with colleagues, it was decided that sufficient data was generated from this focus-group for the purpose of this study. The purpose of the focus group was to obtain the teachers' perceptions of the school dropout phenomenon in the particular school. This would demonstrate whether the



perceptions of the learners and teachers correlated with reference to the reasons for high school dropout during the post-compulsory phase.

### **1.6.2.3 Personal Documents - Collages**

After the semi-structured interviews, each of the learners had to compile a list of the barriers that may prevent him/her from achieving his/her academic goals. Then they were asked to visualise what their lives would be like if these barriers did not exist and to make a collage of this ideal world.

When constructing a collage the participant is free to select the pictures and materials without any boundaries or rules in order to visually represent a topic. A discussion of the contents allows the participant to tell his/her story, whereby some themes and patterns may emerge. It is a useful tool for the identification, analysis and evaluation of characteristics, interests and values that represent the self, and can be viewed as a developmental process that increases personal awareness and growth (Fritz & Beekman, 2007). It was decided that, in this study, this method could provide useful additional data, as individuals may express feelings and opinions which otherwise would not have been raised in the interviews. It also seemed important to leave the learners at the end of the investigation feeling empowered, with the belief that they themselves are capable of bringing about change, and with their minds focussed on solutions rather than on problems (McWhirter et al., 2007).

### **1.6.3 Data Analysis**

Interviews were recorded and transcribed with the interviewees' permission. Data analysis and interpretation began immediately after data had been collected to determine whether and to what extent adjustments needed to be made (Patton, 1987). This allowed for flexibility and the formulation of new questions as the interviews progressed.

Data was collated, ordered and coded into meaningful and manageable categories, patterns and themes through interpretative content analysis, also referred to as qualitative thematic analysis. This involved finding examples or quotations of similar ideas or issues that belong together. Data was also analysed and compared to find connections between themes. This allowed for interpretation of the patterns and relationships. It is important to note that data analysis and interpretation often overlap as interpretation could happen during data collection. This could improve the quality of the analysis if the researcher takes all data into account (Patton, 1987).



## **1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical behaviour is particularly important in social research, as it involves human subjects. The underlying principles are universal and involve issues such as honesty, respect for the rights of others, and the concern that subjects should partake freely, based on informed consent (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005). A participant can only give informed consent once he/she is fully informed of the whole process. In addition, the researcher needs to be available to prospective participants before and during the research process in the event of queries (Tindall, 1996).

In this study, written informed consent had to be obtained from the Western Cape Department of Education, the individual learners that participated in the study, teachers and the school before any interviews were conducted.

The aims and the purpose of the study were clearly outlined to both the school and the prospective participants to enable them to make an informed decision about being part of the research process. The participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the research at any point in time. The acting headmaster and the school counsellor were kept up to date with the progress of the study and they confirmed the availability of continuous emotional support to the learners at risk of dropping out of school.

The participants were given the option to obtain the manuscripts of the interviews after the study had been completed in order to clear up any uncertainty. Confidentiality (*the ethical obligation of the practitioner not to disclose confidential information obtained*) (McWhirter et al., 2007, p. 52) and anonymity (a condition where the individual's identity is unknown to others) was explained and guaranteed and individuals and their needs were respected throughout (Tindall, 1996). As stated by Tindall (1996), this is particularly important as we deal with the participants' personal experiences.

Participants were promised to be briefed by the researcher on the outcomes at the conclusion of the research. Ethical clearance for this research was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Stellenbosch University (Ref No. 120/2008).

## **1.8 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS/DEFINITION OF TERMS**

To ensure clarity within this study the following terms are defined briefly, but will be explained in more detail in the following chapter:

### 1.8.1 Dropouts

*Dropouts* can be defined as learners who leave school before completing a programme of study (McWhirter et al., 2007, p. 127). They may either drop out of school or other higher education institutions (Masitsa, 2006). In this article, the term *dropout* will refer to learners who leave school after the **compulsory school phase** (grade one to nine) and before matriculating, which means the phase between grades 10 and 12 and not obtaining the grade 12 qualification.

### 1.8.2 Adolescence

Adolescence is the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood, and is more easily demarcated on the basis of physical and psychological developmental characteristics than chronological age (Thom, Louw, Ede & Ferns, 1998). Even though it is difficult to define the adolescent phase in terms of chronological age, it is generally accepted to start between the ages of 11 and 13 years and usually ends between 17 and 22 years (Gouws, Kruger & Burger, 2008).

### 1.8.3 At Risk

According to McWhirter et al. (2007, p.7-9), *at risk* should be viewed as a sequence of steps along a continuum rather than a distinct diagnostic category. The range stretches from minimal risk to individual behaviour, to imminent risk and eventually activities that are associated with risky behaviour. *Minimal risk* refers to a situation when young people are subjected to a few psychological stressors, but due to the person's age, developmental level or other factors, the consequences may not be negative. *Remote risk* refers to the point on the continuum at which risk seems progressively more possible. An example would be that low socio-economic status and poor access to good education are associated with greater dropout rates and other problems. *High risk* refers to situations when young people are experiencing several psychological stressors, such as dysfunctional families, poor schools, and negative social interactions, in combination with personal characteristics, such as aggression or negative attitudes and deficits in social skills and coping behaviours. McWhirter et al. (2007) point out that individual high-risk characteristics, such as cigarette use, often act as a gateway to alcohol and marijuana use and eventually to the use of harder drugs. *At-risk* refers to the final step in the continuum that is reached when the young person engages in the activities as defined by the at-risk categories. It is important to note that activity in any of the at-risk categories can generalise to other categories, for example, the adolescent that drops out of school, is at great risk of substance abuse and vice versa (McWhirter et al., 2007).

Risk thus refers to a number of factors associated with negative outcomes. In the context of this study, it includes dysfunctional families, poor schools, negative and social interactions and psychosocial stressors that could contribute to a learner dropping out of school. *At-risk* thus refers to a situation that is probable in the absence of intervention (McWhirter et al., 2007).

#### **1.8.4 High-risk community**

Disadvantaged communities can be viewed as high-risk communities where ill health and social problems are prevalent (Ahmed, Seedat, Van Niekerk & Bulbulia, as cited in Normand, 2007). According to McWhirter et al. (2007), children living in high-risk communities are exposed to several psychological stressors, such as dysfunctional families, poor schools, substance abuse and negative social interactions, as mentioned in section 1.9.3.

## **1.9 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS**

A brief outline of the chapters in this research report follows:

### **Chapter 1: Contextualisation and orientation to the study**

In this chapter the research study is introduced and the aims and objectives are outlined. Some possible reasons for the occurrence of the school dropout phenomenon are briefly mentioned with reference to the effects of poverty in the South African context. The importance of a sound theoretical approach is also highlighted. In addition, the research questions are identified and contextualised. A brief description of the research design and research methods is given and reference is made to important ethical considerations. Finally, the different concepts of the study are clarified.

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Chapter two provides a broad overview of the concepts, contexts, theories, implications and previous literature relevant to this study. It includes a discussion of adolescence and the developmental challenges linked to this phase of development. Reference to social constructivism helps to explain how adolescents create knowledge and make sense of their environments. This chapter includes a brief overview of the educational policies and the development of inclusive education in South Africa, as it clarifies the approach to possible barriers to learning that might result in school dropout. The chapter includes a discussion of the ecological framework to demonstrate how an individual student, a family, a peer and school risk factors, as well as the interaction among such factors can increase the risk of school dropout.

Reference is made to the impact of environmental influences as well as the consequences of school dropout. Chapter two concludes with an overview of the research, with reference to the ecological risk factors for school dropout.

### **Chapter Three: Research design and methodology**

This chapter examines the research design that specifies how the research was conducted. A description of the interpretative, qualitative research design of the study is included. This design serves as framework for this study and directed the entire research process. The chapter includes an explanation of the problem statement and the research questions, in order to refresh the reader with the intention and purpose of the study. The theoretical paradigm, purpose and context of the study are discussed. An introduction to the methodology that was followed in the study, information about the method of sampling, data production and data analysis are also included. Reliability and validity are discussed and the chapter will conclude with an outline of the ethical considerations related to this research.

### **Chapter Four: Data analysis and findings**

Chapter four provides an explanation of the data analysis process and a presentation of the findings. It includes a profile of the participants of the focus-group and individual semi-structured interviews, and provides a detailed explanation of how the data was analysed. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive discussion of the emerging categories and themes.

### **Chapter 5: Discussion and summary of the findings, conclusions, limitations and recommendations**

This chapter provides an overview of the first four chapters and a conclusion to the study. It includes a discussion of the findings with links to the literature and the bio-eco-systemic framework. The limitations of the study are addressed and the chapter concludes with recommendations and suggestions for further research.

# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION AND AIM OF THE CHAPTER**

Neuman (2006) regarded the reviewing of existing knowledge about a subject as an essential step in the research process. He based this on the assumption that knowledge accumulates and that we learn from, and build on what others have done before us (Neuman, 2006). As researchers, we are therefore obliged to familiarise ourselves with any publications on research completed in the field of study before conducting a specific research. For these reasons, recent South African and international publications on high school dropout and the possible risk factors related to this concept were reviewed.

The purpose of this study is to explore the dropout phenomenon of high school learners within a specific context. A further aim is to provide possible explanations for the prevalence of non-completers in a specific school in order to make suggestions on how to address the problem in future.

In the light of the above, the aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the concepts, contexts, theories, implications and previous literature relevant to this study. Due to the fact that this study focuses on grade 10 to grade 12 learners (aged 15-18 years), and that school dropout has been associated with individual characteristics, such as self-concept, it was deemed necessary to acquire an understanding of adolescent development and its relationship to school dropout. A discussion of social constructivism is included to explain how adolescents construct their realities and make sense of their worlds.

As the complex phenomenon of high school dropout is also linked to various external ecological factors, such as socio-economic factors, an explanation of the ecological systems theory was regarded necessary. This helps to develop an understanding of the interrelationships between individual learners and the multiple other systems connected to them, such as their parents, communities and their schools. This study therefore proposes that construction of adolescents' realities are dependent on their systemic interaction with their environments, that they are influenced by their environments, and vice versa. It thus examines the high school dropout phenomenon within a developmental and bio-ecological systems framework.

## 2.2 SCHOOL DROPOUT

### 2.2.1 Definitions

According to McWhirter et al. (2007, p.127) a dropout can be defined as *a pupil who leaves school before graduation and before completing a program of study*. Internationally there are several understandings of dropout. In the United States of America the following two classifications are used, namely *event* dropouts and *status* dropouts. *Event* dropouts are learners who withdraw from school during a certain time frame, such as a given school year. *Status* dropouts are youths between the ages of 16 and 24 who are not enrolled and are out of school without having completed a state approved educational programme (McWhirter et al., 2007, p.127; Progress Report, 2007). In addition, if the learner is absent due to a transfer to another public school or as a result of suspension or school excused illness or death, it does not constitute dropout (Progress Report, 2007).

Masitsa (2006) pointed out that such individuals may either drop out of school or other higher education institutions. In this article, the term *dropout* refers to learners who leave school after the **compulsory school phase** (grade 1 to 9) and before matriculating.

McWhirter et al. (2007) expressed the value of considering four different “dropout types” when designing interventions as identified by Janosz and colleagues (2000, as cited in McWhirter et al., 2007, p.134). *Disengaged dropouts* show relatively high achievement grades, despite lack of involvement in school matters, and minimal educational aspirations. *Low-achiever dropouts* have very little commitment to education, achieve poor grades, but do not demonstrate too many behavioural problems. *Quiet dropouts* display few external problems, but perform poorly at school. They appear to regard school attendance and school involvement as important and do not often misbehave or require discipline. Others are usually unaware of them until they drop out of school. *Maladjusted dropouts* are often disciplined due to misbehaviour. They show weak commitment to education and school performance and lack of involvement (McWhirter et al., 2007).

McWhirter et al. (2007) stressed that consideration should be given to the instructional environment, as it can have an impact on the learners’ dislike for school, their lack of motivation and their self-concept. They argue that low-achieving at-risk students are handled differently to students that show high academic achievement, which in turn contributes to them leaving school (Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice & Tremblay (2000), as cited in McWhirter et al., 2007). McWhirter et al. (2007) recommend that efforts to prevent learners from leaving school should focus on

reducing antisocial behaviours, increasing academic achievements, and improving interaction with other students and adults in order to encourage positive school commitment.

### **2.2.2 Prevalence**

Dropping out of school before attaining a high school diploma appears to be an educational and social problem in most countries. Internationally, the school dropout rates vary. Chmelynski (2006) claims that one American student drops out of school every nine seconds. International dropout rates are 10.3% in the United States of America (USA), 11.4% in Canada, 23% in Australia, 9% in Germany and 6% in Korea (US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2006; Flisher, 2004). In the United Kingdom, nearly 20% of 14-19-year-olds are out of school without any qualifications (UNESCO, 2002).

According to the Progress Report to the Minister of Education published in 2007, South Africa appeared to compare favourably with other developing countries such as Brazil, Nicaragua and Bolivia in terms of survival rates, repeater rates and dropout rates (see Appendix C). This report indicates that the dropout rates from grade one to seven are estimated at 2%, whilst the dropout rates for grades 10, 11 and 12 are significantly higher. Age-specific enrolment patterns obtained from South African surveys and censuses from 1993 to 2006, indicate that 92,9% of 15-year-old *coloured* learners were enrolled in school in comparison to 30.8% of 18-year-olds in 2006 (Progress Report, 2007). This shows an increase in the dropout rate of 15 to 18-year-olds (see Appendices A & B). An analysis of the attainment international profiles of individual learners aged 15-19 years in 2001 shows that the South African system compared favourably with other middle-income countries (Progress Report, 2006) (see Appendix C). According to a Community Survey conducted by Statistics South Africa in February 2007, the attendance rate for grades 1 to 9 was 95.4%. Despite this there are still several children not attending school. This survey indicated that, in 2007, 4.6% of children between the ages of seven and 15 years were not at school. Fleisch et al. (2008, as cited in *The Sunday Times*, June 21, 2009, p.4), agreed with the Progress Report statistics as he claimed that learners start to drop out of school in larger numbers from the age of 15 onwards, and *the downward curve continues between 16 and 19 years*. According to Flisher et al. (2004, as cited in Townsend et al., 2007), 55% of high school learners in Cape Town, South Africa, dropped out of school before matriculating.

### **2.2.3 Consequences of dropping out**

Leaving school prematurely has a significant impact on the individual, and in addition, has severe economic and social repercussions on communities and society as a whole.

### **2.2.3.1 Economic consequences**

Learners who drop out of school are at an economic disadvantage due to the fact that their unemployment rate is significantly higher than that of others that complete their grades. Furthermore, they earn significantly less over their lifetimes than others who had graduated (Grubb, 1999, as cited in McWhirter, 2007). Learners who do not complete their schooling may lack the skills to compete in a job market that requires highly developed technical skills and may then become dependent on society (McWhirter et al., 2007).

### **2.2.3.2 Psycho-Social Consequences**

Dropping out of school often has an effect on the psychological well-being of individuals. Learners who drop out of school may experience dissatisfaction with themselves, the environment and their lack of opportunities, and may in turn regret their decision to leave school because of negative consequences, such as having to live in lower socio-economic circumstances (Kortering & Braziel, 1999, as cited in McWhirter, 2007). In addition, it increases the likelihood of unwanted pregnancies, alcohol and drug abuse, criminal activities, and other social problems (Cohen, 1993; Orthner & Randolph, 1999, as cited in McWhirter, 2007). As parents, due to earning low wages, early school leavers may have to work long *hours* in order to provide for their families, which would make it difficult to spend quality time with their children. This may have a negative affect on their relationships with their families. As individuals who dropped out of school have lower personal occupational aspirations than their peers who graduated, they may in turn also have lower educational expectations for their own children (McWhirter et al., 2007).

As this study focusses on an exploration of school dropout of grade 10 to 12 learners, a discussion of adolescence was also deemed necessary in order to gain an understanding of this developmental phase, as it will shed light on their holistic development.

## **2.3 ADOLESCENCE**

Adolescence is the transition from childhood to adulthood and is often described as the most challenging period of life. This is due to the immense variation in timing and expression of biological changes, and the vast diversity of the cognitive and psychosocial development that takes place during this phase of life.

It starts with the onset of puberty that can be described as “the period of rapid growth and sexual change that occurs in early adolescence and produces a person of adult size, shape, and sexual potential” (Berger, 2005, p.341). Learners, therefore, experience several changes as they move



through adolescence. It is generally accepted that it has its onset between the ages of 11 and 13 years, ending between 17 and 22 years (Gouws, Kruger & Burger, 2008).

### **2.3.1 Social development during adolescence**

Some of the most challenging development tasks of adolescents are socialisation and establishing a place in society, the development of self-confidence, acquiring interpersonal skills and developing tolerance for personal and cultural differences (Gouws et al., 2008). This involves a gradual move away from the parents on the part of the adolescent, the ability to find acceptance in peer relations, and the development of a more mature social cognition.

Adolescents often question their parents' values and opinions and are keen to share their own. Friendships with members of the same gender usually deepen and become more individualised, whilst some relationships develop a sexual or romantic element (Gouws et al., 2008). Peer influences are powerful during this phase of development and can promote positive interactions or apply pressure to engage in less socially accepted behaviours (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Positive peer relationships allow for developing close relationships where emotional issues can be dealt with, experimentation with new roles, and developing a group identity. Less favourable relationships can be the source of jealousy, social pressure to conform in dress, behaviour or attitude, and negative expectations (Gouws et al., 2008). Hamm (2000, as cited in Berger, 2005) points out that it is important to note that teenagers tend to associate with other teenagers whose values and interests are similar to theirs, especially with regard to substance abuse and academic involvement. Adolescent self-esteem depends to a significant degree on the positive feedback from peer group and family members. They therefore often search for a peer group that offers acceptance and do not consider negative behaviours associated with such a group (Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

### **2.3.2 Parent-Adolescent Relationships**

Adolescence is characterised by a gradual, but substantial change in parent-child relationships. Even though most parents continue to influence their children during this phase of development, the tendency to become increasingly independent may cause several parent-adolescent conflict situations. This requires adjustments on both sides to allow for the development of the adolescents physical maturity and emotional independence (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Despite this, adolescents still benefit from the moral and emotional support received from parents. Lack of such support may result in poor school work, low self-esteem, poor social adjustment and antisocial behaviour (Gouws et al, 2008).

It appears that parenting styles enhance or impede on the social and emotional development of adolescents, and may affect the development of independence and self-reliance, and determines the extent of parent-child conflict (Gouws et al., 2008). Demo and Adcock (1996, as cited in Sadock & Sadock, 2007) noted research showing that parent-child relationships with very high conflict and low support structures can have a negative impact on normal adolescent development. This is prevalent when parents are authoritarian and expect total obedience, are insensitive to their adolescents' feelings and moods, or when they feel threatened when the youngsters disagree or argue about certain matters (Gouws et al., 2008). On the other hand, adolescents neither benefit from permissive parenting where their behaviour is hardly ever questioned, and where virtually no limits are set (Maccoby, 2000, as cited in Sadock & Sadock, 2007). These extreme parenting styles are often applied by young single parents at a time when the adolescent needs parental guidelines and support. It is often evident in communities where drug abuse, violence and indiscriminate sex are rife, and may result in rebellious or socially unacceptable adolescent behaviour or in the young individual leaving home (Borkowski et al., 2002; Loeber et al., 2000; Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001; Yoder, et al., 1998, as cited in Berger, 2005). Adolescents appear to respond most positively to an authoritative and democratic parenting style that allows them the opportunity to develop independence in an environment where clear limits and categorical rules are set. Such parents are prepared to discuss rules and limits and the reasons for imposing them. They are accepting, flexible, understanding and encourage communication (Papalia et al., 1998, as cited in Gouws et al., 2008).

## **2.4 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF ADOLESCENCE**

There are several developmental theories that could lead to an understanding of this specific phase of life and could assist in an attempt to try and understand the drop-out phenomenon. These theories can be divided into psychological theories, sociological theories and socio-ecological theories. Each of the theories can help to understand this phenomenon partly in terms of the context.

### **2.4.1 Psychological theories**

#### **2.4.1.1 Erikson's theory of human development**

Erikson's psycho-social theory of human development (1968) is one of the most significant theories on adolescence. He viewed human development as a passage through a series of eight stages, where each of these stages has its particular goals, problems and accomplishments.

Each stage links a key social life challenge to an important point in physiological development (Gouws et al., 2008; Wait, Meyer & Loxton, 2005). According to Erikson (1963), growth takes place in a chronological and cumulative manner and the entire lifespan is necessary for all the functions of psycho-social development to become integrated.

Erikson's eight psycho-social stages are:

- 1) Basic trust vs Mistrust
- 2) Autonomy vs Shame, Doubt
- 3) Initiative vs Guilt
- 4) Industry vs Inferiority
- 5) Identity vs Role Confusion;
- 6) Intimacy vs Isolation;
- 7) Generativity vs Stagnation and
- 8) Ego integrity vs Despair.

The development of the individual passing through these stages depends on the maturation of certain abilities and demands made on the individual of a certain age by society (Gouws et al., 2008).

This implies that development through the different stages involves the following: new needs appear, new expectations are perceived, new opportunities emerge, and new abilities and skills develop. Each stage of development is also characterised by certain demands on the individual by others, such as society and social groups. Erikson argued that this often leads to a psycho-social crisis, when the individual is required to make psychological efforts to change or abide by the demands of others at a specific stage of his/her development. Each crisis presents the individual with a life task and refers to normal life stresses influenced by culture and society, rather than to an unusual series of situations (Erikson, 1968).

According to Erikson (1968), adolescence is characterised as confronting the psycho-socially challenging period of the fifth stage, namely *identity versus role confusion*, with its ultimate goal of identity achievement (Berger, 2005; Gouws et al., 2008; Pillay & Nesengani, 2006). He views this search for identity as the primary crisis of adolescence in which individuals explore who they are by reconsidering the goals and values set for them by their parents and culture

(Berger, 2005). During this stage of development, adolescents need to seek their own role and place in the world, by discovering their own interests, competencies, sexual identity, self-image and friendships (Donald et al., 2002). A positive outcome during this phase of development involves an integrated self-image that results in good mental health. The young adult that emerges from adolescence should know who he/she is and be confident in making this identity known to others. This personal identity then becomes the basis for all individual relationships that may develop (Barker, 1992).

A number of personality and temperamental characteristics have been identified that enhances the development of resilience in children, such as a positive self-concept, effective communication skills and a strong locus of control. For example, a strong internal locus of control would enable a learner to have more power to make changes and decisions in his/her life. This implies that they, personally, can make a difference to what happens to them (Donald et al., 2002). These characteristics would therefore act as protective factors that could help learners withstand the contextual stresses and risks to their development (Donald et al., 2005). Research showed that resilient learners are more independent, socially responsible, cognitively and academically superior to their peers and well adjusted to meet the demands of school and society (Boon & Cook, 2008). Results from a study by Dass-Brailsford (2005) identified individual characteristics, such as goal orientation, motivation and an understanding of the self as possessing a measure of agency, as having helped participants in attaining academic success. Such learners would therefore be unlikely to drop out of school before completing their studies. Donald et al. (2002), points out that it is extremely important that teachers have an understanding of this challenging phase of life, as adolescents require ample patience, tolerance and empathy whilst searching for their own identity. Teachers are often seen as role models during this stage and are expected to have answers to several searching questions (Donald et al., 2002).

Pillay and Nesengani (2006) questioned the application of Erikson's (1968) theory within the South African context, as it states that a positive outcome during adolescence is dependent on positive outcomes during the previous developmental stages where parents play an important role. As poverty is prevalent in many areas in South Africa, it may adversely affect parenting and survival mode stresses (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2005). Pillay and Nesengani (2006) also found Erikson's theory to be contradictory within the South African context, as it does not provide an explanation for the fact that many Black adolescents were able to achieve success in

their education despite living in child-headed families and having been exposed to oppression and denied equal access to education and health during the Apartheid era.

#### **2.4.1.2 Marcia's Identity status theory**

James Marcia, a Canadian developmental psychologist, refined and extended Erikson's work. He argued that a sense of identity is largely determined by the choices and commitments made regarding personal and social traits. His theory of identity achievement states that an adolescent's identity is formed by two processes, namely crisis and commitment, where crisis involves the re-examination of old values and choices, and commitment the acceptance of certain values and roles (<http://learning-theories.com/identity-status-theory-marcia.html>. 09/04/09).

Marcia (1966) used the term *foreclosure* for premature identity formation that happens when the young adolescent conforms and adopts his/her parents' or society's values and roles without questioning and exploring alternatives. Other adolescents may feel that they are unable to fulfil the expectations of their parents and society and develop a *negative or oppositional identity*, which is the opposite of what is expected. Some adolescents experience *identity diffusion*, which happens when the young person finds it difficult to meet the usual demands of this phase of development such as completing school work and thinking about the future. These adolescents do not have a sense of recognising choices and often have an attitude of *nothing matters or whatever* (Berger, 2005, p.388). Marcia (1966) used the term *identity moratorium* to describe a period of *time-out* when the adolescent explores various options and different alternative identities before making final identity choices. *Identity achievement* is the status in which the adolescent has experienced an identity crisis and has made a choice and a commitment to a sense of identity (Berger, 2005).

#### **2.4.1.3 Piaget's cognitive developmental theory**

Masitsa (2006) claims that the single best predictor of whether a learner will drop out of school is his/her level of academic success. This is often associated with poor performance at school, repeated failure, repeated absenteeism and being too old for the grade (Masitsa, 2006). In order to do well academically it is required that adolescents master new cognitive tasks that involves a greater ability to think in an abstract manner, and grasp concepts such as probability (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). If they are not successful, it might affect their school performance that could result in dropping out of school

Jean Piaget (1896-1980), a Swiss philosopher and developmentalist, found that adolescents have the ability to reason more abstractly than younger children. He called adolescence the period of *formal operations* (Sadock & Sadock, 2007, p.135), which is the fourth and final stage of the sequence of his theory of cognitive development. He identified the most important cognitive change that occurs during this stage as the shift from *concrete operational thinking* (*concrete thinking*) to *formal operational thinking* (*abstract thinking*). Piaget (1896-1980) described this kind of thinking as a gradual process that assists the young individual to match his/her cognitive strengths academically. Thinking becomes more flexible and intuitive, the adolescent becomes more aware of his/her own thinking, can justify judgements and can accept assumptions more easily. They have the ability to engage in hypothetical thought (what could possibly occur does not always occur in reality), and have advanced analytic and reasoning abilities.

## **2.4.2 Social theories**

### **2.4.2.1 Social constructivism**

A more thorough understanding of this philosophy can help us comprehend how learners make sense of the world around them. Post-modern social constructivism focuses on the philosophy of knowledge and theorists of this era are concerned and interested in how people know, as well as what people know. It values the human participation in the construction of knowledge and believes that human beings are active agents in their own development. Knowledge is obtained through the individual's interaction with the world and is dependent on the social and cultural context. It is based on the assumption that reality can only be known by those who personally experience it (Eloff, Maree & Ebersohn, 2006).

To fully understand this philosophy, it is important to look at two theorists who were forerunners in this way of thinking, namely Piaget and Lev Vygotsky (a Russian theorist). Piaget (1970) believed that knowledge is actively and individually constructed through assimilation (where new knowledge is added and fitted into existing knowledge) and accommodation (where new information is contradictory to existing knowledge and adjustments have to be made to fit the new knowledge) (Sands, Kozleski & French, 2000). This knowledge is continuously organised and re-organised to reach a dynamic balance of adaptation and integration of knowledge (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002). Cognitive construction is therefore a learning process of internal mental construction of new knowledge, where new experiences are incorporated with existing learned experiences through analysis and

interpretation. Children therefore develop their understandings and gain their skills mainly by interacting with others who are more knowledgeable. According to this philosophy, children extend their problem-solving skills by learning from the expertise of others (Wait et al., 2005). It means that the learner is an active participant and partially responsible for what happens in the learning process. This implies that learners depend on parents and teachers to act as role models to help them make sense of their world. If this is not possible, due to contextual circumstances, such as single-parent families, or unsupportive learner/teacher relationships, learners may find it difficult to cope at school and drop out before completing their studies.

Vygotsky (1896-1934) believed that knowledge is a social construction that is learned through social interaction and this varies across different social contexts and historical times. Individuals cannot be separated from their social contexts, and are therefore challenged to make sense of these contexts and systems such as the family, school and wider society and physical environments. They are therefore influenced by these contexts and by what they hear and see (Poplin, 1988). Learners in one class or one school would therefore have been influenced differently by the systems involved in their lives, such as their family and the way they were raised, the moral and cultural values that impacted on them, the schools they attended, and so forth. From this they construct meaning and develop an understanding of what happens in society. On a practical level it is accepted that learners come into class with an established worldview and are more actively involved in their own learning. Meaning is individually constructed and not just passively “absorbed” from an external source such as the teacher or parent (Poplin, 1988).

These theoretical frameworks bring to the fore the fact that the accumulation of physical, cognitive, social and contextual changes associated with adolescence may cause some academic, behavioural, attitudinal and mental-health difficulties, which could comprise school performance and place learners at risk of losing interest and leaving school early (Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2008).

## **2.5 ECOLOGICAL AND BIO-ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORIES**

Ecological systems theories are based on the relationships and the interdependence between people and other organisms and their physical environment. These parts are interconnected and a change in any of them will have an effect on the other. Together it is seen as a “whole” and if a dynamic balance exists between these parts, the system can be sustained. The systems theory



sees the social context as consisting of different levels where the functioning of the whole depends on the interaction between these systems (Donald et al., 2002).

When applied to education, it means that an interactive relationship exists between the individual learner and other systems such as the family, the church and the school, and that these systems are again affected by other systems such as the wider political and educational systems for instance. This is a continuous process (Donald, et al, 2002).

This systems theory is based on the following principles:

- The different systems should work towards maintaining a dynamic balance (as mentioned above).
- The relationship of cause and effect does not happen in one direction only, but it takes place in a circular manner (Donald et al, 2002). It implies that change in any system or part of a system, or the individual, will affect other individuals or systems. Changes in educational policy will therefore have an effect on the individual as example. This is in contrast to the medical model of linear cause and effect.
- The whole system is bigger than the sum of its parts.
- Rules and values of the different systems are important and help to organise interactions and avoid misunderstandings (Donald et al., 2002).

It is important to note that an individual is part of many systems in interaction with each other at any one time. These systems are changing continuously and a change in one system or level will have an effect on the rest of the system (Engelbrecht & Green, 2001).

### **2.5.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological and Bio-Ecological Theories**

Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992) ecological systems model of human development is a useful tool to explain human development in relation to the social context. This model will thus provide a theoretical framework to illustrate how the individual is connected to the social context and the systems within it. In terms of this study, it provides an answer to the question why the common challenges of development cannot be separated from the challenges presented by social issues and barriers to learning. A culmination of individual and societal challenges may result in learners not coping and dropping out of school.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1992) explains four interacting dimensions that need to be taken into account when discussing child development, namely *person factors* such as the temperament of



the child or other behavioural tendencies; *process factors* such as the interaction that takes place in the family; *contexts* such as schools, family communities and *time* such as changes that occur in the child or his/her environment. He views proximal interactions (close, continuous interactions that happen in long-term relationships such as between mother and child) as the most important influence on child development. He states that these interactions are affected by *person factors* and the context (such as the school) in which they occur. This may all change over time due to developmental changes in the child or the environment (Donald et al., 2002). These theories regard individuals as active participants in their development (McWhirter et al., 2007).

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1992) distinguished four context or environmental interacting systems that could have a direct or indirect influence on a child's life, namely the *microsystem*, the *mesosystem*, the *exosystem* and the *macrosystem*. All four systems interact with the *chronosystem* (Swart & Pettipher, 2005).

The *microsystem* consists of systems where the individual is involved in long-term close relationships such as the family, the school and the peer group. This is where the proximal interactions take place and includes relationships with teachers, friendship networks and sports teams.

The *mesosystem* refers to the interactions and relationships that take place between microsystems: what happens at home can, for example, have an effect on a child's performance or ability to concentrate at school. The ecological models assume that the individual learner's development is improved if the relationships between the microsystems, such as the school, parents, teachers and peers, are consistent and positive (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989, as cited in McWhirter et al., 2007).

The *exosystems* refer to systems where adolescents are not directly involved, but which could still have an influence on the individual, such as the educational system or the health system. It therefore consists of the interconnections between one or more such systems that do not necessarily directly involve the individual. Examples of exosystemic factors are public policy decisions regarding the educational or health sector (McWhirter et al., 2007). If a child does not have access to health facilities, he may be chronically ill and will be unable to attend and/or perform at school.

The *macrosystem* links to the values and beliefs of particular societies that may influence other levels or systems, such as cultural values and beliefs, race relations, such as democracy, or an

ideology that promotes social justice. For example, a cultural belief may include that it is acceptable for young girls to leave school earlier than boys, or to become pregnant, as they are not really expected to finish school.

Finally, the *chronosystem* refers to the fact that all the interactions described above happen over developmental time frames. A particular microsystem such as the family or the teacher-child learning context may be going through a developmental stage, but the child will be developing at the same time (Donald, et al., 2002).

Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979, 1992) highlights the complexity and the importance of the interrelationships and interactions between the different systems and the individual. This can have a major impact on the development of the learner and his/her learning (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). It is important to apply the principles of this perspective when trying to understand situations and communities, to not view one happening as a result of one other change only and to never look for the "cause" of something in one system only. The entire system needs to be considered in all instances and the dynamic interaction between systems needs to be taken into account.

The eco-systemic principles are important as they link the psychological development of the individual to the social context and systems, and acknowledge the influence of the wider environment and higher order systems on human behaviour (Visser, 2007). This helps to understand the learner in a more holistic manner by taking the interactions with the classroom, school and the wider social systems into account (Donald, et al., 2002). The value of the ecological models therefore lies in the fact that they recognise the influence of social contexts on development and can as such provide useful indicators for prevention and intervention strategies (Bronfenbrenner; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Allen-Meares, as cited in Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2008).

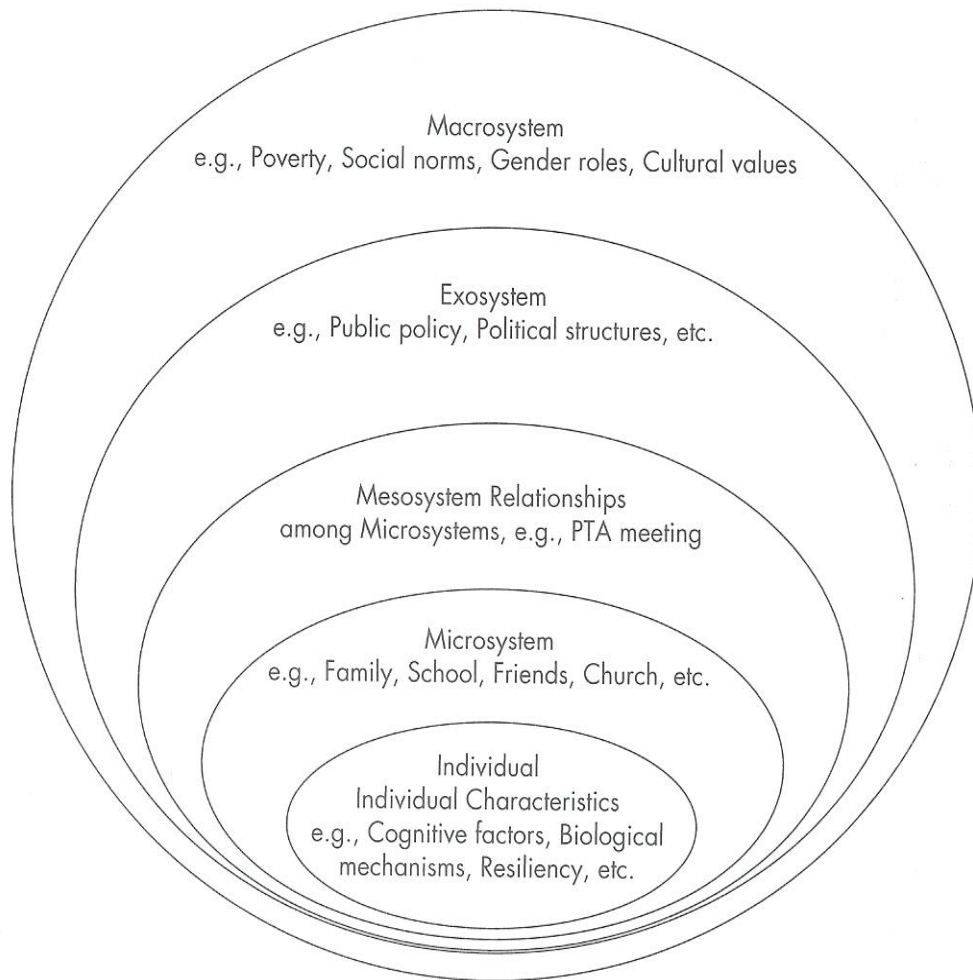
### **2.5.2 The bio-ecological model**

Bronfenbrenner's (1998) revised bio-ecological model was developed in the 1990s. It is based on the former model as described above and still emphasises the same four components, but now views *process* as the main component. *Proximal processes* (the specific manner of interactions between organisms and their environment) are viewed as the most important contributors to human development. If these interactions take place regularly over time, they will be more effective (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). Person characteristics, which are biologically based, are viewed as important in this model, as they have an effect on the proximal processes

and were the reason for the name change to the bio-ecological model (Swart & Pettipher, 2005).

Within this model, person characteristics received renewed attention. Bronfenbrenner (1998) identified certain person characteristics such as impulsiveness, aggression and violence, insecurities, genetic defects, responsiveness and unresponsiveness, and hyperactivity that could affect development. They could have an impact on the proximal processes, depending on the social culture at any given time and may have an effect on the interactions between microsystems (Swart & Pettipher, 2005).

From a learner's perspective, these characteristics within the learner could act as barriers to the individual's learning, and teaching methods may have to be re-structured or adapted to accommodate these learners in order to prevent low achievement which may result in academic difficulties and them leaving school (Donald et al., 2002). According to the South African Department of Education's policy of inclusive education (Department of Education, 2001), educational institutions need to provide access to education for all learners, irrespective of their individual needs. This implies that the necessary adaptations should be made to accommodate the individual learning and developmental needs of learners (Donald et al., 2002). On the other hand, learning and teaching styles may have to be changed to provide support for individual learners. Within this framework it is necessary to note that it is not only the individual characteristics, family, peer, or school risk factors that contribute to **school dropout**, but that the *interaction between* these factors could increase the risk of early departure from school (Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2008). For example, the physical and psychological changes that take place during adolescence may cause behavioural changes that may be experienced by teachers as a threat. This might exert a greater need for controlling behaviour by teachers, which could be experienced negatively by learners and literally *push* them out of school (Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2008, p.56).



**Figure 2.1** Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979, 1989)

As we accept that learners cannot be separated from their social contexts and are affected by their environments and vice versa, it was deemed necessary to include a brief overview of the changes that have taken place in the educational system in South Africa over the past fifteen years.

## **2.6 OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Politics had a big impact on education in the South African context. In order to fully understand the development of inclusive education in this context, we need to look at the situation during the Apartheid era, and the changes after 1994.

### **2.6.1 The Education system during the Apartheid era**

The previous education system during Apartheid provided segregated education for four racial groups, namely whites, Indians, coloureds and blacks. This meant that services were often duplicated and there were also considerable differences between the allocations of resources.

There were separated classrooms and schools for children with disabilities, and black learners were not provided with free and compulsory education and this meant that the disadvantaged majority of learners did not get educational support (Du Toit, 1996).

Curative interventions and education still focused on internal factors and changing children to *fit into the world*, ignoring the fact that special needs may also arise from external factors, such as social, systemic and structural factors as formerly discussed. This approach was based on the medical model (Swart & Pettipher, 2005, p.5).

The special-education system was based on ethnic separation and discrimination and limited educational support services existed where the most privileged groups in society received the best services, and some others had little or no access. More money was spent on providing resources and schools and materials for whites than other races and there was unequal access to specialised education. In terms of special education, there were huge disparities between services provided for the different racial groups with inadequately trained teachers and lack of equipment, especially for black children (Du Toit, 1996).

## **2.6.2 The Education system after 1994**

Inclusive education in South Africa evolved from a human-rights perspective as happened internationally. Since the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, the new government committed itself to creating an environment and country that will provide equal opportunities for all and respect diversity and social justice in a democratic country (Du Toit, 1996).

The new Constitution of 1996 includes the Bill of Human Rights with some rights that relate to education. Point 32 states that “everyone has the right to basic education and equal access to education” (Bill of Rights, 1996). The Bill of Rights also refers to equality (point 8) where it states that “every person has equal rights in the eyes of the law”, and “there may be no discrimination against any person on the grounds of race, gender, ethnic or social descent, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, faith, culture or language”. The right to human dignity states that every person has the right to respect and to the protection of his or her human dignity (Bill of Rights, 1996, point 10). The rights mentioned refer either directly to education in SA or can be linked to certain values and beliefs that should be adopted in an inclusive education system in a democratic society.

These rights are supported by the SA Schools Act of 1996 (SASA 1996) that states that no learner can be denied admission to a school on any basis including language, disability or any

other differences. It made provision for learners to have access to the school of their parents' choice and legislated compulsory education for learners from seven to fifteen years of age. (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001).

### **2.6.3 The Emergence of a New Approach**

International trends influenced the educational thinking in South Africa and therefore had an impact on policy developments in inclusive education. South Africa followed the global movement during the 1980s towards integration and inclusive education. The most important policies that developed were:

- The White Paper on Education and Training (1995) with key initiatives that included the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) approach;
- The South African Schools Act of 1996;
- The White paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (1997);
- The National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS)(1997);
- White paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (2001) (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 200, as cited in Swart, 2004).

The new focus was to develop an education system that will meet the needs of each and every learner. The White Paper in Education and Training and the South African Schools Act made provision for legislation to accommodate the shift to inclusive education in South Africa. It was recognised that society needs to adapt and change in order to accommodate diversity (Department of Education (DoE), 1997, as cited in Swart, 2004).

In 1996 the Minister of Education appointed members to serve on two commissions mentioned, namely the NCSNET and NCESS. The task was to conduct research and make recommendations on all aspects of "special needs and support services" in education and training in SA (DoE, 1997). The investigation included all levels of education from early childhood education to adult training and focused on how to address diversity in education and how to prevent and remove barriers to learning.

The report titled, *Quality education for all - Overcoming barriers to learning and development*, was completed in 1997 (DoE, 1997).

This joint commission recommended preferred terminology such as *learners who experience barriers to learning and development* rather than *learners with special needs*, as the latter fails to

describe what is regarded as special, and therefore gives no indication as to the cause of the learning breakdown. The commission regarded barriers to learning as the *factors which lead to the inability of the system to accommodate diversity, that lead to learning breakdown or which prevent learners from accessing educational provision* (DoE, 1997, p. 11). They suggested that the education system should be re-structured to promote equal opportunities for effective learning, accommodate a diversity of learner needs and minimise or eradicate the *barriers to learning*. Barriers to learning can be viewed as the *factors which lead to the inability of the system to accommodate diversity, that lead to learning breakdown or which prevent learners from accessing educational provision* (DoE, 1997, p. 11).

Since the election of the first democratic government in SA in 1994, the emphasis has been on issues of equity and the redress of past imbalances (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2006). The new Constitution embraces values of human dignity, equality and diversity. The new Department of Education committed itself to the provision of educational opportunities for all, especially for those learners who have experienced and are currently experiencing barriers to learning, or have *dropped out of school* due to the inability of the educational system to accommodate their individual needs (Education White Paper 6, 2001, Section 1.1.5). The need for school reform has been identified, focusing on whole-school development as one of the suggested ways to address the development and management of inclusive cultures (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). This is possible through the implementation of inclusive education, which is a practice based approach in a more equitable and just society, with equal opportunities for all (Swart, 2004).

The White Paper 6 advocates a move away from segregation based on disabilities and points out that other factors such as language, poverty, class, health, and race could create barriers to learning (Education White Paper 6, 2001). Barriers to learning and development could be systemic (overcrowded classrooms), societal (severe poverty), rooted in inappropriate pedagogy or inappropriate and unfair assessment procedures or they could emerge from neurological, physical, sensory or cognitive disabilities located in the learner (DoE, 2002). Such barriers to learning could result in learners dropping out of school. This will be discussed further in chapters four and five.

The Draft National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (DNSSIAS) (May 2005), undertook a critical evaluation of how learners are currently identified and assessed for additional support. They state that support should revolve around the teacher, parents and the children, not focus on *deficits* that have been *diagnosed* in learners, but rather be viewed as *all activities which increase the capacity of a school to respond to diversity* (DNSSIAS, 2005, p.23).



Support should therefore focus on the learning and teaching process by firstly identifying, and then addressing the needs of the learner, the educator and the institution (DNSSIAS, 2005). In terms of assessments, it states that, in view of the negative and discriminatory effects of norm-referenced psychometric assessments, group and individual diagnostic assessments will no longer be used to determine learning and support programmes for learners who need additional support (DNSSIAS, 2005; Department of Education, 2005).

School-readiness testing has been banned in certain provinces, as it is viewed as discriminatory and exclusionary and the Draft Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education (2002) states that psychologists should avoid using psychometric tests as it does not contribute to programme planning. It is also not useful in determining external barriers to learning.

#### **2.6.4 Barriers to learning**

It is accepted that barriers to learning could exist within the learner, the school, the education system or the bigger social, economic and political context, and that such barriers to learning could cause learners to drop out of school. In order to understand the impact that the wider systems could have on the individual learners more clearly, it was regarded important to include an explanation of the ecological and bio-ecological theories.

### **2.7 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SCHOOL DROPOUT**

#### **2.7.1 Social context: socio-economic and other environmental influences**

Research indicates that the social-economic environment in which children grow up is an important exosystemic predictor of their overall well-being. It is argued that their health, education, later employment and future earnings largely depend on the socio-economic status of their family (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Garbarino, 1998, as cited in McWhirter et al., 2007, p.31).

In South Africa, poverty is generally viewed as the result of a history of power relationships which have disadvantaged particular groups in the society. It has had widespread effects and has been noted as the cause of various social and interpersonal problems. South Africa's history of discrimination, repression, and neglect of the needs of many, has been blamed for the poor economic realities faced by a considerable section of society. Since the first democratic elections in 1994, the newly elected government committed itself to creating an environment and country that will provide equal opportunities for all and respect diversity and social justice in a democratic country, but this is an ongoing challenge (Donald et al., 2005).



It has been said that poverty and poor educational and social conditions often sustain each other. Poverty can be defined as “deprivation and unmet needs across different aspects of social and economic life, such as education, living environment, health, income, material necessities and employment” (Ratele, 2007, as cited in Visser, p.221). Poverty is hence not only associated with money, but has an impact on the lifestyle, as well as the social, educational and political life of individuals and their communities. Poverty thus influences peoples’ personalities and motivation, and inevitably becomes integrated in all aspects of life. It generally presents in the form of an inability to provide sufficient food for the family, overcrowded living conditions, lack of employment opportunities, low wages, lack of job security, absent fathers and children living away from home (Ratele, 2007, as cited in Visser). It is the risk factor that is most frequently associated with family stress, school failure (Children’s Defense Fund [CDF], as cited in McWhirter et al., 2007), delinquency and other problems (Jarjoura, 2002, as cited in McWhirter, et al., 2007) that are often linked to school dropout.

Due to poor educational and social circumstances, specific barriers to learning, such as disabilities or learning difficulties may not be addressed. This may result in a cycle of further poverty and other negative causes and effects. An example of such an area of concern is the adverse relationship between poverty, malnutrition and cognitive development. Added to this, severe conditions of poverty and daily survival stresses may have an impact on the energy levels of mothers and their children, which in turn could have an effect on the mother-child relationship. Low school performance and specific learning needs that might develop as a result, may not be adequately met in the under-resourced and overcrowded educational and health sectors in South Africa (Donald et al., 2005). Aspects such as these might put learners *at risk* of negative outcomes such as dropping out of school with limited skills, which in turn results in further poverty due to fewer available work options (Donald et al., 2005).

Even though poverty cannot be isolated as a critical cause of learners’ dropping out of school due to the interrelatedness of many factors (Keen, 1992, as cited in Masitsa, 2006), it is regarded as the most significant demographic predictor by some (Le Roux, 1993, as cited in Masitsa, 2006). According to Masitsa (2006), the implications of people living under poverty conditions are often a lack of adequate nutrition and health care, which leads to poor physical condition and low energy levels. In children, this might have a negative impact on their ability to perform at an academic level, lead to repeated failure, and eventually dropping out of school. It may result in parents leaving home to seek employment elsewhere, and leaving the young in the care of the older siblings (Masitsa, 2006). Findings from a study conducted in the Limpopo Province, South

Africa, revealed that many child-headed families were dysfunctional. Adolescents from such child-headed families had too much work and several problems at home, which affected their concentration abilities and school education. Learners tend not to complete educational tasks, and fail their examinations, which invariably led to poor self-esteem (Pillay & Nesengeni, 2006).

Cardoso and Verner (2007) conducted an extensive survey with the aim to identify the most important dropout and push-out factors that lead to leaving school in a particular area in Brazil. They were predominantly interested in evaluating the role of early parenthood, child labour and poverty pushing learners out of school. Findings indicated that early parenthood had a strong influence on learners' decision to leave school early. Living under extreme conditions of poverty emerged as a factor that lowers school attendance, whilst working did not appear to have a detrimental effect on school attendance. As daily transportation was an obstacle in this context, working for some hours could help individuals to fund and complete schooling (Cardoso & Verner, 2007). Cardoso and Verner (2007) pointed out the benefit of early-childhood development programmes and improved nutrition and health, which would support the cognitive development of children in extreme poverty conditions, with positive long-term implications on their schooling.

McWhirter et al. (2007) pointed out that at-risk problems, such as school dropout, drug and alcohol abuse, risky sexual activity and other delinquent behaviours, interact and reinforce each other. Persistent psycho-social stressors, combined with dysfunctional families, negative social interactions and negative individual attitudes and behaviours, can push an individual towards higher levels of risk. Living in such *high-risk communities*, combined with individual characteristics, such as aggression, anxiety and other affective problems, could encourage learners to participate in self-destructive behaviour. According to McWhirter (2007), learners who drop out of school are thus at great risk for drug dependency, delinquency, and other destructive behaviour. They continue to explain that such problems are often intergenerational and often re-occur in communities.

Even though poverty is often experienced as a substantial psychological stressor, some students demonstrate resilience, and manage to attain academic achievements despite difficult life circumstances. Randolph et al. (2006) noted that differences in family practices, such as support for education, may act as protective factors for high school completion in the context of poverty. Dass-Brailsford (2005) explored the factors that contributed to resilience among a group of socio-economically disadvantaged black South African youths. Results showed that the following factors helped students to achieve academic success: individual characteristics, such as

goal orientation, initiative, motivation and self-knowledge about personal agency; family support and role models; and supportive schools and communities. This type of approach therefore focuses on factors that reduce risk and increase coping whilst living in adverse circumstances. This may in turn reduce the likelihood of learners leaving school before completing their studies.

## **2.8 ECOLOGICAL RISK FACTORS FOR SCHOOL DROPOUT**

### **2.8.1 Individual learner characteristics**

Leaving school early appears to be due to the complex interaction or a culmination of variables. According to McWhirter et al. (2007), early experiences may have an impact on a learner's sense of agency and self-concept, which could in turn have a direct influence on school performance, relationships with teachers and peers, and later decisions to stay in school. Even though individual factors are personal, they could be affected by other factors, such as teacher-learner interactions, school rules and interactions with parents (Ou & Reynolds, 2008). Research shows an association between several individual factors and school failure, such as low self-esteem, negative attitudes towards school, and low educational and work aspirations (Ou & Reynolds, 2008). This association was confirmed by findings from the Progress report (2007) that established an association between a lack of motivation (lack of self-determination and feelings of competence) and dropping out of school (Progress report, 2007, p.86). It states that learners with an intrinsic locus of control are more likely to experience academic success than other learners, as they believe that their behaviour is directly responsible for their educational outcomes (Progress, 2007, p.86). Academic aspiration, organisational skill and locus of control were therefore identified as the three most important factors associated with degree attainment (Progress, 2007).

An investigation of the relationship between educational engagement and high school diploma attainment confirmed the above findings, as it showed that school-related factors, such as self-concept and attendance, correlated highly with dropout rates before adolescent learners drop out of school. Results, however, showed that these factors were no longer significant once the learners had left school. After drop-out the three most important factors associated with eventual attainment of a high school diploma were academic aspirations, organisational skills and prevention programmes. Findings from this study further showed that effective engagement in learning, such as good study habits and less time spent watching television during the week will increase the probability of attaining a diploma (Suh & Suh, 2006). Based on the results of this study, Suh and Suh (2006) identified the following factors as important for eventual academic

success: the promotion of self-esteem, the development of good study habits and organisational skills whilst still at school, and an optimistic view about the future (Suh, Suh & Houston, 2007).

Other research that showed an association between several individual characteristics and school dropout, is a study done by Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig & Heinrich (2008). They examined the developmental pathways between high school graduates and learners that dropped out of school. The findings of the study indicated that dropouts performed significantly lower on all course performance grades, as well as on standardised tests that were administered between grades five and nine than those who graduated from high school. They also showed significantly higher levels of grade retention, absenteeism and behaviour problems. Interestingly, it appeared that indications of these differences occurred as early as kindergarten, where their academic performances were lower in reading, writing, spelling, maths and English. This tendency continued in early childhood, with the gap widening between the developmental pathways from early childhood to adolescence, regardless of the subjects. Results of this study raised questions around the reasons why some learners who were on the developmental pathway of dropping out of school managed to graduate, and further research was recommended to examine what experiences may change (Hickman et al., 2008).

Hardre and Reeve (2003) used the self-determination theory to test a motivational model of rural students' intentions to persevere, rather than drop out of high school. The self-determination theory posits that learners engage more easily in school related activities if they are interesting, relevant to their personal lives, and if they confirm their competencies. They argued that students' motivation can either be supported in the classroom by "autonomy-supported teachers or frustrated by controlling teachers" (Hardre & Reeve, 2003, p.347). Results from this study correlated with previous research that poor achievement is a strong predictor of dropout intentions, and that dropout prevention strategies should focus on improving students' successes at an academic level. Additional findings pointed out that a considerable segment of intentions to drop out of school commences from two other resources, namely individual traits, such as self-determined motivation and perceived competence. They recommend that dropout should not only be thought of as an achievement issue, but also as a motivational issue.

### **2.8.2 Academic factors and Behaviour**

Research showed that learners who drop out of school differ from learners that complete schooling in terms of academic performance and behaviours. An investigation done by Ekstrom and colleagues (1986, as cited in McWhirter et al., 2007) showed that the ones that drop out are less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities and tend to achieve lower grades and test results. They also do less homework, have more disciplinary problems, are late more often, get suspended from school more frequently and are often in trouble with the police. They are less involved in extra-mural activities, such as sports or clubs, report feeling alienated from school, and do not feel popular among their peers.

More recently, McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun and Cochrane (2008), explored the relationships between academics and problem behaviour in the transition from middle school to high school. They noted that previous research identified this as a challenging time of development when learners at risk of dropping out of school are faced with several challenges. In addition, problematic behaviour presented as a distinctive barrier to school graduation and learners with emotional and/or behavioural problems appeared to be twice as likely to drop out of school (Lehr et al., 2004; Tobin & Sugai, 1999, as cited in McIntosh et al., 2008). They found that low academic skills often have an impact on social behaviour, but if problem behaviour is present, it nearly always interferes with academic learning (McIntosh et al., 2008). Findings from this study emphasise that academic support and behaviour support go hand in hand to allow learners access to success and academic engagement. It also stressed the importance of early identification of individual learners at risk for dropping out of school, as waiting until high school may be too late to prevent them following a path to dropout. They recommended a systems-level approach to improve academic and behaviour outcomes.

### **2.8.3 Family System**

The progress report to the previous South African, Minister of Education (2007), Mrs. Pandor, identified the following family characteristics as contributing to school dropout: single-parent households, older siblings, family's cultural resources and parent-child conversations about school. They found that learners who drop out tend to have parents who are less involved and demanding, do not model educational attainment, and provide little educational support in general (Progress Report, 2007). This confirmed Masitsa's (2006) findings that the following factors can have a detrimental impact on a child's ability to perform academically: inadequate

parental support, learners not living with their parents, divorced or separated parents, loss of parents or single parent families and family conflicts.

Children taking on adult roles, such as employment due to financial stress, taking care of other family members and families where the overall stress levels are high, are also associated with higher dropout rates (Ou & Reynolds, 2008).

Boon and Cook (2008) found that having a strong emotional parent-child relationship in adolescence promotes motivation, attentiveness and perseverance, and stressed that the absence of such a relationship can hinder psychological development and predispose problem behaviours. Competent care-giving is viewed of utmost importance in the development of resilience, where resilience is conceptualised as achieving academic success despite being disadvantaged socio-economically, whilst demonstrating acceptable and motivational behavioural patterns (Boon & Cook, 2008). They stressed the importance of alternative support such as mentoring teachers in the case where parents or care-givers are unable to provide and maintain required care to learners.

Terry (2003) also found that families and friends have considerable influence on high school learners' decisions to leave school before graduating. Findings suggested that, in order to address the problem, schools should make an effort to actively welcome and make learners' families and out-of-school friends more at ease with the school settings. In addition, it was recommended that parents and guardians receive guidance and training on *how* to provide academic support to their children in educational settings (Terry, 2003).

#### **2.8.4 Peer-Group System**

Peer groups represent the world outside the family, and can present difficulties for the individual if its members value antisocial behaviour. Under such circumstances the young person either has to resist engaging in such behaviour (which may result in compromising the social relationship), or give in to the peer group pressure (McWhirter et al., 2007). Peer pressure involves the strong influence that a group has on an individual. Such individuals usually have limited ability to resist such pressure (McWhirter et al., 2007). Peer cluster theory (Beauvais et al., 1996; Oetting & Beauvais, 1986, as cited in McWhirter et al., 2007) suggests that young people who engage in problem behaviour have a propensity to find each other and form peer cluster groups. Such groups then normalise and encourage antisocial and problem behaviours, and are an important influence on their behaviour (McWhirter et al., 2007).

Staff and Kreager (2008) found that peer status in adolescence is associated with achievement and adjustment at school level. They considered sub-culture theories of juvenile delinquency that suggested that disadvantaged boys are likely to gain some form of peer status through violence, and that such membership in violent groups undermines educational achievement. They argued that it could be the rewards of peer acceptance that keep popular adolescents at school, rather than good grades, high expectations and praise from teachers. However, findings from this study also suggested that disadvantaged boys, who are popular in violent groups, are much more prone to dropping out of school when compared with other youths. Involvement with such groups reportedly provides an additional factor that pulls young males away from school. Results showed a negative association between peer acceptance and school dropout, and that acceptance into a violent group compromises educational attainment with disadvantaged boys (Staff & Kreager, 2008).

Townsend, Flisher, Chikobvu, Lombard and King (2008) examined the relationship between physical and psychological bullying behaviours and *high school dropout* in Cape Town, South Africa. Findings indicated that girls who were both bullies and victims were at a greater risk of dropping out of school. Continued participation in bullying, meant continued exposure to the negative effects thereof, such as absenteeism, poor academic performance and psychological distress on a continuous basis. Results of this study showed a possibility that an accumulation of these unfavourable effects can result in learners leaving school before completing their studies. However, findings suggest that this relationship may be mediated by the consequences of the bullying (Townsend et al., 2008).

### **2.8.5 School System**

A number of school factors have been associated with school dropout, such as poor education quality in the form of overcrowded classrooms, poorly trained teachers, teacher-learner ratio, and lack of learning materials (UNESCO, 2007; Masitsa, 2004). According to Ou and Reynolds (2008), such school-related factors were not assessed in detail before the 1980s.

Knesting (2008) identified four emerging factors that were influential in supporting students in completing their education within the school context. These were: listening actively to students, communicating a caring school environment and the school and the students' role in prevention of dropout. Results emphasised that school personnel needed to engage actively with learners who are struggling to stay in school in order to explore their experiences: why they want to leave, and what would make them stay. The manner of learner-teacher communication was



noted as important, as learners responded more positively to relationships based on acceptance, respect, support and high expectations. Learners also needed to be made aware of the purpose and benefits of graduating (Knesting, 2008).

Marks (2007) investigated the importance of schools on school leaving in the Australian context. He pointed out that, in the event of schools having important effects on school leaving, school-focussed policies could be adapted and implemented to increase resources and reduce inequities. Mark's (2007) study emphasises the importance of prior academic performance of students, and confirmed expectations that academically weak students are more likely to drop out of school. Findings indicated that schools do not have a strong independent influence on school leaving, especially when taking into account the corresponding individual student characteristics. Based on these findings, Mark (2007) questioned whether staying in school would necessarily be beneficial to low achievers, and argued that resources may be more appropriately spent on after school education and training once the individuals are employed. This is a debatable issue and warrants further exploration.

Research shows that the efficacy of early grade retention (keeping learners back a grade) has been a contentious issue. Some researchers have identified grade retention as *the most powerful predictor of drop out status* (Jimerson, Anderson & Whipple, [2002], as cited in the Progress report, 2007, p.72), whilst other studies have argued that grade repetition in the early primary years help learners to perform better in the later years of their schooling (Alexander, Entwistle & Dauber, 2003, as cited in the Progress report, 2007). Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) conducted a longitudinal study of grade retention in order to examine the academic and behavioural outcomes of retained learners through adolescence. They found that retained learners are more likely to drop out of school and show aggression during adolescence. It therefore failed to illustrate that grade retention has any benefits for academic achievement. They recommend a move away from grade retention and social promotion towards interventions that focus on individual strengths and needs. They reiterated that specific interventions are essential to promote the academic success of learners. Results from research done by the Ministerial Committee on learner retention in the South African schooling system concurred with this, as they found grade retention as generally ineffective as an intervention strategy when addressing early learning problems. They recommended that learners who are repeating grades should have specially designed educational programmes, which are not simply a repetition of the content material that they experienced that first time. They therefore regard the solution to grade repetition in providing such learners with better opportunities to succeed academically (Progress report, 2007).



A later study by Ou and Reynolds (2008) also identified grade retention in the elementary grades as one of four predictors linked to significantly lower levels of school performance. They argued that grade retention could have a negative effect on self-esteem, and be the beginning of school experiences and adult expectations that could lead to an increased risk of learners dropping out of school. The other three factors that emerged as predictors of low levels of educational attainment were school absences, frequent school mobility up to eighth grade, and juvenile arrests. The latter appeared to have the largest impact on educational attainment. Ou and Reynolds (2008) found, on the other hand, that learners' expectations of educational attainment and attendance in selective high schools were associated with higher levels of educational attainment. A possible explanation could be that such schools have a greater concentration of learners that value education and with bigger aspirations. Their findings revealed that the type of high school and frequent mobility are more predictive of educational attainment than demographic factors and parental education (Ou & Reynolds, 2008).

Chen (2008) acknowledged the value of successful completion of high school. He investigated the possibility that more effective career guidance and career education strategies could help students at risk of dropping out of school to continue and complete their schooling. This would, in turn, facilitate their transitions into worklife or higher education more successfully. Legum and Hoare (2004, as cited in Chen, 2008) pointed out that at-risk students seldom see a direct connection between their education and its relevance to their future. This makes it easier for them to drop out of school, which limits their career options. Chen (2008) suggested that students need to learn to rectify career myths that limit and reduce the number of career possibilities, and that they should be helped to realise that their schoolwork *here-and-now* is important for further career opportunities in the world of work. He recommended that self-defeating thinking patterns and associated negative beliefs, such as low self-esteem and learned hopelessness towards schoolwork should be identified, and that counsellors should support students in dismissing such faulty beliefs thereby strengthening students' self-concepts. In addition, he recommended several skill enhancement strategies to address areas, such as assertion training, reading study materials, ways to increase academic performance, ways to obtain financial assistance, and so forth. The value of career education and guidance was reiterated, where students can articulate what the obstacles in their lives have been in a positive and supportive environment, as this may create an increased interest and motivation in their own learning and future.

The results of a study by Suh, Suh and Houston (2007) indicated that there was a high possibility of dropping out of school where learners had a low grade average in conjunction with high absenteeism and a pessimistic outlook on life. They suggested that learners would benefit from career counselling before the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, with focus on their level of aspiration and self-belief as people who can achieve. In addition, they recommended that comprehensive intervention strategies need to be generated to support learners who are likely to experience relationship problems at school. These strategies should aim to teach communication and conflict resolution skills.

Underachievement is often viewed as a reason for learners to drop out of school. Masitsa (2004) identified the media of instruction, overcrowding, truancy and a shortage of books and other resources as major determinants of underachievement at school in the South African context. He expressed concern that at the time of his study, such inadequacies had not been addressed by the government of the time. Masitsa (2004) pointed out that, despite the fact that more secondary schools were built after the shift in government policy in South Africa, they could not keep up with the growing numbers of learners, and that the backlog increased. This led to overcrowded classrooms and a high learner/teacher ratio in many areas of South Africa.

### **2.8.6 Substance Use**

The use and abuse of substances such as alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other illicit drugs during adolescence may impede the acquisition of skills required for adequate performance of adult roles later on in life. *Drug use* refers to the ingestion of a drug, regardless of the amount or the effect, and *drug abuse* can be defined as the *ingestion of a drug to the extent that it impairs the user's biological or psychological well-being* (Berger, 2005, p.355).

As substance abuse was reportedly highly prevalent in the community where this study was conducted, it was decided to explore the risk and protective factors related thereto as well as its relationship to school dropout in more detail.

The age of onset and the severity of substance use amongst adolescents are influenced by several risk and protective factors. Examples of psycho-social risk factors are parent modelling of substance use, family conflict, a lack of parental supervision, peer relationships and stressful life events that may have an impact on the individual (Sadock & Sadock, 2007, p.1295). Protective factors that may prevent substance use among adolescents are stable family and home circumstances, strong parent-child relationships, consistent parental supervision in terms of academics and peers that regard positive family and school relations as important (Sadock &

Sadock, 2007). Other risk factors that could influence the use of substances are: parental belief that substances are harmless, lack of parental involvement in children's activities, lack of closeness between parents and children, maternal passivity, academic difficulties, parental and peer substance use, early onset of cigarette smoking and lack of anger control in families (Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

Much research has focussed on tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use and abuse. These are also known as gateway drugs, as their use often increases the risk that an individual will later use harder drugs, such as cocaine and heroin (Berger, 2005). The nicotine in cigarettes is very addictive and smoking at an early age can reduce fertility and increase the risk of cancer and heart disease. Drinking alcohol is more harmful to adolescents than to adults, as it impairs judgment and inhibitions, impairs memory and self-control and could result in compromised cognitive function, especially related to attention (Berger, 2005; Sadock & Sadock, 2007). The use of marijuana slows down thinking processes especially the ones related to memory and abstract reasoning (Berger, 2005). Other short-term effects are loss of coordination, increased heart rate, anxiety, and panic attacks. Repeated marijuana use may lead to a general lack of motivation and lack of interest in the future, which may have an impact on academic performance and the desire to stay in school. Rapid termination of marijuana use by adolescents can result in several withdrawal symptoms, such as drug-craving depression, anxiety, irritability, and others (Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

Several studies have explored the relationship between high school dropout and the use of substances, such as alcohol, tobacco and other illicit drugs. Green and Ensminger (2006) examined the effects of heavy adolescent marijuana use on employment, marriage, and family configuration among African Americans. They predicted a range of difficulties as a result of such use, such as dropping out of school, and later on, unemployment, parenting outside of marriage, being unmarried and continued marijuana use into their 30s. Dropping out of school and continued marijuana use during adulthood seemed to be additional consequences of heavy adolescent marijuana use (Green & Ensminger, 2006). The conclusion of this study indicated that adolescent substance abuse prevention programmes may increase the likelihood of high school graduation, reduce the probability of adult drug use, and make the transition to adult roles easier (Green & Ensminger, 2006).

Townsend, Flisher and King (2007) conducted a systematic review of 46 peer-reviewed literature articles to establish whether existing research could provide a better understanding of the relationship between *high school dropout* and use of substances, such as alcohol, tobacco and

other illicit drugs. The main findings of this review showed a consistent relationship between high school dropout and substance use. Results from several cross-sectional studies indicated a positive association between school dropout and alcohol use (Aloise-Young & Chavez, 2002; Arellano et al., 1998; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Flisher & Charlton, 1995; Wichstrom, 1998; Zimmerman & Maton, 1992, as cited in Townsend et al., 2007). Conversely, an investigation to establish whether young adults, who dropped out of school, were at a greater risk of developing an alcohol disorder later, showed a significant association between school dropout and increased risk of later alcohol abuse (Crum et al., 1998, as cited in Townsend et al., 2007).

Cross-sectional studies exploring the relationship between school dropout and tobacco use indicated that students who dropped out of school were more likely to report on their cigarette smoking than students who were at school (Flisher & Charlton, 1995; Wang et al., 1998; Zimmerman & Maton, 1992, as cited in Townsend et al., 2007) or students who have completed high school (Gfroerer et al., 1997, as cited in Townsend et al., 2007). In-school learners who were identified as at risk of dropping out, were also more likely to smoke cigarettes than others (Eggert & Herting, 1993, as cited in Townsend et al., 2007). Fine (1991, as cited in Townsend et al., 2007, p.313), pointed out that negative stereotypes need to be addressed, as dropouts are often unfairly blamed for their situation and viewed as *depressed, helpless, without options and losers*.

### **2.8.7 Teenage pregnancy**

Research has found that teenage pregnancy is related to leaving school early. Data from the United States showed an association between factors relevant to adolescents' school experiences, and the risk of school-age pregnancy and birth among 8<sup>th</sup> graders (Manlove, 1998). Results showed that high levels of engagement at school level were associated with postponement of pregnancy, and that learners who dropped out of school were more likely to have school-age pregnancies.

Early pregnancy appears to be a problem especially in developing countries. Results from a study conducted by Pillay and Nesengani (2006) confirmed the increase in teenage pregnancies amongst rural black adolescents in South Africa. Results showed that some female learners from child-headed families often resort to conceding sexual favours to men for financial gain or safety issues. Grant and Hallman (2006) examined the likelihood of school dropout and subsequent enrolment among pregnant schoolgirls in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. They found that young

learners who were committed to their school and education, and experienced a sense of belonging were less likely to become pregnant while attending school.

South African research conducted for The Progress Report (2007) found that young women who are more engaged in their education and do become pregnant, are less likely to leave school as a result. A significant number of pregnant schoolgirls either remained in school or re-enrolled after their child was born. School engagement therefore emerged as an important factor, as disengagement has been associated with the perception that school completion does not offer any benefits.

## **2.9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The aim of this chapter was to provide a comprehensive overview of the concepts, contexts, theories, implications and literature relevant to this study that is an exploration of the school dropout phenomenon. The concept of adolescence and the developmental challenges linked to this phase of development were discussed. Reference to social constructivism helped to explain how adolescents create knowledge and make sense of their environments, and the discussion of the ecological framework demonstrated how individual learners, families, peer and school risk factors, as well as the interaction among such factors can increase the risk of school dropout. Attention was given to the impact of environmental influences as well as the consequences of school dropout. This included an overview of the development of inclusive education in South Africa. Finally, an overview of the research was included, with reference to the ecological risk factors for school dropout. It became clear that school dropout is both an individual and social problem that has several negative personal and societal consequences. The ecological systems models of human development acknowledge the impact of social contexts on development, and provide a useful theoretical framework when considering prevention and intervention strategies. With this in mind, the decision was to explore the dropout phenomenon in the particular school of interest as a systemic problem, as a thorough understanding of it would be beneficial for the suggestion of intervention strategies.

The next chapter includes a discussion of how a predominantly qualitative approach to investigate the perceived experiences of the eight participants and the one focus group from the specific school was applied. The different techniques used to gather and produce the data are also described. Finally, a discussion on how the ethical requirements of research were met is included.

## **2.10 FURTHER RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES**

Materialising from this literature review is that very few South African studies have been conducted to explore the school dropout phenomenon. It also became evident that very few qualitative studies had been done. It was therefore decided to do an exploratory study to investigate this phenomenon in a particular school to gain a more in-depth understanding of the issue.

Townsend et al. (2007) pointed out that most of the articles that they reviewed made use of surveys or other quantitative statistical research methods. They advocated a qualitative approach which would allow for the exploration of the complex interdependent factors that cause young learners to leave school early as experienced by the learners themselves.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this study is to explore the dropout phenomenon in a specific secondary school in a high-risk community. This chapter examines the research design that specifies how the research is going to be conducted, and the methodology adopted for the study.

Durrheim (1999) described a research design as the strategic framework or plan of action that serves as the connection between research questions and the implementation of the research. It guides the conditions for the data collection and analysis, and enables the researcher to draw conceivable and valid conclusions from systematic research observations. Methodology refers to the methods, techniques and procedures that are employed in the process of implementing the study. The type of measurement, sampling, and methods of data-collection and analysis are therefore determined by the research design and the research problem (Babbie and Mouton, 2001).

According to Durrheim (1999), the development of a research design requires clarity about the purpose of the research, the theoretical paradigm underpinning the research, the context within which the research is conducted, and the research techniques used for the collection and the analysis of the data.

This chapter commences with a clarification of the research question and the research aim. Thereafter, the supporting research design, the context, and the methodology adopted for this study are examined. Finally, the issues of researcher bias, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations are addressed.

#### **3.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH AIM**

The goal of this study is to gain a contextual understanding of the reasons for learners dropping out of school during the post-compulsory school phase in a high-risk community, and to compare the perceptions of learners and teachers and other stakeholders regarding this phenomenon. It

aims to explore reasons for the high prevalence of high school dropout rates in the particular context. The findings of this study could make it possible to formulate some suggestions of how to address the problem from an Educational Psychology and Educational Department's perspective.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

5. What is the dropout phenomenon?
6. What do adolescent learners regard as the reasons for high school learners dropping out of school within a certain context?
7. What are the perceptions of teachers and other interested stakeholders in this context regarding this phenomenon?
8. What can be done to address this issue?

### **3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), a research design is a blueprint of how the researcher proposes to conduct the research. It is therefore a plan that describes how the researcher intends to structure the research problem and how he/she focuses on the type of study selected, as well as on desired results (Mouton, 2004).

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, it involves a series of decisions about how the research questions can best be answered by the investigation. The researcher has to decide whether the study is exploratory, descriptive or explanatory; applied or basic; and whether it is a quantitative, qualitative or participatory action research (Durrheim, 2006). The decision was to do a qualitative, exploratory study as it was regarded as the most appropriate design to explore the dropout phenomenon in the particular school and community.

#### **3.3.1 Purpose of the Research**

Babbie and Mouton (2001) identified three of the most useful purposes of social research as explanation, description and exploration. The most important aim of explanatory studies is to indicate causal relationships between two variables. Descriptive research, on the other hand, is used to describe situations and events either through narrative descriptions or classifications or by measuring relationships (Kaniki, 2006). It would therefore be effective for conceptual and



historical analysis, and may range from a narrative to a highly structured statistical analysis, such as correlational studies (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p.79). Exploratory studies are designed as open and flexible investigations that can be helpful to apply in relatively new or unknown areas (Kaniki, 2006).

The aim of this study was to *explore* the participants' perceived circumstances and possible reasons for discontinuing their schooling. The design was therefore open, flexible and inductive in nature. This provided the participants with an opportunity to talk openly about their feelings and thoughts about their lives, for example, what they like; what they would change; what affect their current circumstances had on their lives (at school and at home), which areas of their lives they find the most difficult to deal with; how they would like to be treated at school, and more.

### **3.3.2 Applied versus Basic Research**

The distinction between applied and basic research refers to the uses to which the research will be put. The same phenomena can be studied by both types of researchers, but they would approach the study from different perspectives. Basic research is used to increase fundamental knowledge of the world, and aims to create general theories about the social world. Applied research has as its aim a practical application. It would therefore aim to contribute to community development, problem solving issues, decision making and social action (Durrheim, 2006).

In order to explore the research questions of this study, an applied, interpretive qualitative research design was selected. One of the research questions focussed on suggestions of how the issue of high school dropout can be addressed. The findings of the study could therefore also have a practical application as it may contribute towards improvements to the particular school environment or it may provide guidance for future adjustments.

### **3.3.3 Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research encompasses several forms of inquiry that help to explain the meaning of social phenomena within naturally occurring settings, such as homes or schools (Merriam, 1998; Willig, 2001). Qualitative researchers regard the social context as important for understanding the social world, and believe that the meaning of a social action depends on the context in which it appears (Neuman, 1994). According to Neuman (1994) this implies that the same events can have different meanings depending on the context, such as the culture or historical era, or the person involved.

Qualitative researchers are therefore concerned with meaning. According to Willig (2001) they are interested in how people experience and make sense of their worlds and in the meanings attributed to events by the participants themselves. They would attempt to understand the *quality of experiences* rather than the *identification of cause-effect relationships*, with the objective being to explain events. The qualitative researcher's focus is therefore on studying human action in its natural setting from the perspective of the participants and not the researcher, with emphasis on understanding the phenomena studied within the appropriate context (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Merriam, 1998). This type of research mainly uses an inductive research strategy, which means that it builds concepts, hypotheses, abstractions, or theories inductively, rather than testing existing theories (Merriam, 1998; 2002).

A qualitative research design was selected for this study, as the purpose of the research was to learn from the learners and teachers in their natural school and community settings, focusing on subjective knowledge. This design was most suitable as the aim was to explore the meanings that they attribute to their experiences and to create an understanding of the dropout phenomenon from a contextual perspective.

### **3.3.4 Phenomenology**

This study could also be described as a phenomenological research study, as the purpose was to understand how the selected participants experienced the dropout phenomenon from their own perspectives (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The goal was therefore an attempt to enter the inner world of these participants by creating a trusting relationship through the use of semi-structured interviews and to create an understanding of their experiences and perspectives. This made it possible to explore what it is like to come to school despite difficulties at home and school, to learn more about their home circumstances and their dreams for the future.

### **3.3.5 Research paradigms**

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) define a paradigm as a form of background knowledge that tells us what exists, how to understand it, and how to study it. Paradigms refer to systems of interconnected practices and thinking that describe the nature of the enquiry for the researcher along three dimensions, namely the nature of reality that is to be studied (ontology), the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known (epistemology), and how the researcher goes about practically studying what he/she believes can be known (methodology) (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Selecting an appropriate theoretical paradigm is therefore essential when planning a research study, as it influences the research problem and the manner in

which the research can be conducted (Durrheim, 2006). Paradigms act as perspectives that provide the basis for the research and commit the researcher to particular methods of data collection, observation and interpretation.

This study used the interpretive paradigm as framework, as the researcher was interested in the participants' subjective experiences of their external world; in other words, to develop an understanding of the meaning that the learners at risk of dropping out of school had constructed for themselves of their world.

The interpretive approach aims to explain the subjective meanings and reasons that lie behind social action. The interpretivist epistemology argues that the reality that needs to be studied consists of people's subjective experiences of the world (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). They believe that human beings are engaged in the process of making sense of their world and that they continuously interpret, define, justify and give meaning to what is happening around them (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The interpretivist believes that people are continuously constructing, developing and changing their everyday interpretations of their worlds. Research conducted within this paradigm views reality as subjective, and as constructed by the individuals involved (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Knowledge is gained from an inductive, hypothesis- or theory-generating manner of inquiry and the process relies on interacting methodologies, such as interviews and participant observations (Merriam, 2002).

### **3.3.6 Context of the study**

Neuman (1994) emphasises the importance of the social context for the understanding of the social world in qualitative research. This implies that the meaning of a social event or happening depends on the context in which it happens. He continues to explain that if the context is ignored, the social meaning and significance can become distorted. Qualitative researchers argue that one can only truly understand events if they are viewed against the background of the whole context. As this is a qualitative study, it is crucial to identify the context clearly.

The community selected for this study is situated on the outskirts of Stellenbosch in the Western Cape and its circumstances are the result of the Apartheid eras policy of separate development. It is a predominantly coloured community that started out as squatters on the mountain area after 1945. It is divided into different sub-residential areas. Sub-economic and economic housing schemes, as well as flats, were built later on. These sub-economic schemes created opportunities for gang activities, although these have reportedly decreased over the last couple of years (Community profile – Kindersorg Suid Afrika, 2009). This information was confirmed during

the interview with a member of the community when she explained that there was a housing shortage in the area, and that several families who had children at the school of study lived in prefabricated housing in the backyards of others (July 6, 2009, (R3)).

It was identified as a *high-risk* community due to high levels of gang activities, shebeens [liquor bar in an informal settlement], challenging living conditions, poverty, high school dropout figures, alcohol and drug abuse and poor police control. As indicated in section 1.9.4, children living in high-risk communities are exposed to several psychological stressors on a regular basis, such as dysfunctional families, poor schools, negative social interactions and substance abuse (McWhirter et al., 2007).

Some areas in the community are situated at the river's edge, which can cause health problems. The location of the station and industrial area also poses danger for children and general hygiene. In addition, the area has a very large population for a relatively small area, which results in overcrowded houses, full schools, lack of jobs and social problems, such as the breakdown of traditional families (Community profile – Kindersorg Suid-Afrika, 2009).

Many are poor, and depend on pensions to pay rent, water and electricity. A lack of educational opportunities appears to result in lack of goals, a low economic status, sharing of houses and a lower status and morale (Community profile - Kindersorg Suid-Afrika, 2009).

Religion is multi-denominational, and seems to be a binding factor amongst residents. Most families are extended and tend to take responsibility for each other. Formal networks, such as doctors, dentists, a day hospital, ambulance services and the police exist and are functional, and there are a primary and a secondary school in the area (Community profile - Kindersorg Suid-Afrika, 2009).

This community and school were selected after confirmation from the acting headmaster of the current high school (March 12, 2009) that half of learners enrolled in grade 8 drop out of high school before completing grade 12. It was therefore evident that many learners in this area were *at risk* of dropping out of school during the post-compulsory phase of their schooling.

### **3.3.6.1 School setting**

The acting headmaster (March 12, 2009) described the school setting as follows: There were 1290 children and 44 teachers at the school. All the teachers were qualified. Forty-one of these posts were permanent and three were governing body posts. The classes were fairly big and consisted of forty to forty-seven learners. He expressed concern about the number of children

that dropped out of school and explained that only 50% of the 320 children enrolled in grade 8 reached grade 12. This implied that 50% of learners had dropped out of the particular school over a five-year period. Unfortunately, no official statistics were available for the period between grade 10 and grade 12. (See Appendix H for the number of students in different subjects). The pass rate in the matriculation year, 2007, was 86%, and 73% of grade 12s passed successfully in 2008. The drop in pass rate was reportedly due to the increase in the Departmental requirements for Afrikaans, which raised the required pass mark from 33% to 40%. According to the acting head, possible reasons for the high dropout numbers could be personal difficulties due to socio-economic circumstances, such as single parenting, lack of discipline at home, substance abuse and poverty. Several children at the school worked during weekends to earn extra money. He explained that many of the learners' parents were former scholars of the school, which might mean that they have a more positive attitude towards the value of education. The school reportedly never refused entry to any children. The community worker agreed with these possible reasons for high school dropout in this specific school as stated above (March 6, 2009). She reiterated that many of the learners live in overcrowded living conditions, which, in her opinion, added pressure to the lives of the learners.

### **3.4 METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology refers to the research process and the group of methods, tools and procedures that are used to deliver data and findings that will reflect the research question (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Qualitative research methods allow the researcher to investigate selected issues in depth. Qualitative researchers collect data in the form of written and spoken language, observations are recorded in language. They also collect personal documents and analyse such data by identifying and categorising themes. In qualitative research, the emphasis is therefore on inductive analytical strategies (Durrheim, 2006; Babbie & Mouton, 2001) in order to remain open to interpretations and to allow the problem to emerge from the data.

The specific research methods of data collection used in this study were primarily individual semi-structured interviews, a focus-group interview, literature reviews and personal collages. Eight individual semi-structured interviews of approximately 90 minutes each were conducted. At the end of the interviews, participants were asked to make a collage of their ideal world where no barriers that could prevent them from reaching their dreams in life existed. These interviews took place during the month of March 2009 and all were recorded and transcribed. The collages were completed directly after the individual interviews. In addition, one focus-group was facilitated during April 2009. As this study used the eco-systemic systems theory as theoretical

framework, it was decided to conduct an additional semi-structured interview with a community worker, in order to gain a better understanding of the social context. This interview took place on 6 July 2009 on the school premises, and was also recorded and transcribed.

### **3.4.1 Case Study design**

This study is an example of an instrumental case study as it is an examination of a particular case (a particular school, which can be viewed as a bounded system with clear boundaries), in order to create a better understanding of the dropout phenomenon during the post-compulsory school phase.

Yin (1994, as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 27), defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. Merriam (1998, p.21) describes a case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit”. It focuses on the holistic description and explanation of phenomena within a bounded context. The unit of study can be an individual person, a family, a treatment team, or a community (Cooper, 1990; Kivnick, 1988; Davis and Reid, 1988; Gilgun, 1988; Eckert, 1980, as cited in Babbie & Mouton, 2001), or as in the case of this study, a particular school.

According to Punch (1998), the four main characteristics of a case study are the following: it is a bounded system with identification of margins (even if not clearly evident); it's a case of *something*; there is a clear attempt to preserve unity and, finally, multiple sources of data collection methods are likely to be used typically in a natural setting. The case study method of research has the advantage of allowing new ideas and hypotheses to emerge from careful and detailed observation. Case studies also have limitations: there may be problems with the validity of information; causal links are often difficult to test; and the lack of generalisation has been a major criticism (Punch, 1998).

Stake (1994, as cited in Punch, 1998), distinguishes between three main types of case studies, namely the intrinsic case study that allows for a better understanding of the particular case; the instrumental case study, where the examination of a particular case provides insight into an issue or helps to refine a theory; and the collective case study, which involves multiple cases in order to learn more about a phenomenon, a population or a general condition. This study is an example of an instrumental case study, as was mentioned at the beginning of this section.

### **3.4.2 Participants**

The sampling procedure used for this study is known as purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, gain insight and an understanding of a phenomenon, situation or issue. It involves locating individuals with specific characteristics as specified by the researcher (Johnson and Christensen, 2008). The participants selected should be *information-rich*, and the ones from which the most can be learned about the most important issues related to the purpose of the research (Patton, 1990, as cited in Merriam, 1998; Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). The main motivation should be to gain as much knowledge as possible about the topic, which will allow for an in-depth study.

The main participants for this study were selected with a specific purpose in mind. They had to fit the criteria of *desirable participants* (Henning et al., 2004, p. 71), which meant that they had to be learners in the post-compulsory phase of their education, current learners at the selected school in the Stellenbosch district, and regarded as *at risk* of leaving school before completing grade 12. The particular school was selected after it became apparent during the researcher's practical training that many learners leave this school between grades 10 and 12 before matriculating. This was a major cause of concern for the acting headmaster of the time. He thus granted permission for this research to take place in order to gain a better understanding of the reasons why some learners leave school before completing their programmes of study.

The focus group consisted of the acting headmaster (who also taught at the school) and the school counsellor. An additional interview was conducted with a member of the community in order to gain a better understanding of the social context and possible reasons for learner dropout. They were the perceptions of someone of the wider community. See sections 3.4.3.3 and 3.4.3.4.

#### **3.4.2.1 Selection of Participants**

For the purposes of the study, eight learners were identified as *at risk* of dropping out of school in conjunction with the school counsellor and the acting headmaster. The following criteria were used: low grade performance; being older than the median age or grade repetition; behavioural problems, such as aggression and disrespect, and poor school attendance. The participants were between 15 and 18 years old and as gender was not part of the selection criteria, three girls and five boys were interviewed. All the participants were from the coloured culture. An additional interview was conducted with a community worker who was recommended by the Child Care Unit in the area. These participants will be introduced in more detail in Chapter Four.



### **3.4.2.2 Procedure**

The eight learners who were identified as potential participants were initially approached by the school counsellor. Thereafter, the actual research was discussed with them and they were requested to participate. Once they had agreed to be interviewed the process started.

The interviews were conducted in a setting that was familiar to the participants. Given that all the participants were learners from the specific school, a private room on the school premises was made available by the school counsellor.

The interviews were conducted in Afrikaans, since all of the participants had Afrikaans as their first language. Interviewees signed a consent form (see Appendix D), which ensured confidentiality through anonymity. They had the option to withdraw from the process when they felt uncomfortable at any stage. All of the participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms in this study to ensure that they will not be identifiable by others.

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix E). At the end of the interview, participants were asked to construct a collage with the aim to end the interview with a solution-focussed result.

Interviewees were thanked for their participation and finally, the participants were informed that they would be notified when the final results of the study would be available.

The interview with the community worker was arranged telephonically, and conducted on the school premises near the end of the research process. The interview was conducted in Afrikaans as it was her home language. In order to ensure anonymity, she will be referred to as R3 in this study.

### **3.4.3 Data Collection**

#### **3.4.3.1 Literature Review**

Merriam (1998), states that the theoretical or conceptual framework indicates where the theory fits in a study. It is therefore the structure or the frame of the study and refers to the body of literature and the disciplinary orientation that the researcher draws upon. According to Merriam (1998; 2002), this framework clarifies what is known about the topic, what aspects of the topic the researcher is going to focus on, the gaps in knowledge, the importance of knowing it, and the exact purpose of the study.



Reviewing the relevant literature is one way of establishing the theoretical framework of a qualitative study. A literature review shows how a research project fits into a particular field and is based on the assumption that knowledge accumulates and that we learn from what others have done (Kaniki, 2006; Neuman, 2002). It involves the identification of relevant resources of information and related literature, and includes an initial assessment of such resources (Kaniki, 2006). Neuman (1994, p.80) identifies the following four goals of a literature review: *to demonstrate a familiarity with a body of knowledge and establish credibility; to show how the current research is linked to prior research; to integrate and summarize what is known in the area of research; to learn from others and find stimulation for new ideas*. A review should therefore describe, summarise, evaluate and clarify the literature and provide a theoretical basis for the research.

In order to orientate this exploration of the dropout phenomenon in a particular school in a high-risk community in the Stellenbosch area, the researcher deemed a discussion of the social systems approach necessary. This approach acknowledges the interrelationships of the individual with other multiple systems, such as the school, the family, the local community and the extended environment and was discussed in detail in section 2.5. Adolescent development and its impact on school dropout were discussed as all the participants were in this stage of their development. In addition, the study was placed within the context of past and present research in this field.

### **3.4.3.2 Triangulation**

This study made use of multiple methods to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. This method, also known as triangulation, involves sourcing of data in different ways to increase the validity and reliability in qualitative research (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Henning et al., 2004; Johnson and Christensen, 2008). This study made use of semi-structured interviews, a focus-group with the headmaster and school counsellor, and personal collages to help create an understanding of the dropout phenomenon from three different vantage points.

### **3.4.3.3 Individual Semi-structure interviews**

Interviewing is probably the most commonly used form of data collection in interpretive and constructionist research (Kelly, 2006). Kahn and Cannell (1957, as cited in Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 108), describes interviewing as *a conversation with a purpose*. It is a useful way to gather large amounts of information fast, and involves a face-to-face encounter in which one person elicits a special kind of information from another.

Interpretive approaches use interviewing as a tool in an attempt to establish how people experience events by creating an environment of openness and trust. It is a useful way to assess people's perceptions and the constructions of their realities. Constructionists believe that meanings are co-constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee, and that these meanings are a result of a larger social system (Kelly, 2006). Qualitative researchers therefore use interviews to explore general topics to help uncover the participant's views, whilst allowing him/her the freedom to structure his/her own responses. This involves that the participant's view of the phenomenon of interest should be allowed to unfold from his/her perspective, and not from the perspective of the researcher. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999) it is essential that the researcher conveys the attitude that the responses are valuable and useful, and that researchers are respectful, non-judgemental and non-threatening.

The limitations of interviewing lie in the fact that it relies on interaction – cooperation and truthfulness are therefore essential. Interviewing skills, such as good listening skills, carefully formulated questions and gentle probing are important. Merriam (2002) emphasises the importance of using a familiar language. In addition, data analysis is time-consuming and as it is the subjective view that matters, triangulation with other methods is recommended to ensure the quality of the data (Marshall & Rossman (1999). Triangulation will be discussed in more detail at a later stage in this chapter.

This study made use of semi-structured interviews. An advantage of this type of data gathering is that it allows the participants to speak for themselves and to share their subjective experiences at school and at home in an interactive manner. Another advantage of semi-structured interviewing is that the interviewer has the opportunity to follow up on ideas, and investigate motives and feelings as well as probe for responses. The conversational quality of these interviews makes it easier to establish a relationship of trust between the researcher and the interviewee, which is an essential element in the research process (Merriam, 2002; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). This was particularly evident during the data gathering process of this study. Some of the learners were initially reluctant to share their experiences and would only do so after rapport and a relationship of trust was established. Only then were they prepared to share their real thoughts and feelings about their circumstances at school and in their community more spontaneously. The community worker spoke openly about the home circumstances and the social context of the people living in the community.

These informal conversations were guided by the research questions and use was made of an interview guide that included a list of specific as well as more open-ended questions. Parts of

the interviews were therefore structured with a set of questions asked consecutively, whilst other parts of the interviews were unstructured and designed to explore the views of the participants in detail.

The interview guide for the eight individual interviewees who were the main informants in this study, was compiled and translated into Afrikaans (the learners' first language) by the researcher. The interview questions covered themes relating to the participants' home and school experiences and environment. Interviews started with a clarification of the demographics of each participant. This was followed by an exploration of the family and home environment. Participants were asked to describe their family and home circumstances, circle of friends, what they like to do together, frequency of absenteeism and their feelings about substance abuse, as this appeared to be prevalent in the community. This was followed by an exploration of their experiences of their school environment, such as the facilities, relationships with teachers, what they like and do not like, support and absenteeism. Participants were thus invited to share their experiences at home and at school, as well as in the community. The conversational nature of these semi-structured qualitative interviews allowed the researcher, as interviewer, the flexibility to pursue specific topics raised by the interviewees. See Appendix E for the interview guide.

The main aim of the semi-structured interview conducted with the community worker, was to get confirmation of, and gain a better understanding of the social context of the learners as a possible contributing reason to their likelihood of dropping out of school.

#### **3.4.3.4 Focus group interview**

Since this study was approached from an eco-systemic perspective, it was believed necessary to include a focus-group consisting of school staff in order to contextualise the data. This allowed for an exploration of the dropout phenomenon from a mesosystemic perspective in the specific school.

Focus groups generally consist of up to ten people who are purposely selected to examine in detail how they think and feel about a specific topic (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). These selected members usually reflect a heterogeneous cross-section of interests and attitudes within the parameters of the main criteria that qualify them for the group (Kelly, 2006). Focus-group discussions can generate different data than what would have emerged from one-on-one interviews (Byrne, 2004). This method has an interactive quality and assumes that people often need to listen to others' opinions and understandings in order to form their own attitudes and beliefs. In other words, opinions and attitudes are produced socially. Focus group interviews

allow the facilitator the flexibility to explore issues as they arise in the group (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The focus group in this study was to consist of six school teachers who were purposively selected in conjunction with the school counsellor and the headmaster. Due to work pressure, several teachers unfortunately were not available and a focus group was conducted with the acting headmaster and the school counsellor. After consultation with colleagues it was decided that the data gathered from the focus-group was informative and sufficient for the purpose of this study.

The focus group interview took place on the school premises in March 2009, and lasted more or less one and a half hours. The aim of the research was clarified after which the interview began. The interview was conducted in Afrikaans as both of the participants had Afrikaans as their home language. Pseudonyms were used in this study so that they will not be identifiable to others. The discussion was audio-taped and transcribed for analysis. Mainly open-ended questions were asked to find out more about the facilities at the school, the learners' general attitude, disciplinary measures at the school, size of the classes, qualifications of teachers, the relationships between learners and teachers, support structures and the approximate percentage of learners that drop out of school. They were also requested to share their views on what can be done to prevent learners leaving school before completing their studies.

At the end of the interview, the participants were thanked and told that they would be notified when the final results of the study would be available. See Appendix F for the interview schedule.

#### **3.4.3.5 Personal documents**

Merriam (2002) views personal documents, such as collages, as a reliable source of data to discern a person's attitudes and beliefs, as well as his/her view of the world. As the writer is the only one that decides on what to record, it is a reconstruction of a part of life. Even though the end product is highly subjective, it is a reflection of the participants' perspective, which is important in qualitative research.

As explained in Chapter One, in this study, each individual participant was asked to make a collage after his/her interviews. Firstly the participants had to visualize the barriers that prevent them from reaching their academic goals, and then they had to construct a collage of their ideal world where such barriers do not exist. Participants were free to select the materials, such as pens, pictures from magazines and coloured paper, in order to make a visual representation of their ideal world where possible additional feelings and opinions could be expressed. An

additional purpose was to transform the face-to-face encounter from a probable problem-focused environment into a solution-focused environment, which may install in learners a reason to be hopeful (McWhirter et al, 2007).

### **3.5 DATA ANALYSIS**

According to Merriam (2002), data collection and analysis in qualitative research could happen simultaneously. There is therefore no definite point where data collection stops and analysis begins (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Kelly, 2006).

Geertz (1973), (as cited in Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p.321), states that interpretive analysis provides a *thick description*, which means a comprehensive description of contexts, characteristics, and the processes of the phenomenon being studied. Real-life events are thus placed into some form of perspective. It therefore allowed for the interpretation of the subjective experiences of the learners at school and at home and their perceptions of the reasons why they might leave school prematurely.

Data gathering in interpretive research involves the development of ideas and theories about the phenomenon being studied, and most such researchers already have an initial understanding of the meaning by the time data analysis begins. This involves a search for similarities, differences, categories and themes and is a continuous process.

Data analysis begins with reading all the data and then dividing it into more meaningful units (Henning et al., 2004). It refers to the process of working repeatedly through text, such as field notes and interview transcripts, in order to establish what kinds of interpretation are supported by such data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The process of qualitative data analysis thus involves the eliciting of meaning from data in a systematic, disciplined, comprehensive and meticulous manner (Henning et al., 2004). This inductive, bottom-up process called *qualitative thematic analysis* or *interpretive content analysis* (Seale, 2004), involves comparing different units of data, whilst looking for common patterns or themes across the data.

According to Seale (2004), coding schemes emerge inductively from the data itself, and is the creative beginning of the insight that the qualitative researcher hopes to gain eventually by investigating the social world. These themes and sub-themes then form the written account of the phenomenon being studied and form the bulk of the findings section. Henning et al. (2004) emphasises that it is important to remember that categories are flexible and that they can be

modified during the process of analysis. The process of qualitative analysis should also truly reflect the perceptions of the participants.

In this study, the above-mentioned process was followed. After comparing the different units of data, common patterns or themes were identified. These themes were given codes that described the content of the data after which phrases, sentences and paragraphs were linked and classified to these codes depending on whether they contained material that pertained to the particular themes. The category names chosen were more abstract than literal to ensure that they could be applied in several instances and care was taken to ensure that the main themes identified across all sources captured the meanings that were gained from the data.

### **3.6 RESEARCH BIAS - REFLEXIVITY**

As qualitative research is concerned with meaning in context and involves the interpretation of data, the qualitative researcher takes on an active role in the process. Merriam (1998; 2002) reminds us of the fact that the human being is the primary instrument in qualitative research. This implies that all observations, interpretations and analyses might be affected by the researcher's worldview, values and his/her perspective. This links to the underlying philosophical assumption that there are multiple interpretations of reality. Merriam (1998) points out that it is therefore essential for us as qualitative researchers, to be sensitive to understand and consider how biases or subjectivity could shape the investigation and its findings. Qualitative research therefore acknowledges a subjective element (Willig, 2001). In order to understand and control their biases, it is essential for researchers to engage in self-reflection on a continuous basis to become more self-aware and monitor such biases (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005) also refer to language and cultural differences and warn that even though respondents may be fluent in the language of the interviewer various expressions have different meanings in different languages. Language and cultural values must therefore be taken into consideration in cross-cultural interviews to minimise misunderstandings and biases. Welman et al. (2005) continue to point out that although good rapport and a relationship of mutual confidence and respect are essential to collect valuable information, the researcher must focus on remaining objective.

In this study, the individual interviews were conducted in Afrikaans that is the participants' home language. This minimised bias in this area as the researcher is bilingual with both

Afrikaans and English as home languages. Although this research was conducted in a predominantly coloured community, (which in terms of culture and economic status is very different from the researcher's own), the researcher feels she was fortunate as she has a good understanding of this culture due to her upbringing and background. She therefore did not feel insecure or *out of place* in the particular setting, and could relate to the participants' circumstances. Despite this, the researcher reminded herself continuously during the research process of the possible affects that these cultural, language, gender, age differences could have on the interpretations of data and the eventual findings of this research.

### **3.7 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

According to Seale (2004), validity refers to the truth status of research reports and is concerned with the question whether the researcher is measuring (in quantitative terms) or investigating (in qualitative terms) what is supposed to be measured or investigated. It can be divided into internal and external validity, where the former refers to how congruent the findings are with reality and the latter to whether findings can be generalised to other settings similar to the one studied (Merriam, 1998).

Henning et al. (2004) and Merriam (1998) suggest some strategies to enhance internal validity in qualitative research, such as continuous checking for bias and precision, theoretical interpretation of the findings throughout the process, discussing and sharing the progress of the research process with peers for critical feedback, involving research participants in all phases of the research from conceptualising to recording findings.

Great care was taken during the course of this study to adhere to the above. The progress of the research process was discussed with the researcher's supervisor on a continuous basis to check for bias and to make sure that the correct procedures were followed. As mentioned earlier, multiple methods of data collection, namely, individual semi-structured interviews with eight learners and a community member, a focus-group, as well as personal documents were used to increase validity of this study. During the process of data analysis and search for recurrent themes, the themes from the different sources were cross-checked by the researcher for consistency of interpretations. According to Merriam (1998), reliability and internal validity both are strengthened by triangulation. Regarding peer examination and debriefing, the data production process and analysis were discussed with fellow colleagues on a regular basis.

Merriam (2002) states that qualitative researchers need to provide enough rich, thick description for readers to decide whether their research situations are similar and whether findings can be



transferred. Contextual features of the study should therefore be fully reported. This will enhance external validity in qualitative research.

Reliability refers to the extent to which similar findings can be replicated if the study had to be repeated and is based on the assumption that there is a single reality. It demands consistency over time and is problematic in social research as human behaviour is never unchanging (Merriam, 1998; 2002).

### **3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

According to Ali and Kelly (2004) ethical practise in social research refers to the professional integrity of the individual researcher. They point out that researchers need to be aware of issues of power in knowledge production. Wassenaar (2006) explains that, contrary to some belief, participants in qualitative research are entitled to the same respect and protection as those that partake in quantitative research. Before commencing the study, the researcher ensured that the following ethical requirements were met with links to Wassenaar's (2006) broad principles in italics:

- *The research conducted should be developed in collaboration with the target community.* Permission for this study was obtained from the acting headmaster on 12 February 2009. The need for such research was confirmed by the local Child Care Unit in the area. Permission was also obtained from the Western Cape Education Department on 18 August 2008 (see Appendix I).
- *Social value: The area of research should be of value to the society or a particular community.* The decision of the particular setting of the research was because many learners reportedly left the specific school before matriculating. School dropout was thus identified as a problem in the particular community and school during the researcher's practical work as an Educational Psychology masters student in the area. The findings of the study should therefore be of value to the community as a whole.
- *Scientific value: The design, methodology and data analysis of the study should be justifiable, feasible and lead to valid answers of the research question.* The researcher believes that the qualitative research design of this study helped to produce valid results regarding the dropout phenomenon in the specific school.
- *Participants should be selected because the research question applies to them and not because they are easily accessible.* The main participants in this study were carefully and



purposively selected through consultation and in collaboration with the acting headmaster and the school counsellor according to certain criteria as specified in section 3.4.2.

- *Risks: Possible risks need to be identified and minimised.* The researcher checked that the necessary support structures were in place to provide emotional support to the learners if the need should arise during and after the research. The school counsellor ensured me of the availability of such support.
- *Informed consent: Participants have the right to know what the research involves and that they have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. Formalisation of such consent should be in written form.* The aim, purpose and procedures of the research were clearly explained to each participant, and written consent was obtained from the school, the Western Cape Department of Education, as well as the learners themselves before conducting the study. The main interviews took place during March 2009, and were conducted in a private room on the school premises as organised by the school counsellor. The interviews lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. Participants were informed about their voluntary participation, and permission was obtained for the interviews to be audio-taped. Informed consent was further confirmed in writing. The interview with the community worker took place during July 2009 and permission was also obtained for it to be audio-taped.
- *Ongoing respect for participants:* Participants were treated with respect and individual information remained confidential. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, but care was taken to ensure that the individuals, as well as the school and the community remained anonymous. Pseudonyms that had no relation to the participants were selected and used for all participants to ensure their anonymity.
- Ethical approval to conduct this research was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Stellenbosch University (Ref No 120/2008).

### **3.9 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER**

In this chapter, a qualitative, phenomenological, interpretive, research design is described. This design served as the framework for this study and directed the entire research process. The problem statement and the research questions were initially mentioned in order to familiarise the reader with the intention and purpose of the study. The theoretical paradigm, purpose and context of the study were then discussed. Next, the reader was introduced to the methodology that was followed in the study. This included information about the method of sampling, data production and data analysis. Reliability and validity were discussed and the chapter concluded

with reference to the ethical considerations related to this research. In the following chapter the researcher describes the implementation of the study. This includes the presentation of the data produced, the process of data analysis and the themes that emerged from the study.

# **CHAPTER 4**

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the aim is to contextualise the study by describing the background of the eight main participants, the member of the community and the focus group participants, as well as the procedures followed in order to conduct the individual interviews, the focus group interview with the headmaster and school counsellor, and the construction of the collages. This includes a brief description of all the participants, followed by a concise reference to the data analysis process as discussed in Chapter 3. This is followed by a discussion of the main themes that emerged from the findings and an interpretation of the results in order to answer the research questions mentioned in section 3.2.

### **4.2 PARTICIPANTS**

As discussed in section 3.4.2, the participants for this study were selected through a process of purposive sampling. This means that they were selected with the specific purpose to explore the dropout phenomenon in the particular school. The main participants were selected in collaboration with the school counsellor and the acting principal using the following criteria: low grade performance; being older than the median age or grade repetition; behavioural problems and low school attendance. In addition, an interview was also conducted with a community worker in order to obtain a better understanding of the social context of the learners.

In the next section the eight participants, the community member, as well as the focus group participants are briefly introduced. This background information was obtained from the first set of questions of the semi-structured interviews. The initial phases were utilised to explain the purpose and procedures involved in the research processes, to complete the consent forms, to establish rapport and a relationship of trust between the researcher and the participants, and to gain some background information. The information gathered helped to develop an understanding of the individual contexts. At the end of each interview, participants were asked to construct a collage of their ideal world where no barriers exist, with the aim to conclude the interviews in a positive manner.

#### **4.2.1 Background of Participants/ Participant Characteristics**

##### **Rose**

Rose is a 16-year-old female and repeating grade 8 for the third year. She was selected to participate in the research as she showed academic difficulties and reportedly often behaved in an aggressive manner. She initially presented a shy girl, but became more spontaneous as the interview progressed.

Rose lived with her mother and her brother, with whom she appeared to get along quite well. She expressed concern about her mother who had been diagnosed with lung cancer, as she may not have long to live. Her sister visited often, but lived somewhere else. Rose's father, who left them a long time ago, was living with another woman. She only saw him occasionally. She explained that her father would like to get a divorce, but that her mother refused as she would prefer to have him back with the family. Rose reported that this continuous conflict *work[s] on her nerves*. Both parents were employed. Rose's dream was to be in a position to help others and to become a doctor or a police woman or to work for a security company.

##### **Sam**

Sam was 17 years old and repeating grade 10 at the time of the interview. He was selected because of his low academic performance, behavioural difficulties, and lack of acceptance of authority. He seemed sceptical of the interview being audio-taped and preferred note-taking.

According to Sam, the school wanted to suspend him at the beginning of 2009 after an incident when he was non-compliant, but the decision was reversed as he *promised to behave and do his school work (Sam)*. He explained that he had changed his attitude towards school and that his dream was to finish grade 12 and attend a college to study sports management.

Sam explained that he was one of three children, and that he had one older sister and a brother. His sister lived with him, his mother and father, and one set of grandparents. His parents reportedly encouraged him to attend school and to complete his work.

##### **Jimmy**

Jimmy was 17 years old and in grade 10 at the time the interview was conducted. He was selected as a participant due to academic and behavioural difficulties. Jimmy formerly repeated both grades 4 and 6. He explained that his lack of academic performance during grade 4 was due to his inability to concentrate during that time. This was as a result of emotional difficulties

when his father decided to leave his mother for another woman. In grade 6 he reportedly lost interest in school, but realised, after his mother had spoken to him, he would not like his younger brother to catch up with him. He then decided to put more effort into his school work.

Jimmy lived with his mother, grandmother, and his younger brother who was 10 years old and in grade 4. His mother and father never married and his father did not live with them. He did see him occasionally. Jimmy was quite open about his home circumstances. He explained that his younger brother often caused trouble at home as he would impulsively threaten him (Jimmy) with a knife if *things did not go his way (Jimmy)*. Jimmy explained that gangs were prevalent in the areas and that people often get knifed in the community. Both parents were employed and Jimmy's grandmother ran a little shop at the clinic. Jimmy felt that they have adequate money to provide for their basic needs, even though his father seldom contributed financially.

Jimmy talked a lot about his two hobbies: he liked to fix bicycles during his free time and his other passion was soccer. Jimmy played soccer at school and at an outside club, and was excited at the prospect of perhaps going to Scotland with his team at the end of 2009.

## **Lily**

Lily was in grade 10 and 15 years old at the time of the interview. She had not repeated a year yet, but was identified as being at risk of dropping out of school due to substance abuse, behavioural difficulties and home circumstances.

Lily is one of seven children and lived with her mother and other family in a two-bed-roomed flat. Her father, who had been using Mandrax and alcohol regularly for a long time, lived with his own mother in a different location. He visited them regularly and contributed R300 per week to the running of the household. Her older brother left school in grade 10 and was described as a regular alcohol and marijuana user.

Lily's aunt was employed, which meant that she was able to contribute financially to the running of the house. Lily spoke in detail about the home circumstances and her own use of methamphetamine and marijuana during the course of 2008. *Ek het so geskel en so lelik gepraat...ek het tik ook gebruik en so aan en het baie onbeskof gewees...(I used abusive language and used to swear a lot...I also used tik and so on and was very rude..)* (Lily).

Lily described several of her experiences and acknowledged that she often misbehaved whilst under the influence of the drugs. She explained that she was not interested in school at all during this time, and that she often did not attend school. She was of the opinion that she had changed a

lot since she had stopped using substances, and that she felt more positive about her school work. Lily's dream was to become a hairdresser and she hoped that her father would be able to send her on a relevant course.

### **Jake**

Jake was 18 and in grade 10 at the time of the interview. He repeated grade 9 due to academic difficulties and absenteeism. He was reportedly easily influenced by others and indicated that he did not want to finish school.

Jake's home circumstances appeared to present several personal challenges. He explained that he and his brother had been living with his grandmother since his own mother died of cancer when he was 4 years old. His father started to drink heavily after his mother's death and eventually disappeared. He shared that he only saw him occasionally since then, and that his father was under the influence of alcohol most of the time. Jake appeared to get on well with his brother who finished school, and was looking for employment with a security company at the time of the study. He described how his brother used to smoke and drink, but explained that he admired him for being able to stop three years ago.

Jake explained that he [himself] used to associate with friends who used marijuana and methamphetamine and smoked cigarettes. During that time (grade 9), he did not care much for school and was suspended for almost a year. *Ek het skool gelos...vir 'n jaar omtrent...maar toe't ek besluit ek kom wee skool toe, en daar vanaand af, toe's ek oppad. (I dropped school ...for almost a year...but then I decided to go back to school, and since then I have been on track) (Jake).* The turnaround point for Jake happened when he reflected on where he might end up if he continued with such behaviour. *Ek het vir myself gevra...waar toe...ek het daai vraag gevra een aand...toe loop die trane... en toe word ek ge-rehab...(I asked myself where I was going ...I asked that question one evening ...then the tears flowed ...and then I became rehabilitated) (Jake).*

At the time of the interview, Jake had not used substances for approximately one year. He explained that he was enjoying school and playing soccer and cricket, and was particularly proud of the fact that he was part of a soccer team that went on tour in Germany during 2008. Jake shared that his first dream was to become the best soccer player in the world. His second dream was to get a good job, or to become a cricket coach.

## **Candice**

Candice was 16 years old and in grade 10 at the time of the interview. She had not repeated a grade yet, but was selected as she reportedly demonstrated aggressive behaviour, was often absent from school, and appeared to be easily influenced by her peers.

She lived with her mother, her younger sister, her grandparents, uncle, aunt and cousin in a two-bed-roomed house. Candice grew up without knowing her father, but knew that he was a Rastafarian that smoked *ganja* (marijuana). She explained that the family often had arguments and *problems* in the house, and that they then tend to shout at each other and often hit one another. She would often leave the house under those conditions only to return at about 8pm. She preferred to complete her homework at school when possible, as it was difficult to find a suitable work space at home with the younger children.

Candice's mother, aunt and uncle were employed. This meant that they had enough money to provide for their basic needs. Candice explained that she had been using marijuana with her friends on a regular basis for the past year and that *she only drank at parties (drink net op partytjies)*. She described herself as having been a *wilde meisiekind* (wild girl), who had often been sent to detention.

She expressed the desire to finish school and described her dream as to be able to get a job one day. Candice liked art and showed an interest in the design of clothing.

## **Chaz**

Chaz was 15 years old and repeating grade 10 at the time of the interview. He was selected due to behavioural and academic difficulties. He presented a friendly young man who expressed himself well and talked easily.

Chaz lived on the same premises as his mother, but in his own *ghetto'tjie* [prefabricated outhouse]. He spoke frankly about his family and explained that he had three brothers, one of which lived with his father and was in jail at the time of the interview. One of his other brothers had also formerly been in jail for three and a half years and another had a child. The mother of the child used methamphetamine, which meant that Chaz's mother often had to take care of the child. His one brother left school in grade 7 and the other in grade 5. Both of them were substance abusers and were unemployed. Chaz described his difficult home circumstances: his brothers never contributed any money to the running of the house, he often went to school

feeling hungry, and his mother was unwell, which resulted in Chaz being cared for by his grandmother and his aunt.

Chaz explained the challenges of living in his household in detail, and spoke about the pivotal role that becoming a Rastafarian has played in helping him to lead a good life. *Ek is alright – ek skel nie, doen nie verkeerde dinge nie. Ek is elke dag by die huis. As my ma my vra om iets te doen dan doen ek dit. (I am alright – I don't swear, do not do wrong things. I am at home every day. When my mom wants me to do something I do it) (Chaz).* He continued to explain how this supported him to have turned his life around from sniffing glue, using methamphetamine, and stealing, to being a Rasta that smoked dagga only after school and attending the supportive extramural sessions and gym on a regular basis.

Chaz described his love for cooking and expressed the desire to be a chef one day. His dream was to finish school, but he explained that he had often considered leaving to look for work in order to earn money to afford food and other essentials that were needed at home.

### **Abe**

At the time of the interview, Abe was 18 years old and in grade 11. He had repeated grade 10. Abe was selected, as he was at risk of dropping out of school due to academic and behavioural difficulties.

He was one of five in his immediate family that consisted of himself, his two smaller brothers and his mother and father. He preferred to live with his grandfather and aunt in a household that consisted of eight people, as he disliked the fact that his mother and father drank alcohol and argued too much over weekends. His parents showed some interest as they often phoned him to find out how he was during the week. They reportedly would like him to finish school.

Abe explained that his failure to pass grade 10 was due to the fact that he had no interest in school or in completing homework tasks during that time. He used to get easily distracted by his peers in his class, and often jumped over the fence and stayed away from school. Abe apparently had a change of attitude after one of the teachers encouraged him to work harder. Since then he had made a concerted effort to improve his behaviour at school, to ignore his peers when they tried to distract him in class, and to complete all his tasks.

Abe seemed to have a passion for soccer and athletics and practised twice or thrice a week. His dream was to become a star soccer player.



### **Community member (R3)**

R3 was a female member of the community who had reportedly been involved in community work with the Child Care Unit in the area since the late 1980s. The staff at the Child Care Unit recommended that an interview be conducted with her as she had been involved with some of the families of learners at the school. She had also served on the Governing Body at the school and had been involved in disciplinary cases. She explained that she had a good understanding of the local community and the living conditions that most learners experienced in the area due to her husband's involvement with the housing committee. Her subsequent involvement with street children and some of the learners at the school stemmed from this.

#### **4.2.2 Backgrounds of the focus group participants**

According to Byrne (2004), focus group discussions are a strategy for obtaining a better understanding of a problem or phenomenon by interviewing a purposefully sampled group of people rather than each person separately. For the purpose of this study, a focus group was conducted with the acting headmaster and school counsellor, as the rest of the teachers were reportedly under too much work pressure at the time.

The school counsellor (R1) had been employed at the school for the past 11 years. Her post was created after a restructuring process when Life Orientation (LO) became an examinable subject. This change meant that counselling teachers had less time available for individual learners. As a definite need existed at the school, it was decided to appoint a school counsellor. She reported that she received much support from the teachers and that her job was made easier by the support from outside organisations, such as the Stellenbosch University (SU). The SU regularly appointed Intern Psychologists to assist learners who struggled with academic, emotional and behavioural difficulties at the school. The school counsellor mainly referred *high-risk* students to such Interns. The job presented several difficulties due to the lack of support programmes in the community. The existing outside programmes seemed to be under tremendous pressure:

*Hulle is oorlaai met werk, en sit met hulle hande in hul hare en wanneer ek saam met hulle vergaderings bywoon hoor mens dat hulle ook uitkoms soek – want daar is nie facilities naby waar ons kan se ons verwys nou maar kinders soontoe of stuur ‘n kind vir ‘n maand of twee nie.(They are snowed under with work and at a loss and when I attend meetings with them one gathers that they are also looking for ways out – as there are no facilities nearby where we can decide to refer children to or to send a child for a month or two)(R1).*

The acting headmaster (R2) had been involved with the school for the past 27 years. He previously filled the post of Senior Head of the Department of History, and was acting Headmaster at the time that the study was conducted.

He described the area in which the school was situated as a *hoë risiko en gevaarlike area* (*high-risk and dangerous area*) and said that one has to be more careful when moving around this community compared to some other communities in the area. He explained that gangsterism used to be much more prevalent some years ago, and that it used to be not unusual to hear shooting in the streets. He identified unemployment, low-cost housing, poverty, alcoholism and drug abuse as very real issues in the lives of the members of the community.

### **4.3 DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **4.3.1 Data Collection**

Data was collected through a literature study, eight semi-structured interviews, an interview with a member of the community, a focus group interview and individual collages. The literature study is discussed in Chapter 2. The eight semi-structured interviews, the interview with the community member, and the focus group interview took place on the school premises and were audio-taped and transcribed. Copies of the transcribed interviews were safely stored on the personal computer of the researcher. The collages and notes made during the interviews were also stored in a safe in the researcher's office. The researcher carefully read through the transcribed notes several times to fully familiarise herself with the data before starting the process of analysis.

#### **4.3.2 Data Analysis**

Qualitative analysis is an inductive process that helps to understand and explore issues rather than test theoretical hypotheses. In this study the researcher made use of thematic content analysis as discussed in section 3.5 and described by Seale (2004) and Henning et al. (2004). This inductive process involved the comparison of the different units of data, after which common patterns or themes were identified. The first part of the process involved the coding and collation of the data. The next step involved sorting the different codes into potential themes within the different categories. Thereafter, all the relevant coded data were collated within the identified themes. Care was taken to ensure that the main themes identified across all sources captured the meanings that were gained from the data. These potential themes and categories that were identified were then presented in a table format. This list of potential themes and

categories was comprehensive and needed to be reviewed and refined into a smaller number of dominant themes. Themes were then categorised into broader over-arching categories based on the research questions, the literature, the data and the theoretical framework. Throughout the process, the researcher was aware that the data within the themes should cohere together meaningfully, whilst there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes. See Appendix G for a detailed table of the findings.

#### 4.4 FINDINGS

The following table summarises the themes and categories that emerged from the findings:

**TABLE 1: CATEGORIES AND THEMES**

CATEGORIES	THEMES
INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS CONTRIBUTING TO AND MEDIATING DROPOUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Beliefs and Responsibilities</li> <li>• Personal Attributes</li> <li>• Personal Difficulties</li> </ul>
FAMILY SYSTEMS FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO AND MEDIATING DROPOUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Difficulties</li> <li>• Family Support</li> </ul>
PEER GROUP SYSTEMS FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO AND MEDIATING DROPOUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer Relationships</li> </ul>
SCHOOL SYSTEM FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO AND MEDIATING DROPOUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learner/Teacher Relationships</li> <li>• Barriers to Learning</li> <li>• Motivators for Learning</li> <li>• School Resources and Facilities</li> <li>• Consequences of High School Dropout</li> </ul>
ENVIRONMENTAL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY ISSUES CONTRIBUTING TO DROPOUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues concerning wellness and safety in community (such as violence and gang activities)</li> <li>• Socio-Economic Issues (such as unemployment and poverty, substance abuse, living conditions and availability of supportive community programmes)</li> </ul>

<p>EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO AND MEDIATING DROPOUT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of governmental policies</li> <li>• School fees</li> </ul>
<p>MACROSYSTEM FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO AND MEDIATING DROPOUT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living in a democratic society</li> <li>• Vision of a <i>community school</i></li> </ul>

Table 1 is a summary of the main themes and categories that emerged from the data. The categories included (1) individual characteristics contributing to and mediating dropout, (2) family systems contributing to and mediating dropout, (3) peer group systems factors contributing to and mediating dropout, (4) school system factors contributing to and mediating dropout, (5) social context and environmental community issues contributing to and mediating dropout, (6) educational system factors contributing to and mediating dropout, and (8) macro system factors contributing to and mediating dropout. These categories, and the emerging themes included in each, will form the basis of the discussion of the results.

#### **4.4.1 Individual characteristics contributing to and mediating dropout**

The following themes concerning individual characteristics contributing to and mediating dropout emerged from the data from the semi-structured interviews, collages and focus group interview: personal beliefs and responsibilities; personal attributes and personal difficulties.

##### **4.4.1.1 Personal Beliefs and Responsibilities**

Personal beliefs and responsibilities played an important role in several of the individually interviewed participants' decisions to attend or contemplate dropping out of school. The data indicated a certain degree of abstract thinking as the participants were able to reflect about who they were, what their beliefs were, what they were good at, and how important certain things were to them, aspects pertinent to the adolescent phase. Self-concept development and self-perceptions about competence would play a role in the participants' decisions to attend or drop out of school and are important when assessing one's likelihood to succeed.

All the participants appeared to have different, but definite personal beliefs about their sexual debut and the impact that it would have on them, possibly dropping out of or staying at school. Rose, for example, felt strongly about teenage pregnancy being unacceptable and that one needs to wait until one is older before getting involved in a sexual relationship. Lily agreed with her

and said that it had almost become a fashion for some girls at school to fall pregnant and subsequently run the risk of dropping out:

*Die een wil die ander ene beat met hulle verwagtingskap en so aan. Dis nou 'n nuwe ding. As hulle so verwag dan sien jy net die pensies kom uit. Nee, hulle los die skool. Party kom weer terug skool toe (One wants to beat the other with pregnancy and so on. It's a new trend. When they fall pregnant like that, one only sees tummies bulging. No, they leave school. Some of them do return to school) (Lily).*

Furthermore, beliefs of several participants in their own ability to make decisions as to the use and abuse of forbidden substances also transpired from the individual interviews. Drug use and abuse appears to be evident at this school and appeared to link to learners either continuing with school or dropping out. Only two of the eight participants had reportedly never used substances before and it therefore had not impacted on their school attendance or performance. The remaining six had all been involved in substance use to a certain extent. Lily, Jake, Candice and Chaz indicated that they believed fervently in their own abilities to stop using methamphetamine and commented on the danger of its use in particular. They were proud of the fact that they had successfully given up such use for a period of time. They explained that it contributed to them possibly dropping out of school, as it resulted in being either suspended or absent from school, and caused a loss of interest in their school work: *...ek was nooit in die klas want ek was buite gewees. Elke dag uit by die hek gesit...nou op 'n tyd toe gaan ek by die huis bly (...I was never in class, as I was outside. Sat outside the gate every day...then at a time I stayed at home) (Jake).* Candice and Chaz still used marijuana, but felt that it did not impact on their studies as they were able to use it in a responsible manner. Chaz linked his marijuana use to his spiritual beliefs as a Rastafarian:

*ek rook net ganja – ek is mos Rasta. Ek rook nie ander goed. Ek rook net as ek by die huis is. Nie in die oggend as ek skool toe gaan nie – miskien in die middag. Ek is elke dag by die huis en ek loop nie rond nie...dis my geloof. Ek het Rasta geraak, nou rook ek ganja – ek is gewoonde ganja rook...ek het glue gesnuif en TIK gebruik en gerook. Maar ek het uitgevind daai goed is nie goed vir my nie (I only smoke ganja – I am Rasta, you know. I do not smoke anything else. I only smoke when I am at home. Not in the morning when I go to school – maybe in the afternoon. I am at home every day and do not loaf about...it's my religion. I became Rasta, now I smoke ganja – I'm used to smoking ganja...I sniffed glue and used and smoked TIK. But I found that stuff is not good for me) (Chaz).*

Religious beliefs appeared to play a positive role in four of the participants' and their families' lives, as it offered support and guidance and played a role in influencing learners to continue with their school programmes: *my ouma en oupa bly ook by ons...hulle is sterk kerkmense en speel 'n goeie rol in my lewe...(my grandma and grandpa also stay with us...they are heavy church people and play a good role in my life) (Sam).*

Personal beliefs in their ability to be successful in sport seemingly contributed to an increased motivation to attend school. Jimmy and Abe showed a definite interest and involvement in soccer, and believed that one has a personal responsibility to stay fit. They also appeared to believe in their own abilities to succeed: *Ek kan nou sê ek is in die beste 11 juffrou...ek het laas keer trials gepseel vir die Boland span en nou die 21ste speel ek vir die Western Cape span (I can now say I am in the best 11, Miss,...last time I played trials for the Boland team and soon, the 21<sup>st</sup> I will play for the Western Cape team) (Jimmy).* Both of them played for their school as well as for outside teams.

A belief in future success through the completion of education emanated from several participants during the individual interviews. They indicated that they regarded finishing school as important and expressed the belief that they can be successful in a future career via their education at school level. This appeared to act as a motivator for school attendance. Six of the participants expressed the belief:

*...en daas klomp kinners hulle gaan tot by die college, hulle los graad tien dan gat hulle college toe. Laas jaar toe wou ek ook gegaan het, ma toe het ek besluit ek wil hie klaamaak en dan...ja (...and there are a lot of kids they go up to the college, they drop grade 10, then they go to college. Last year I also wanted to go, but then I decided I want to finish here and then...yes) (Jake).*

*Partykeer is skool nie lekker nie...maar ek wil college toe gaan en verder leer (Sometimes school is not nice...but I'd like to go to college to study further) (Chaz).*

Abe said: *ek voel sterk daarvoor om skool klaar te maak (I feel strongly about it to finish school).*

*Ek wil klaarmaak en dan gaan my pa my stuur op 'n kursus maar ek gaan nie college toe nie...leer om hare te doen...met bloudraaiers en so....(I want to finish and then my dad will send me on a course, but I am not going to college...learn to do hair...with blowdryers and so....) (Lily).*

Some participants reported having to fulfil household tasks which contributed to the acceptance of having certain responsibilities at home and at school. An increased awareness of personal responsibilities could have a positive affect on their school work and school performance and therefore play a role in possible academic success. Lily, Jake and Chaz regarded their personal responsibilities at home as important and regularly performed their household tasks:

*Ja, as ek by die huis kom dan moet ek die kombuis skoon maak en so aan en skottelgoed was in die aande ook en so of ek moet na my niggie, sy is klein, dan moet ek na haar kyk en so aan. Hulle ma werk mos (Yes, when I get home then I have to clean the kitchen and so on and also wash the dishes in the evenings and so or I have to look after my niece, she is small, then I have to look after her and so on. Their mother works, you know) (Lily).*

*Ek maak miskien die jaart skoon en die tuin skoon of soe dan gie hulle vir my geld of hulle gie sommer self vir my (Maybe I clean the yard and the garden or so then they give me money or they themselves give me) (Jake).*

*As ek iets moet skoonmaak doen ek dit. Ek help my ma kos maak (When I have to clean something I do it. I help my mother to prepare food) (Chaz).*

#### **4.4.1.2 Personal Attributes**

Several of the participants showed evidence of personal attributes, such as self-awareness, self-confidence and an internal locus of control that would assist learners when making important decisions, such as whether to attend or leave school, or to dissociate themselves from negative peer influences.

Half of the participants showed particularly good self-insight and self-awareness. Candice described herself as: *...ek was 'n wilde meisiekind. Ek hou van praat (...i was a wild girl. I like talking) (Candice).* Lily showed good self-insight when she wrote a school essay about her involvement with substances and how it negatively impacted on her school experience: *Dit het nie lekker gegaan...en ek het gevoel ek wil nie meer skool gaan nie...ek het snaaks gevoel by die skool...maar toe voel ek ek gaan nou vir myself skryf en so vir my familie en so aan (It did not go well...and I felt like I didn't want to go to school any more...I felt funny at school...but then I decided I was going to write for myself and so, for my family and so on) (Lilly).* Jimmy, Lily, Candice and Chaz illustrated confidence in their own abilities to succeed in certain areas. For



example, Jimmy showed particular confidence in his sporting abilities and proudly talked about his achievements, as mentioned in section 4.4.1.1:

*Ek kan nou sê ek is in die best elf juffrou...ek het laas keer trials gespeel vir die Boland span en nou die 21ste speel ek vir die Western Cape span...(I can now say I am in the best 11, Miss...last time I played trials for the Boland team and soon on the 21<sup>st</sup> I will play for the Western Cape team...) (Jimmy).*

Candice and Chaz were proud of the fact that they managed to make the personal decision to separate themselves from their previous friends who used substances regularly. These friendships resulted in them being absent from school frequently, and put them at risk of dropping out of school. Being able to dissociate themselves from these friends resulted in them being absent less frequently, and attending school on a more regular basis:

*My ma het vir my gesê ek moet kies of ek moet nie meer daar loop nie. Toe luister ek ma vir my ma...was nie maklik nie.... Ek was bietjie uit die groep uit...my ma het gesê die vriende was nie reg vir my nie...hulle rook, drink en rook ganja...Ja, dit was moeilik, want twee vriende is nog in een klas en hulle praat van my (My mother told me to choose or I must not go there any more. Then I ma listened to my mother...wasn't easy... I was a bit out of the group ...my mother said they were not the right friends for me... they smoke, drink and smoke ganja...Yes, it was tough, because two friends are still in one class and they talk about me) (Candice).*

*Ek het glue gesnuif en tik gebruik en gerook. Maar ek het uitgevind daai goed is nie vir my nie. Ek het saam met verkeerde vriende geloop. Ons het dorp toe gegaan en gesteel en sulke dinge en laities gerob. En gehardloop uit die dorp uit...van die middle van die jaar in standard 5 toe hou ek op...(I sniffed glue, used tik and smoked. But I found that that stuff was not for me. I socialised with the wrong friends. We went to town and thieved and so on and robbed laities. And ran out of town...,from the middle of the year in standard five I stopped...) (Chaz).*

Jake said: *Jy weet, dit was baie moeilik, ek het so nou en dan dan gat ek na hulle toe...dan het ek gedink ek kan nie wegkom by hulle nie, en dan het ek myself gefors...(You know, it was very difficult, now and then I went to them...then I thought I cannot leave them, and then I forced myself...) (Jake).*



Four participants showed indicators of internal locus of control, which seemed to enable them to take control of their lives by adopting a more positive attitude. Data indicated that this change in attitude assisted them to make their own decisions regarding their school and personal lives. The ability to make such decisions appeared to have a definite impact on their tendency to attend school. For example, Jimmy explained how he changed his mind about gang involvement and indicated that he regarded it as a personal choice, whether to belong to a gang: *dit is jou keuse...hulle gaan vir jou sê dit hang van jou af...ek is klaar met die besigheid...(it is your choice...they will tell you it depends on you...I am finished with the business...)* (Jimmy). Breaking such ties with the gang reportedly enabled him to focus on his school work, which would most likely result in greater academic success.

Abe also described how a more positive attitude helped him to become more assertive in terms of his school work: *Ek het self beplan om hard te werk...ek maak hulle stil en sê vir hulle hulle moet werk...(I planned to work hard myself...I tell them to shut up and to start working...)* (Abe).

Sam proudly explained how, after failing grade 10, he decided that he needed to change his subjects and approached his parents explaining the situation: *...nee, ek het self verander. Ek het met my ouers gaan praat en vir hulle verduidelik dat ek sukkel en my vakke moet verander (...no, I changed on my own. I talked to my parents and explained to them that I am struggling and need to change my subjects)* (Sam). This decision reportedly led to him being more successful at school, enjoying his studies to a greater extent, and visualising a more positive future.

It became apparent during the interviews that six of the eight participants had definite personal goals and aspirations in terms of sport and future work opportunities. These ideals appeared to encourage them to complete their schooling. Chaz and Sam expressed the desire to finish grade 12 and to attend a College afterwards *om verder te gaan leer (to study further)* (Sam). Three of the participants, Jimmy, Abe and Jake, dreamt to become excellent soccer players – they practised regularly, showed commitment, and seemingly appreciated the opportunities to be coached at school. It became evident that the sport activities at school played a considerable role in their decision to attend school:

*Ja, ek wil nou 'n sokkerspeler word mevrou...ek oefen twee keer in 'n week. Dinsdae en Donderdae juffrou. Op daardie dae oefen ek vir verskillende klubs. Ja...soos op my ouderdom toe ek 15 was, juffrou, toe speel ek saam met die senior mense. Grootmense juffrou. Nou, daar het ek begin...kan ek nou sê sterk geraak en nou...maar soos u nou kan sien, meeste van ons gaan klaarmaak vir die Western Cape team (Yes, I want to become a*

*soccer player, Missus...I practice twice a week. Tuesdays and Thursdays, Miss. On those days I practice for different clubs. Yes...as on my age when I was 15, Miss, I played with the senior guys. Grownups, Miss. It was there that I started...I can now say became strong and now...but as you can see now, most of us are going to prepare for the Western Cape team) (Jimmy).*

*Ek wil graag 'n sokkerstêr word. Ons oefen Dinsdag, Donderdag en Woensdag. Partykeer Vrydag ook. Oefen by die skool, speel by die skool en oefen vir die klubs (I would like to be a soccer star. We practise Tuesday, Thursday and Wednesday. Sometimes also on Friday. Practice at school, play at school and practise for the clubs) (Abe).*

Jake's additional aim was to get a good job one day: *...my droom is ek wil die beste sokkerspeler ter wêreld word...my tweede droom is om 'n goeie werk te het...(my dream is I want to become the best soccer player in the world...my second dream is to have a good job...).* Candice said that she would like to design clothes in the future, as mentioned in section 4.2.1.

#### **4.4.1.3 Personal Challenges**

Several of the participants mentioned personal challenges that could possibly place them at greater risk than other learners of dropping out of school. Jimmy and Jake spoke about their undesirable living conditions that led to health problems and as a result being absent from school:

*juffrou, ek wil nie eintlik dit saam met mense gepraat het nie...ons het in die huis gebly, maar die huise was nie soos afgepleister binne nie...toe het ek nou TB in my rugwerwels gekry...(Miss, I did not actually want to talk this with people...we lived in this house, but these houses were not like plastered on the inside...then I got TB in my spine) (Jimmy).*

The embarrassing behaviour by family members appeared to cause emotional difficulties for some of the participants, which made it difficult to focus on their school work. Jake described how he had often been embarrassed by his dad's drinking problem: *ek wietie waar bly my pa nie...ek sien hom nou en dan dan's hy bietjie dronk, dan praat ek met hom. Hy kommie na ons toe nie. Ek kry hom innie pad (I don't know where my dad stays...I see him now and then, then he's a bit drunk then I talk to him. He doesn't come to us. I meet him in the street) (Jake).*

Chaz explained why he found the behaviour of his older brothers unacceptable and difficult to deal with on an emotional level:

*Die 17 jaar een het die skool gelos in standard vyf en die ander een in standard drie. Hulle gebruik altwee drugs, hulle gebruik tik [methamphetamine] en Mandrax en hulle werk nie. En die een het 'n baba ja, maar elke dag skel my ma of hulle skel en vloek op my ma en op my en my uncle en antie. Hulle sal nie miskien se mammie ons het gaan rondloop om te kyk waar ons geld kan kry nie, of hier is vir mammie R25 of R30 nie (The 17-year-old one dropped school in standard five and the other one in standard three. They both do drugs, they use tik [methamphetamine] and Mandrax and they don't work. And the one has a baby, yes, but every day my mother scolds or they scold and swear at my mother and at me and my uncle and aunt. They will not perhaps say mommy we have walked about to see where we can get money, or here is R25 or R30 for you, Mother)(Chaz).*

Health-related issues seemed very prevalent and appeared to cause additional stress in the lives of several of the participants. Jimmy elaborated on his problems with tuberculosis (TB), as mentioned above, and Lily formerly struggled with health problems due to methamphetamine use and smoking. This led to them being absent from school for long periods of time, which put them at risk of dropping out:

*...toe het ek TB in my rugwerwels gekry juffrou. Toe moet ek my behandeling gebruik, toe het ek weer reggekome...toe het my rug werwel platgeval...ek was ook in die scan gewees...toe kyk hulle en sien hulle ek is besig om by te kom...(then I got TB in my spine, Miss. Then I had to use my treatment, then I recovered...then my spine went flat...I was in the scan as well...they looked and saw I was coming to...) (Jimmy).*

Several of the family members in Chaz's family had died, two received disability grants due to accidents, and another suffered from epilepsy. These circumstances appeared to add financial and emotional pressure to his life, which reportedly made it difficult to focus on his academic school work:

*Ek het by my ouma grootgeword. Sy is nou oorlede en toe het ek by my antie gaan bly. Sy is ook oorlede. Twee dae voor Krismis het sy pille gedrink in 2002. Sy was in 'n koma en hulle het pille uitgepomp, maar kon nie alles uitkry nie. Ek het nog 'n antie en uncle, maar hulle is altwee op disability. My uncle is geslaan met 'n graaf van agter af. Hy is nou gestrem – sy arm en sy been. My antie kry epileptiese aanvalle (I grew up with my*

*grandmother. She has now passed away and then I stayed with my aunt. She also passed away. Two days before Christmas she took pills in 2002. She was in a coma and they pumped out pills, but couldn't get all out. I have another aunt and uncle, but they both are on disability. My uncle was hit with a spade from behind. He is now disabled – his arm and his leg. My aunt gets epileptic fits) (Chaz).*

Furthermore, Rose was very concerned that she might lose her mother who suffered from lung cancer: *ek voel bietjie sleg, ek wil haar nie verloor nie anders is ek allenig...(I feel a bit awkward, I don't want to lose her otherwise I am alone) (Rose).* Lily's mother was unemployed as a result of arthritis. It became evident from the data that concern about the well-being of extended family members could place the learners at risk of increased disengagement from school and education, and eventual drop out.

As mentioned in section 4.4.1.1, the prevalence of substance abuse and its implications resurfaced continuously throughout the interviews. It became apparent that it was a main reason for learners' loss of interest in school. The participants' involvement with drugs illustrated some personal difficulties regarding giving up, but also illustrated some personal strengths as several of them managed to stop and showed a renewed interest in school.

Jimmy spoke about the high prevalence of drugs in the community. This appeared to make it difficult for individuals to be *different (Jimmy)*, and to resist participation in such activities. He explained that drugs such as *buttons* [Mandrax] and *dagga* [marijuana] were mostly used by youngsters; some whilst at school and others only during week-ends. He indicated that he was not in favour thereof, as he had witnessed the negative impact that it had on the lives of others, and he had his focus on his sport. Lily was proud of the fact that she managed to stop using methamphetamine and marijuana. She explained the negative impact it had on her behaviour, her school experience and her life in general, and expressed the desire to stop smoking in the future: *ek het 'n jaar die tik gebruik en so maar ek het nie dagga so baie nie...nooit weer doen nie...al was ek nou doen is entjies [cigarettes] rook...ek wil dit ook ophou...(I have used tik for a year and so but I did not dagga so much...never do again...all I do now is smoking entjies [cigarettes] ...I want to stop this as well...) (Lily).* According to Lily, substance use had the effect that she did not want to attend school any longer, and explained that her brother left school in grade 10 as a result of *buttons* [Mandrax] and *dagga* [marijuana] use and *drinking* [alcohol] (Lily). The community member confirmed that the high prevalence of drugs presented problems in the community. She was of the opinion that, especially the use of methamphetamine, had changed the nature of the learners:

*...hierdie tik...die dwelm...het baie van die kinders se jeug vernietig, want die kinders is nie meer kinders nie...hulle is meer aggressief. Die ouers vertel dat hulle kind die duvet van hulle bed afgesteel het om vir tik te gaan verruil (this tik...the drug...has destroyed many of the children's youth, as the children are not children any more...they are kind of aggressive. The parents say that their child stole the duvet from their bed to swop it for tik) (R3).*

Jake, on the other hand, was suspended for a certain period due to bad behaviour. He explained that he was very stubborn at the time, and that he had been using methamphetamine, marijuana and cigarettes for about three years on a regular basis at the time of his suspension. He could not really afford the drugs, and it affected his schooling as well as his health. He was able to overcome his personal struggles with these substances and reportedly stopped with support from ABBA [literal meaning: to carry someone] (a community support programme). He proudly reported that he had not used any substances for about a year at the time of the study: *Ek het skool gelos partykeer, toe ek getref standerd 7...toe't ek gelos...vir 'n jaar omtrent...ma toe't ek besluit ek kom wee skool toe, en daar vanaan af, toe' ek oppad (I sometimes dropped school, then I hit standard 7...then I dropped school...for about a year...but then I decided to go back to school, and since then, I'm on my way) (Jake).*

Candice had been using marijuana and alcohol on a daily basis for about one year. This led to a disinterest in school. Since then, she has become aware of the consequences thereof and has stopped using these substances: *...kan jou siek maak. Maak jou snaaks voel. Jy kan verkrag word. Jy weet nie wat om jou aangaan nie.. (...can make you sick. Make you feel funny. You can be raped. You don't know what is happening around you..) (Candice).* She explained that two of her friends had left school – one due to falling pregnant and the other due to methamphetamine and dagga use.

Chaz described a difficult family life due to two of his brothers who left school as a result of substance abuse, who were dealing in drugs and who were unemployed. Both of them used methamphetamine and mandrax that reportedly affected their behaviour in a negative manner and was the cause of regular family conflict:

*hulle rook saam en worry nie...my ma het 'n interdik teen hulle gekry...al wat hy kom doen is koop Tik en buttons en as hy klaar is kom hy huis toe en vra vir my ma 'n stukkie brood...(they smoke together and don't worry...my mother got an interdict against*

*them...the only thing he does is buying tik and buttons and when he has finished he comes home and asks my mother for a piece of bread...)* (Chaz).

Chaz continued to explain how his brothers' behaviour caused concern for his mothers' well-being as they did not show any respect towards their elders, often became physical during arguments and often get into trouble with the police:

*In die oggend het hulle nog nie eens hulle gesig gewas nie, dan is dit ma se die en ma se daai, dan soek hulle kos. Ek wat skoolgaan, eet nie eers in die oggend nie...ek worry net oor wat maak my ma, skel daai twee...hulle vloek – het geen respek – op my ma, antie en se net wat hulle wil. Hulle worry nie (In the mornings they have not even washed their faces, then it is mother's this and mother's that, then they want food. I, attending school do not even eat in the morning...I worry about what my mother is doing, do the two of them scold...they swear – have no respect – at my mother, aunt and say what they want. They do not worry)* (Chaz).

He explained how it affected his ability to focus and concentrate at school: *ek het te min gewerk...my mind was nie by die skool nie...(I worked too little...my mind wasn't on school...)* (Chaz). He indicated that the emotional pressure had an impact on his ability to concentrate at school and therefore affected his academic performance. This led to a disinterest in school and grade repetition, which increased his risk of dropping out of school.

It became evident that such personal challenges as described above had a definite impact on the learner's ability to cope at school and at home, which could cause him/her to drop out of school.

#### **4.4.2 Family Systems factors contributing to and mediating dropout**

Family circumstances appeared to present real difficulties for learners and emerged as a possible contributor to the tendency to drop out of school. Seven of the eight participants spoke about family difficulties that could possibly have had an impact on their school attendance. On the other hand, some also commented on the encouragement and financial and emotional support they received from family members.

##### **4.4.2.1 Family Difficulties**

Five participants from the individual semi-structured interviews reported that they lived in single-parent families with absent fathers with whom they seldom had any contact. This appeared to lead to increased family conflict, lack of academic support and a lack of parental

monitoring and discipline, which often resulted in problem behaviours which could lead to eventual school drop out:

*...my pa bly nie meer by my nie...(my father does not live with me any more) (Rose);*

*...my pa bly nie in die huis nie...hy bly by sy vrou (my father does not live in this house...he lives with his wife) (Jimmy);*

*...my pa bly by sy eie ma...(my father lives with his own mother) (Lily);*

*...het sonder pa grootgeword (grew up without a father) (Candice)...”.*

Single-parenting therefore did not seem to be an unusual occurrence in the wider community. This was confirmed by the community member, who explained that many learners were unsupervised at home due to the fact that single mothers had to go to work. This led to a lack of discipline, which often resulted in learners getting involved with substances which could lead to a lack of interest and them dropping out of school: *...baie keer is daar nie beheer nie...waar die kind 'n enkel ouer het waar die ma werk miskien van vroeg tot laat en dan raak hy betrokke met die verkeerde goed...(there is often no control...where the child has a single parent where the mother perhaps works from early to late and then he gets involved with the wrong things...(R3).*

The focus group participants were of the opinion that the learners relied heavily on teachers for emotional and educational support due to lack of parental care and presence: *Want hier is soveel kinders wat uit gesinne kom wat, jy weet baie kinders praat nie eers met hulle ouers nie. Die onderwyser neem byvoorbeeld 'n ma-figuur in vir die kind (Because here are so many children who come from families that you know many children do not even speak to their parents. The teacher for instance becomes the mother figure for the child) (R2).*

The focus group participants expressed the views that the majority of the learners at the school had to cope with challenging family circumstances on a daily basis. They confirmed that most learners were from single-parent families, with absent fathers and the mother as head of the family. Others were raised by grandparents. The apparent lack of discipline typical of such households, was viewed by the focus group participants as a main contributor to the learner's tendency not to attend school or to leave school before matriculating:

*en nou sit ons met geweldig baie kinders wat uit 'n enkelouer huisgesin kom waar daar net 'n ma is, of dan bly hulle by ouma...hier is soveel kinders wat uit gesinne kom wat, jy weet baie kinders praat nie eers met hulle ouers nie...die onderwyser neem byvoorbeeld*



*'n ma-figuur in vir die kind. Die huislike omstandighede waar enkel ouers is en waar daar nie genoeg dissipline is nie en waar die ouers nie hulle hand op die kinders hou nie. Wanneer die ouma in beheer is, is daar nie beheer in die huis nie...kinders sal maklik wegbly van die skool af en ek weer die ouer gaan nie op-check nie...(and now we sit with a large number of children coming from single-parent families where there is only a mother, or then they live with their grandmother...here are so many children who come from families that you know they don't even speak to their parents...the teacher, for instance becomes a mother figure for the child. The household circumstances where there are single parents and there is not enough discipline and the parents do not take care of children. When the grandmother is in control, there is no discipline in the house...children would easily stay away from school and I know the parent will not check up) (R2).*

Two of the participants, Jake and Abe, reported living with their grandparents due to family difficulties. Jake lost his mother when he was four years old, and moved in with his grandmother as his father was drinking heavily. Abe said he preferred to live with his grandparents due to his parents' drinking habits: *hulle twee het geskei en toe verkoop hy die huis...maar ek bly nie by hulle nie...bly by my oupa, maar gaan naweke na hulle toe...my ma en pa hulle drink te veel...(the two of them divorced and then he sold the house...but I do not live with them...live with my grandfather, but go to them on week-ends...my mother and father, they drink too much) (Abe).*

One of the themes that emerged from the collages was love for their families and the desire to be part of a happy family. Three of the participants included pictures of families doing activities together and interacting in a happy and positive manner. Two participants included pictures of happily married couples and indicated during the discussion that they would like to be happily married in the future.

Most of the participants' households consisted of several extended family members, which appeared to lead to increased family conflict. This was confirmed by the member of the community. Six participants spoke about experiencing such regular family conflict, which often seemed to occur around the shortage of money, lack of basic needs, different opinions about substance abuse, parental conflict and physical abuse, stealing and/or feelings of being treated unfairly. It transpired from the interviews that such family conflicts often led to increased anxiety and distress in learners, which could possibly result in behavioural difficulties, but appeared to make them feel less comfortable to attend school: *...baie van die kinders kan nie*



*cope met hulle omstandighede by die huis nie, soos finansiele omstandighede, en drank en dwelm misbruik.(Many of the children cannot cope with circumstances at home, such as financial circumstances, and liquor and drug abuse.) (R3).*

Jimmy and Lily shared how lack of money often caused conflict in their families. Jake remembered how his father used to abuse his mother physically: *en as ek sien hy's nou dronk en ongesteld, dan wil hy van my ma praat...en ek...dan was ek klein, dan slaan hy my ma, en dan kyk ek hom net so aan...(and when I see he is drunk and unwell, he wants to talk about my mother...and I...I was small then, then he hits my mother and then I only look at him...)* (Jake). Candice mentioned how her mother and the rest of the family often argued about unnecessary issues, and *oor hoe ek is en wat in die huis gebeur. Skel sommer onnodig. Skel te baie (about how I am and what happens in the house. Scolds unnecessary for no particular reason. Scolds too often)* (Candice).

In Chaz's family, conflict arose around violation of trust, substance abuse, lack of money and basic needs, overcrowded living conditions and relationship issues between his siblings and his mother. He described how his brother's girlfriend stole their personal and household articles to sell them for drugs:

*Sy bly langsaaan ons. Sy het haar ouma besteel. Haar ouma se stryksters en sulke goeters. Dan sit haar ouma haar uit, maar dan vat haar ouma har weer. My ma het gesê sy kan by ons bly...die eerste keer wat sy by ons gebly het, het sy my broer se kamera verkoop. Sy het dit in die wasgoed gesit...toe sit sy dit onder die wasgoed waar niemand dit kan sien nie...my broer het kwaad geraak...maar toe gaan hulle weer tik en so-aan (She lives next door to us. She stole from her grandmother. Her granny's irons and such things. Then her grandmother turns her out, but takes her back. My mother said she could stay with us...the first time she stayed with us, she sold my brother's camera. She put it in the washing...then she put it under the washing where no-one could see it...my brother got angry...but then they went off to tik and so on)* (Chaz).

Abe's parents reportedly often argued about irrelevant matters when under the influence of alcohol: *Hulle stry so onder mekaar en baklei maar ek weet nie waarom nie (They quarrel among themselves and fight but I do not know about what)* (Abe). Only one participant, Sam, reported very little family conflict.

Troubled sibling relationships appeared to contribute to family conflict as was reported by Jimmy, Lily and Chaz. Jimmy found it difficult to get on with his smaller brother as he often

acted in a disrespectful manner towards the others in the family. He had disregard for the possessions of others and often threatened him (Jimmy) with a knife (as mentioned in section 4.2.1) when he reprimanded him: *hy's 'n mannetjie, hy gryp sommer 'n mes juffrou, maar hy het nie die hart om aan my te steek nie...*(*he is a little chap, he easily grabs a knife, Miss, but he does not have the heart to stab me...*) (Jimmy). Chaz mentioned several unpleasant incidents between him and his siblings during the interview. He found it difficult to deal with his brother's behaviour when under the influence of substances, as they often insulted his mother, stole household goods, and in addition, made unfair demands on the rest of the family members: *dan verwag die groot een wat 'n kind het, wat een jaar oud is, my ma maak die kind groot van hy gebore is...*(*then the big one who has a child of one year old is expecting, my mother has been looking after the child since his birth*) (Chaz). He did not seem to have any relationship with his stepbrothers who were in jail at the time. The atmosphere in their household appeared very strained, which seemed to be the reason for him building his own prefabricated house in the back yard: *...ghetto'tjie...nee, ek het my eie ghetto'tjie...ek slaap alleen. Ek het self geslat vir my...by die huis in die jaart...*(*little ghetto...no, I have my own ghetto...I sleep alone. I myself put it up...at the house in the yard...*) (Chaz). He explained that the regular family conflict at home affected his ability to concentrate at school thereby affecting his academic performance.

Two participants, Jimmy and Candice, explained that family conflict often arose in their homes as a result of them being treated unfairly by their parents. Jimmy explained that arguments often took place when he asked his parents to buy him something:

*my ouers, ek het 'n probleem met my ouers, juffrou...nou en dan is daar 'n stryery in die huis juffrou as ek byvoorbeeld iets vra juffrou en hulle wil dit nie koop nie juffrou, dan word daar 'n stryery...ek wil te veel verduur juffrou...*(*my parents, I have a problem with my parents, Miss...now and then there is a quarrel in the house, Miss, when I for instance want something, Miss, and they do not want to buy it, Miss, then there is a quarrel...I want to tolerate too much, Miss...*) (Jimmy).

Candice felt that her parents often interfered unfairly in her friendships and often treated her badly without reason: *hulle skel sommer vir enige iets...ook as ek iets laat val het...skel sommer onnodig...somtyds word ek geslaan, maar dan loop ek uit die huis uit...*(*they scold for anything for no particular reason...also when I drop something...scold unnecessary...sometimes I get hit, but then I walk out the house...*) (Candice). Incidents such as these seemed to cause parent-child conflict in some of the households, which appeared to often be aggravated by substance use, as described by Lily:

*omdat ek so met verkeerde vrinne [vriende] deurmekaar was en so...en my ma het altyd vir my gesê daardie vriende wat jy het is nie reg nie. Toe wil ek nie vir haar hoor nie en so aan. En toe agterna toe ek sien ook maar self dat hulle nie reg is nie vir my en so aan...toe bly ek by die huis en toe is ek nie weer so baie onbeskof met my ma nie...(because I was involved with the wrong friends...and my mother always used to say that the friends you have are not right. Then I did not want to listen to her and so on. And afterwards I also saw myself they were not right for me and so on...then I stayed home and then I was not so very rude with my mother again...) (Lily).*

It became evident from the interviews that stressors such as regular family conflict could detract from academic achievement and school attendance, which in turn could result in learners leaving school early.

Data indicated that overcrowded living conditions, and parental substance abuse appeared to be a general problem for half of the participants. These difficulties were identified as common problems in the community by the community member (R3). It became evident that such circumstances made it difficult for learners to sleep well and complete their homework, which could possibly contribute towards academic underachievement and later dropping out of school.

Lily was one of seven people living in a two-bedroomed flat: *Daar is sewe in ons familie (There are seven in our family) (Lily)*. Candice and her eight family members also lived in a two-bedroomed house. Both of them explained that such conditions made it difficult to do any school work at home and that they preferred to complete their homework at school: *as ek uit die skool kom dan is my suster en nefie by die huis. Ek doen eerder my skoolwerk by die skool (when I come out of school then my sister and nephew are at our house. I rather do my homework at school) (Candice)*.

Chaz and Abe reported living under similar circumstances, which they regarded as difficult conditions. Jimmy dreamt that his sport abilities would create an opportunity to improve their living conditions. These aspirations seemed to play a positive role in his decision to attend school:

*Ek wil eintlik 'n professionele sokkerspeler word om my ma-hulle uit die situasie te red waar hulle bly juffrou...want ons bly in een van die huise juffrou. Ek slaap, ek is al 17al, en ek slaap nog steeds saam met my ma-hulle in een kamer juffrou...met my broer and en my ouma...geld is 'n duiwel maar jy moet geld het om goeters te kan bekostig in die lewe, juffrou...(Actually I want to become a professional soccer player to save my mother and*

*them from the situation where they live, Miss...because we live in one of the houses, Miss. I sleep, I am 17 already, and I still sleep with my mother and them in one room, Miss...with my brother and my grandmother...money is a devil but you've got to have money to afford things in life, Miss...)* (Jimmy).

#### **4.4.2.2 Family Support**

Despite several mentioning family difficulties and family conflict as described in section 4.4.2.1 above, six of the participants spoke about the valued support they received from one or both parents and/or other family members. They indicated that they relied on such support and guidance to make decisions about issues such as friendships and whether or not to complete their schooling. Such support appeared to serve as motivation for these participants to attend and not to drop out of school before completing their studies.

Data indicated that several of the participants particularly valued the support they received from their mothers. Rose valued a good relationship with her mother, even though she did not seem to be able to rely on her for much support due to her illness: *Ek en sy kom goed oor die weg maar sy is nou baie siek en die dokter het gesê sy moes bereid wees om 'n paar maande te lê* (She and I get along but she is currently very ill and the doctor said she must be prepared to lie for a few months) (Rose). Lily, Candice and Chaz also seemed to have particularly close relationships with their mothers and appeared to regard their mothers' guidance and concern regarding friendships, drug use and school completion as important in their lives. This support appeared to assist them in their decision-making processes, which resulted in them attending school more regularly after being absent for periods of time:

*My ma het gesê ek moet kies of ek moet nie daar loop nie. Toe luister ek maar vir my ma. My vriende was kwaad vir my* (My mother said I must choose or I must not go there. The I gave up and listened to my mother. My friends were angry at me) (Candice).

*Dis my ma. My ma het met my gepraat en my uncle en ekself wat op die ou einde wat vir my nou self gedink het. En my hele familie ons doen huisbesoek en toe praat hulle almal saam met my oor die goed* (It's my mother. My mother spoke to me and my uncle and I myself who thought for myself in the end. And my whole family we do house calling and then they all talked to me about these things) (Lily).

Chaz explained that it was his mother's desire that he should finish school: *My ma wil hê ek moet klaar maak. Haar begeerte is vir my om klaar te maak* (My mother wants me to finish. Her desire

*is for me to finish) (Chaz). He seemed to value spending time with his mother and spoke about how much he enjoyed cooking with his mother: ja, ek help my ma kos maak. Ek wil 'n kok raak eendag. Ek hou van kos maak. Dan leer my ma my baie. Ek maak partykeer kos as my ma siek is dan vat ek oor (yes, I help my mother to prepare food. I want to become a cook one day. I like cooking. Then my mother teaches me a lot. I sometimes make food when my mother is ill then I take over) (Chaz).*

Sam felt that both his parents and his grandparents played a supportive role in his life as they encouraged him to attend school and complete homework tasks:

*Ek het 'n goeie verhouding met my Pa en met my Ma. Hulle moedig my aan met my skoolwerk. My ouma en oupa bly ook by ons. Hulle is sterk kerkmense en speel 'n goeie rol in my lewe...ons baklei nie baie by die huis nie (I have a good relationship with my father and with my mother. They encourage me with my school work. My grandmother and grandfather also live with us. They are heavy church people and play a good role in my life...we do not quarrel a lot at home) (Sam).*

Despite not living with them, Lily's father seemed to show genuine concern as he often provided food when they had nothing available at home, and had arranged for Lily to be hospitalised when she had to have her appendix removed. She also appeared to respond to his parental concern in a positive manner as she stopped using Mandrax after he spoke to her. Even though her father did not appear to support her regarding her studies, giving up drugs resulted in her attending school on a more regular basis.

Jimmy, Lily and Chaz mentioned how they appreciated the encouragement they received from their parents to attend and finish school: *...en my ma moedig my aan, en my pa...(and my mother encourages me, and my father...)* (Jimmy).

#### **4.4.3 Peer Group Systems factors contributing to and mediating dropout**

Acceptance in peer relations is an important issue during adolescence. As discussed in section 2.2.2, peer influences can be powerful during this phase of development and can either promote positive interactions or apply pressure to engage in less socially accepted behaviours (Sadock & Sadock, 2007, p.39). Research shows that positive peer relationships could encourage learners to attend school, whereas an association with learners with low academic expectations or deviant behaviour could encourage learners to drop out of school (Cairns et al. 1989, as cited in Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2008).

#### 4.4.3.1 Peer Relationships

The data indicated that the participants' responses varied in respect of their friendships. The majority of them seemed to have temporary instead of long-lasting friendships and did not identify strong peer relationships as motivators for attending school. Jimmy described his relationships as fluctuating: *...my vriende is orraait juffrou, maar...hulle is die een dag so en die ander dag gaan hulle so wees...dan is daar party dae dat ek net allleen wil wees...(my friends are alright, Miss, but...the one day they are like this and the other day they will be like that..then there are those days that I just want to be alone...)*. Lily, Jake, Candice and Chaz spoke about having a few caring and supportive friends, but they did not seem to be lasting friendships: *Ek speel met die vriende hier by die skool, en so aan, maar by die huis is ons nie saam nie (I play with the friends here at school, and so on, but at home we are not together) (Lily)*. Abe spoke about his four friends: *Ek het twee, ek het vier vriende hier by die skool...(I have two, I have four friends here at school...(Abe)*.

It transpired from the interviews that six of the eight participants had been involved in friendships that, in their view, had a negative impact on their lives. It became evident that such negative peer relationships could influence a learner's decision whether to attend or drop out of school as they explained how being involved in activities with such friends had encouraged them to be absent from school. Furthermore, some of the participants spoke about feeling rejected after their decision to dissociate themselves with such friends.

Chaz described how he used to sniff glue and rob people together with some friends when he was younger. This reportedly fuelled a disinterest in school. It was reportedly only after he decided to join ABBA's drug-free programme (supportive programme) that he managed to stop using most substances and changed his circle of friends: *...ek het saam met die verkeerde vriende geloop. Ons het dorp toe gegaan en gesteel en sulke dinge en some lalties gerob...(I was involved with the wrong friends. We went to town and stole and such things and robbed lighties...)* (Chaz). Abe explained the reason for him repeating grade 10 as: *ek het agter my vriende geloop. Ek het nie huiswerk en so gedoen nie. Toe ek by die huis gekom het, het ek net uitgetrek en dan loop pyp en dan speel ek (I followed my friends. I did not do homework and so. When I got home, I undressed, piped and played)* (Abe).

Jake and Candice also described how they used to engage in less socially accepted behaviours, such as substance use with their friends. They felt that these previous friends did not have a

positive influence on them, and described feeling rejected by these friends after they stopped using the substances:

*die wat ek nou het, hulle is baie goeie vriende van my, en ek kan sien hulle gee om vir my. Ma die vriende wat ek voorheen gehet het, hulle het dagga gerook...en sigarette gerook...ek was saam met die groep, maar toe't ek 'n besluit gemaak en het nie verder nie. Hulle het my uitgejou, heelyd, ma ek het dit geface ja (those I have now, they are very good friends of mine, and I can see they care about me. But the friends I had previously, they smoked dagga...and cigarettes...I was with the group, but then I made a decision and did not further. They booed me, all the time, but I faced it, yes) (Jake).*

The focus group participants explained that some learners seemed to find it difficult to withstand peer pressure to leave school:

*Hulle is bevriend met kinders wat nie meer in die skool is nie, en nou voel hulle half gepressurized om skool te verlaat...die kind het nog nie daai sense of responsibility van ek wil skool klaarmaak nie...en sal die maklikste uitweg kies...(They are friends with kids who are no longer at school and now they feel sort of pressurised to leave school...the child does not yet have that sense of responsibility of I want to finish school...and will take the easiest way out...) (R1).*

They added that peer pressure also played a significant role where substance abuse was concerned.

It became evident from the data that the participants found it difficult to break ties with old friends once they had decided to change their lifestyles. Some strategies that these participants seemed to apply to make the process easier were to only socialise at school and not at home, or to adopt an attitude of indifference to the approval of friends.

Lily, Chaz and Abe reported a non-care attitude regarding the approval of friends, and said that they preferred to have fewer rather than several friends: *...en toe sê ek vir my ma vrinne is nie alles in die lewe en so aan nie. Jy't alleen in die lewe gekom en so. Ek kan, ek worry nie, ek kan heel dag in die huis in bly en so aa" (...and then I said to myself but friends are not everything in life and so on. You came into life alone and so. I can, I don't worry, I can stay at home the whole day and so on...) (Lily).*



Jimmy spoke about relationships in the classroom and explained how difficult it was to concentrate in class when others were disruptive. He felt that he often got into trouble as a result of the behaviour of others. He felt that this was unfair treatment and identified it as one of the reasons why he did not enjoy school that much:

*toe doen ons ons werk wat ons moet. Toe gaat die kinders aan toe sê ek maar net vir die mannetjie wat langs my sit wat ook saam daar kan kan jy nou sien hoe gaan die kinders aan...die manne wat erg, erger as ons in die klas is, juffrou. Maar julle haal ons uit...(then we did our work that we had to. Then the kids went on then I only told the chap next to me who was also there can you see how the kids behave...the chaps who are bad, worse than us in class, Miss. But you turn us out...) (Jimmy).*

None of the participants spoke about having been involved in romantic relationships, although the prospect of getting married in the future emerged from the collages of two participants. This did not emerge as a contributing or mediating factor to high school dropout.

#### **4.4.4 Environmental and Community Issues contributing to and mediating dropout**

As this study was approached from an eco-systemic perspective, it was deemed essential to explore the impact that the wider social context and environment had on the individual participants' decisions to either leave or remain in school. The focus group participants described the context of the study as a *high-risk* area due to the high prevalence of unemployment, lack of safety, high substance abuse and poverty. They explained that most members of the community experienced financial difficulties: *dit is 'n omgewing wat baie sosio-ekonomiese probleme het...wat ek bedoel met sosio-ekonomiese probleme die is mense wat finansieël swaarkry...(this is an environment that has many socio-economic problems...what I mean with socio-economic problems these are people who suffer financially...)* (R1). Both participants felt that such difficulties could cause learners to leave school before completing their studies, either to earn money to provide for the households, or due to lack of academic support. The member of the community confirmed the above findings when she explained that most people in the community experienced conditions of unemployment and lack of money:

*werkloosheid is 'n groot kopseer...'n groot deel van die mense is werkloos en ek het met kinders gewerk met agterstallige skoolfooie...plus minus 300 kinders by die skool kry kwytskelding van skoolfooie as gevolg van dat hulle ouers werkloos is...(unemployment is a huge problem...large numbers of people are unemployed and I have worked with*



*children with arrears school fees...plus minus 300 children at school receive pardoning for school fees as a result of their parents being unemployed...)* (R3).

#### **4.4.4.1 Issues Concerning Wellness and Safety in the Community**

Gangsterism and violence were reportedly prevalent in the community, but the participants indicated that it did not always result in learners not attending school. The focus group participants were of the opinion that gang activity had decreased in the community: *"...gangsterism het bietjie afgeneem. Ons kry dit nie meer baie nie, ons het nie daai effek in die gebied nie. Ek kan dit vir u sê dit was baie hoog maar vir die afgelope paar jaar, vier of vyf, het ons nie meer hierdie probleem grootliks nie (...gangsterism has decreased a bit. We don't find it here any more, we don't have that effect in this area. This I can tell you it was very serious but for the last few years, four or five, we largely do not have this problem)* (R2).

Only two of the participants, Jimmy and Chaz, commented on the presence of theft, gang activity and violence in the area: *Die meeste ouens wat in gangs is is uit die skool uit, maar jy kan in 'n gang wees en in die skool wees (Most guys who are in gangs have left school, but you can be part of a gang and attend school)* (Jimmy). It therefore did not appear to have an influence on the learners' likelihood to attend school. Chaz spoke about his uncle's injuries after a violent attack: *...is geslaan deur 'n graaf van agter af (...was hit by a spade from behind)* (Chaz). The focus group participants indicated that the prevalence of violence and gang activity had decreased in the community due to an increased police presence.

Substance abuse, drug dealing and the consequences thereof, appeared to be ongoing occurrences in the specific community. It seemed to present many challenges for the learners, as many of them, their parents or someone in their extended families, had used substances at some stage of their lives. Substance use by individual learners often resulted in them losing interest and not attending school. This was discussed in section 4.4.1.3. In addition, the presence of drug dealers and availability of such substances in the community made it a challenge to resist.

Five participants spoke openly about their substance use. Chaz, despite his own marijuana use, explained that he found it extremely difficult to deal with his brothers' behaviour when under the influence. Jimmy felt that the prospect of earning money as a drug dealer and possible gains from break-ins, lured many children from school before matriculating:

*...dan sê hulle sommer los die skoolfooie, dan gaan miskien nou aan met klubs en so, verkoop drugs of werk vir iemand wat drugs verkoop. Steel, beland in die tronk ...*(then

*they say leave the school fees for no particular reason, then perhaps continue clubbing and so, sell drugs or work for someone who sells drugs. Steal, end up in prison ...)* (Jimmy).

Jake felt proud of the fact that he had managed to stop using methamphetamine, and explained some of the effects on his health: *...sommer in my en dan voel ek sommer lekker, ma as dit uittrek voel jy siektes...(...for no particular reason in me and then I feel very good, but when it is out, one feels sick...)*(Jake). The school seemed to address such issues as Candice mentioned an enjoyable grade nine camp and there were talks by the headmaster where they received guidance as learners:

*Die hoof het gepraat dat daar kinders is met armoede by die huis, kosprobleme, tik probleme, bakleiery en so aan...kinders wat dwelms gebruik en verwagting is...ek het na 'n kamp gegaan vir kinders wat probleme het en dwelms gebruik – ek wil weer so 'n kamp doen waar mens kan leer. Hulle moet die kinders reghelp...)(The headmaster spoke about children with poverty at home, food problems, tik problems, quarrels and so on...children using drugs and children who are pregnant...I went to a camp for children with problems and who used drugs – I want to do such a camp again where one can learn. They must show the kids the right way...)(Candice).*

Lily, Jake and Chaz seemed quite aware of the behavioural and physical consequences of substance use and mentioned the following: *disrespectful behaviour(Lily); non-care attitude about school in particular(Chaz); nausea(Jake); pain(Jake); hallucinations(Lily); affects on hearing(Lily); insomnia(Lily); dry throat(Lily); loss of appetite(Lily;Jake); feeling lazy(Chaz); enlarged pupils(Chaz); long-term brain damage and feeling strange and oblivious(Lily;Chaz).*

The focus group participants re-iterated that substance abuse was very common in the school and the community. This reportedly led to some learners dropping out of school. Furthermore they reported a noticeable decline in aggressive behaviour of learners, which they believed was attributed to a change in drug type popularity. They explained a shift from methamphetamine use to marijuana use since 2004. Learners presented with fewer behavioural difficulties as a result, which decreased confrontations between teachers and learners. This contributed to a more positive school environment, which made it less likely for learners to drop out of school:

*...hier van 2004 af was daar 'n geweldige toename in tik...ek dink die tik saak het 'n bietjie geswaai en die tik het veroorsaak dat die kinders 'n bietjie opstandig was...dit het die verhoudinge bietjie vertroebel. Deesdae rook die kinders meer dagga wat 'n ander*

*tipe dwelm is (...as from 2004 there has been an immense increase in tik...I think the tik business has changed and the tik resulted in the children being rebellious...relationships were disturbed. Nowadays kids prefer to smoke dagga that is another type of drug) (R1).*

The focus group participants commented on the shortage of supportive programmes in the community, as it was not possible to refer learners who were experiencing emotional and other difficulties to outside organisations. Existing programmes were reportedly overloaded: *waar daar wel ondersteuningsmiddele is, is hulle self oorlaai...(where there actually are supportive means, they are overloaded themselves) (R2)*. They felt that issues such as these contributed to the learners' tendency to drop out of school. This was only mentioned by one of the participants, Chaz, when he spoke about the lack of supportive programmes for the youth in the community.

Four of the eight participants felt that teenage pregnancy was an issue in the community that could contribute to learners dropping out of school. They were of the opinion that it was almost a fashion for girls to become pregnant. Jimmy explained: *Ek dink nie dis goed om te verwag op so 'n jong ouderdom nie juffrou. Baie mense het al gesê dit is seker nou al 'n mode juffrou om kinders te kry (I don't think it is good to fall pregnant at such a young age, Miss. Many people have said that it has become a trend, Miss, to have children) (Jimmy)*. Lily expressed her viewpoint in her collage where she used a picture of a pregnant girl, subtitled: *om so te verwag vandag se mense dink dit is cool (to be pregnant like this today's people think it is cool) (Lily)*. Some of these girls reportedly left school prematurely, although others seemed to return to school after having given birth.

#### **4.4.4.2 Socio-Economic issues**

Unemployment, low cost housing, overcrowded living conditions and lack of money to provide for basic needs emerged as important issues embedded in this theme. These issues appeared to present individual difficulties to learners that made it difficult to attend school regularly. Focus group participant R2 was of the opinion that the socio-economic circumstances of the learners were the most important determinant of school dropout in the school. He viewed the prevalence of substance abuse as a result thereof: *die sosio-ekonomiese toestand van die kinders maak dat die kinders dit moeilik vind om skool toe te kom...die dwelms is eintlik 'n bysaak – dit is in die gemeenskap (the socio-economic condition of the children makes it difficult for them to come to school...the drugs are actually a matter of minor importance – it is in the community) (R2)*.

Poverty and unemployment surfaced as very real issues in most of the participants' lives, although they reported varying circumstances. Despite the fact that some of the learners

indicated that they had no shortage of basic necessities, it became apparent that difficult living conditions due to poverty, often led to learners leaving school prematurely to earn money for the household.

For example, Rose, Sam, Abe and Jimmy lived in households where both parents were employed. They did not complain about a lack of money for basic needs, but seemed aware that other learners experienced such difficulties. Jimmy felt that it could be a possible reason why some learners left school prematurely: *miskien omstandighede in die huis...geldsake, juffrou...dan besluit hulle dan nou ek is groot genoeg, ek kan die skool los, ek gaan werk vir myself...(maybe circumstances in the home...money matters, Miss...then they decide they are old enough, I can drop school I am going to work for myself) (Jimmy)*. Rose spoke about two friends that left school before completing grade 12 who were unemployed and unable to find work. They reportedly stayed at home all day and used substances frequently. Abe also spoke about two of his friends that were unemployed: *Ek het twee vriende wat skool klaargemaak het...hulle sit net by die huis...hulle werk nog nie...(I have two friends who finished school...they just sit at home...they have not started working yet) (Abe)*.

Findings showed that some of the participants were dependent on the financial support from other family members for their daily needs. For example, Lily's family relied on her aunt's income, disability grants and the occasional support from her father to provide for their basic needs. Jake lived with his grandparents and their household was dependant on his brother's job and his grandparent's pension. In Chaz's household, only his aunt was employed, and there was often a shortage of money and food. He spoke about going to school feeling hungry, and talked about the lack of money for other necessities. He explained that he had often considered leaving school to earn money for the household:

*ek eet nie eers in die oggend nie. Ek drink net 'n koppie koffie. As ek by die skool is raak ek baie honger...as Henko kom bring hulle miskien so brood en appels – dan wag ek maar daarvoor. As ek miskien 'n paar tekkies of broek wil hê, is daar nie geld nie (I don't even eat in the mornings. I only drink a cup of coffee. When I am at school I get very hungry ...when Henko comes they might bring some bread and apples – then I may just as well wait for it. When I perhaps want a pair of tacksies or pants there isn't money) (Chaz).*

*...partykeer dink ek ek wil sommer gaan werk – elke oggend se opstanery werk nie uit nie. Sodat ek kan sien ek verdien my eie geld (...sometimes I think I may just as well go*

*and work – the getting up every morning doesn't work out. So that I can see I am earning my own money) (Chaz).*

The focus group participants also pointed out that poverty and unemployment were common issues in the community and mentioned that many of the learners were unable to afford school fees:

*...baie van die ouers is werkloos en hulle lewe van die grant van die staat en moet skoolfoeie ook betaal...die lewensomstandighede van die kinders is baie moeilik as gevolg van die finansiële omstandighede van die ouers...(many of the parents are unemployed and they live of the grant of the government and must pay school fees as well...the living conditions of the children are very hard as a result of the financial circumstances of the parents..) (R2).*

They re-iterated that no children were ever refused access to the school due to an inability to afford school fees. They explained that, in their view, school dropout was more strongly related to home circumstances and the effects of poverty on their living conditions than school refusal:

*...hy nie kan betaal nie maar hy word nog toegelaat...hy word nie weggewys nie. So dit kan nie 'n rede wees vir die uitvalsyfer nie...vir my gaan dit meer oor kinders se gemotiveerdheid, kinders se omstandighede by die huis (...he cannot pay but he is nevertheless accepted...he is not denied. So it cannot be a reason for the drop-out figure...to me it is more about the children's motivation, circumstances at home) (R2).*

Most of the participants described living in overcrowded living conditions, where rooms were often shared by three or four people, across generations. For example, Lily was one of seven in the household and Candice one of eight. Such conditions seemed to lead to family conflict and presented homework difficulties due to lack of space and privacy. This caused difficulties for some learners to complete their tasks, which could affect their school performance in a negative manner.

Jimmy felt that the bad quality of their house contributed to his health difficulties, which caused him to be absent from school for a certain period of time. Chaz regarded the living conditions of two of his friends that were in rehabilitation as the cause of them dropping out of school. He described the one's house as: *Hulle het nie 'n mooi huis nie – hulle bly in 'n ghetto [prefabricated house] – daar is gate en hy en sy ma en broertjie bly agter by hulle suster in die jaart...(They don't have a nice house – they live in a ghetto [prefabricated house] – there are*

*holes and he and his mother and brother lives with their sister in the yard) (Chaz). The member of the community and the focus group participants endorsed the reality of such living conditions when they explained that many of the learners lived in overcrowded conditions where they relied on the income of a single breadwinner, or pension and/or disability grants:*

*...daar is baie min huise met net 'n gesin...dit is altyd ten minste 'n gesin met 'n gesin...(there are very few houses with only a family...it is always at least a family with a family...) (R3).*

*Ons het hier kinders wat in 'n drie-vetrek huisie bly, waar kinders uitkom waar daar nege is in daardie gesin, en daar is net een broodwinner, verder lewe hulle maar op die grants van die ouma of die kind (We have children here who live in a little three-roomed house, where children come from where there are nine in that family, and there is only one breadwinner, otherwise they make do with the grants of the grandmother or child) (R2).*

The collages illustrated the participants' desire to live in comfortable homes with several rooms as most of them included pictures of attractive homes with beautiful gardens.

#### **4.4.5 School system factors contributing to and mediating school dropout**

The following themes emerged from the data regarding this category: learner/teacher relationships; barriers to learning; motivators for learning; consequences of high school dropout and school resources and facilities.

##### **4.4.5.1 Learner/Teacher Relationships**

Responses varied in relation to teachers at the school. Most of the participants indicated that the support they received from teachers encouraged them to continue their studies.

It transpired from the interviews that six of the participants experienced teachers as supportive, whilst some complained about having been treated unfairly at times: *party van hulle is behulpsaam, party is so-so juffrou (some of them are helpful, some are so-so, Miss) (Jimmy).* Jake spoke about a very supportive teacher who encouraged him to return to school after he had considered dropping out. He especially valued the fact that this teacher kept contact even after he [the teacher] left the school:

*...hy het vir twee jaar hier skool gehou en was lief vir my...daai tyd toe was ek nog deurmekaar...is deur hom wat ek oek vandag reg is. Hy't my altyd gesê: moet nie daai doen nie, gaan klas toe, dan wil ek nie geluister het nie, dan kom vat hy vir my en sê ek doen verkeerd (...he taught at this school and was fond of me...that time I was still confused...is due to him that I am fine today. He always said to me: do not do that, go to your class, then I didn't want to listen, then he fetched me and said I was doing wrong) (Jake).*

Sam explained how the emotional support received from a teacher had a positive influence on his work ethic, school experience and school attendance:

*...hulle wou my skors in die begin van die jaar – ek moes vyf dae uit die skool bly, maar toe het ek met 'n sekere onderwyser gepraat. Nou is my skoolwerk op datum en ek doen my werk. Ek kom ook nie nou meer in detensie nie en is nou meer gehoorsaam (...they wanted to expel me at the beginning of the year – I had to stay away from school for five days, but then I spoke to a certain teacher. Now my school work is up to date and I do my work. I do not come in detention and am more obedient now) (Sam).*

Jake described the teachers as “very good, competent, and not too strict”: *Hulle is baie goed...geemans ordentlik klas en hulle is nie te streng nie (They are very good...teach us in proper manner and are not too strict) (Jake).* Candice agreed with Jake as she had also experienced good support from teachers in terms of her academic work.

Candice valued the support and guidance that she received during a school camp that was organised by the school counsellor. This happened at a time in her life when she was using substances, which could possibly have resulted in her dropping out of school if she continued using drugs.

Chaz's reason for why he liked a particular teacher was genuine personal interest: *...hy weet ek is Rasta – hy help my baie – ek het nie nou klas by hom nie. Hy het my baie gehelp en uplift en dan vra hy wat gaan aan as ek buite is. Ek hou van hom want hy sal vra hoe gaan dit (...he knows I am Rasta – he helps me a lot – I do not have class with him now. He helped and uplifted me a lot and then he would ask what is going on when I am outside. I like him as he would ask how I am) (Chaz).*

Abe explained how the support from a teacher encouraged him to continue school and work harder: *...my een meneer het saam met my gepraat. Maar hy is nie meer hier nie. Hy het laas*



*vorige jaar wat ek gedruip het, toe sê hy ek moet nie skool los nie, ek moet deurkom. Ek moet my sokkies optrek en harder werk (...my one teacher talked to me. But he isn't here any more. He last said previous year when I failed I must not drop school, I must pass. I must pull up my socks and work harder)(Chaz).*

Jimmy and Candice commented on the positive role that the school counsellor fulfilled at the school in terms of emotional support, which appeared to have encouraged them to attend school.

On the other hand, Jimmy and Chaz explained when and why they found some teachers unsupportive. Some reasons for not liking a teacher were insensitivity, and a lack of understanding and feelings of being judged. This could have a negative impact on the learners' motivation for school, even though the participants did not state this explicitly:

*ek hou nie van hom nie...hy kom skool toe om gat te maak. Hy gee klas, maar hy judge vir jou en maak gat van jou in die klas. Miskien kom ek in 'n bad mood by die klas en daar is 'n probleem – nou maak hy jokes in die klas. By die huis is my twee broers probleme (I do not like him...he comes to school to belittle us. He teaches but judges one and belittles one. Perhaps I turn up at school in a bad mood and have problems – now he makes jokes in class. Back home my two brothers are problems) (Chaz).*

Jimmy said that he would appreciate greater understanding from teachers. He described the teachers' reluctance in accepting his altered, more positive attitude towards school:

*...van die onderwysers het, juffrou, nog steeds die gedagte dat jy is soos jy laasjaar gewees het, juffrou,...elkeen het 'n kans om te change in die lewe juffrou. Ek verdien 'n kans...ons besluit nou ons wil nie meer so weer nie...ons raak mos nou groot, juffrou...(some of the teachers, Miss, are still of the opinion that you are that you were last year, Miss...each of us has the chance to change in life, Miss. I deserve a chance...we decide that we do not want to be like that any more...we are getting big now, Miss...)*  
(Jimmy).

Four participants mentioned that they value mutual respect between teachers and learners to a great extent, and indicated that being respected made school a more comfortable place. Abe, in particular, felt that, even though most of the teachers were helpful, some others treated learners in a disrespectful manner: *party onnies wat – as die kinders mooi praat – dan vloek hulle op die kinders en dan vloek die kinders terug vir hulle (some teachers who – when the kids talk nicely – then they swear at the kids and then the kids swear back at them) (Abe).*



The focus group participants agreed that mutual respect between learners and teachers was important, and were of the opinion that the learners appreciated being respected by teachers, as they often did not receive respect at home. They pointed out that, from their experience, most learners from the specific community did not learn values at home, and that it [learning about values] had to be included at school. Values were reportedly regarded as important and special opportunities were created for such discussions at school: *onderwysers wat onderrig gee moet waardes beklemtoon, eenvoudige waardetjies soos...jy doen jou huiswerkies, jy praat mooi in die klas, jy steek jou hand op, jy staan op as iemand in die klas inkom...(teachers who do training should emphasise values, simple little values such as...you do your bit of homework, you talk nicely in class, you put up your hand, you stand up when someone enters the class...)(R2).*

The focus group participants were of the opinion that the relationships between learners and teachers had improved over the past two years and regarded it as a motivator for children to attend the specific school. They explained how the school's attempts to focus on improving their sport, cultural, academic and disciplinary policies had a positive effect on the attitude of learners: *die visie van die skool is om 'n gemeenskapskool te wees sodat ons die volle potensiaal van al die kinders kan bereik...die skool moet die lig wees in die gemeenskap...(the vision of the school is to be a community school in order to achieve the full potential of all the children...the school must be the light in the community...)(R2).* Another possible reason for improved teacher-learner relationships was the fact that learners showed less aggressive behaviour since the decrease in methamphetamine use, as mentioned in section 4.4.4.1.

The focus group participants explained that the teachers at the school of study had a more difficult job than teachers at other schools to ensure that learners do not leave school prematurely. They explained that, as learners at the school did not get the necessary basic education from their parents, the onus fell on the teachers to fulfil that role:

*...ons neem eintlik die rol oor van die ouer in sy geheel. Baie van hulle kry nie die nodige opvoeding by hulle huise nie. Ons moet vir hulle kan sê hoe praat 'n mens, hoe sit 'n mens. Ons moet vir hulle die fyner maniere aanleer. Baie keer is dit ook dat die onderwyser daai rolmodel moet vervul (...we actually take over the role of the parent as a whole. Many of them do not get the necessary education at home. We must be able to tell them how to speak, how to sit. We have to teach them the finer manners. It is often the case that the teacher has to fulfil that role model) (R2).*

As many learners in the school were from single-parent families, they depended on teachers to act as role-models in many situations. The participants felt that sport and cultural activities allowed opportunity for this: *baie van die seuns soek 'n rol model om te kan relate na iets toe...dis hoekom ek sport en kultuur aanmoedig, want uit daai kom persoonlike kontak (many of the boys are looking for a role-model to relate to something...that is why I encourage sports and culture, because from that comes personal contact) (R2).*

Teachers were reportedly also expected to arrange transport for extra-mural activities, as parents were unable to provide such services. As families could not afford money for outings or sports tours, the onus fell on teachers to raise funds for this purpose. This added pressure to their already full schedules.

#### **4.4.5.2 Barriers to Learning**

Several issues emerged from the data that could act as barriers to learning and cause learners to drop out of school. The focus group participants identified the following possible barriers to learning that may put learners at risk of dropping out of school: financial difficulties; regular substance use in learners and their families; peer pressure to leave school; gang involvement and difficult home circumstances. Some of these issues have already been addressed previously; the remainder will receive attention in the following section.

Six of the eight participants had reportedly repeated grades for different reasons as mentioned in sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2. Grade retention at the specific school was seemingly due to different barriers to learning that put the learners that participated in the study at risk of dropping out of school. Fortunately, this had not resulted in them leaving school permanently yet at the time that the study was conducted.

The focus group participants explained that some learners found school difficult as they did not feel academically strong enough to cope. They were of the opinion that, as learners were only allowed to be kept back for one year, they often advanced to the next grade without having the required knowledge and skills: *...enkele kinders is nie akademies rêrig opgewasse vir die graad waarin hy is nie – dis nou as gevolg van die nuwe onderwysstelsel...(some children cannot really cope academically with the grade in which they are – this is as a result of the new education system...)* (R1). This reportedly made it difficult for them to cope with the demands, which led to some leaving school prematurely.

Several of the participants spoke about having difficulties coping with academic demands due to substance use, and seven of the eight participants reported to have been affected to some extent. It became evident that substance use presented individual difficulties that could cause learners to drop out of school. This was discussed in more detail in sections 4.4.1.3 and 4.4.4.1.

Most of the participants reported added academic pressure as result of family and home circumstances. Jimmy, Lily, Candice, Chaz and Abe all spoke about the fact that their home circumstances were often not conducive to learning:

*ek doen my huiswerk in die voorkamer of in die kombuis juffrou ...(I do my homework in the sitting room or in the kitchen, Miss) (sharing a two-bedroomed house with seven others) (Jimmy).*

*As ek uit die skool kom, dan is my suster en nefie by die huis. Ek doen eerder my skoolwerk by die skool (When I come from school, then my sister and nephew are home. I rather do my schoolwork at school) (Candice).*

The school seemed to be aware of such problems and had made some allowances for children to finish their homework during school time:

*kinders doen nie huiswerk nie...dis 'n groot probleem...ons reël daar is 'n minimum wat hy by die huis moet doen (children do not do homework...this is a huge problem...we arrange a minimum that has to be done at home) (R2).*

Four of the participants mentioned difficulties within the classroom, such as having to deal with disruptive learners and difficulties with content and teaching styles. Sam and Jimmy explained this in more detail. Sam felt that teachers should make more frequent use of detention as he regarded it as an effective disciplinary measure: *Ek dink die disipline kan verbeter word. Hulle gee detensie, maar hulle moet dit meer gebruik (I think discipline can be improved. They have detention, but they should use it more) (Sam).*

Jimmy described how disruptive learners affected the rest of the class, as teachers reacted and stopped explaining content matter: *party van hulle wil nie hul samewerking gee nie...dan word net blaaië uitgedeel sonder om te verduidelik...(some of them do not want to cooperate...then pages are handed out without explaining...) (Jimmy).*

Absenteeism, unless related to substance abuse, did not emerge as a significant independent barrier to learning for all the learners.

Rose and Jimmy reported that they were only absent for medical reasons. Lily explained that she was often absent during the period when she used substances regularly. Jake spoke about how he left school for a whole year whilst he was using marijuana regularly. He said that he made a personal choice to return once he stopped: *Ek het skool gelos ok partykeer...vir 'n jaar omtrent. Ma toe't ek besluit ek kom wee skool toe, en daar vanaand af, toe's ek op pad...(I even dropped school sometimes...for about a year. But then I decided to come back to school and since then I was on track) (Jake)*. It became evident that he had been suspended for a period of time: *...ek was nooit in die klas nie...elke dag, ek moet elke dag uit by die hek gesit...nou op 'n tyd toe, gaan ek by die huis bly. Die skool het my uitgesit ...want ek wil nie geluister het nie, en ek was hardkoppig (...I never attended class...every day I sat outside the gate...then at a time I stayed home. The school suspended me...I did not want to listen and I was obstinate) (Jake)*.

The focus group participants viewed a lack of discipline at home as an important barrier to learning for learners. This often meant that learners could stay away from school without being reprimanded, which made it easier to drop out of schools: *...kinders sal maklik wegbly van die skool af en ek weet die ouer gaan nie opcheck nie...(...children will easily stay away from school and I know the parent will not check...)* (R2).

Even though the individual learners seemed satisfied with the available school resources, the focus group participants expressed the need for an upgraded library as learners lacked research facilities at the school. A lack of school resources were therefore not viewed by the learners as a reason for children to drop out of school.

All teachers were reportedly fully qualified. The lowest qualification was a teacher's diploma. The focus group participants pointed out that the teachers, in addition to their teaching, fulfilled extra responsibilities, such as arranging transport, and providing emotional support and care. The data therefore did not indicate being taught by under-qualified teachers as a reason for learners not to attend school.

Four of the participants described how emotional issues affected their ability to concentrate at school. This had resulted in poor school performance and in some instances in grade repetition. Such issues therefore had an impact on their academic performance and their likelihood to attend school.

For example, Rose described her concern about her mother's illness. Furthermore, Jimmy spoke about his difficulties when his father left his mother for another woman: *...die eerste rede [hoekom hy gedruip het], was toe my pa my ma gelos het en 'n ander vrou gevat het...ek kan nie*

*eintlik gekonsentreer het op skoolwerk nie...my kop was nie daar nie juffrou...(...the first reason [why he failed] was when my father left my mother and took another woman...I couldn't really concentrate on schoolwork...my mind wasn't there, Miss...) (Jimmy). Chaz spoke about his concerns for his mother when his older brothers misbehaved at home: *ek worry net oor wat maak my ma...enige tyd kom die polisie na die huis toe, dan soek die polisie hulle. Dan het ek 'n vrees en dan baklei hulle onder mekaar. Hulle vloek – het geen respek... hulle worry nie...(I only worry about what my mother is doing...the police can turn up any time, then they look for them. Then I am scared and then they fight with each other. They swear – have no respect...they don't worry...)* (Chaz).*

Most of the participants felt that they were well supported academically, although Sam mentioned lack of guidance with subject choices, and Lily and Candice expressed a need for career guidance. Another possible barrier to learning that surfaced was a lack of interest in school. Sam felt that changing subjects increased his interest in school. Jimmy and Chaz spoke about how involvement in gangs could have a negative impact on one's school experience, and Lily blamed her substance use for her disinterest in school.

Chaz described how difficult it was to feel positive about attending school when you are hungry and in need of money: *partykeer dink ek ek wil sommer gaan werk...partykeer is daar niks om te eet nie. Dan gaan slaap ek sonder kos. Dit is moeilik, dan voel ek nie vir die skool nie – wil ek werk soek (sometimes I think I want to find work for no particular reason...sometimes there is nothing to eat. Then I go to bed without food. It is difficult, then I don't feel for school – I want to find a job)* (Chaz).

#### **4.4.5.3 Motivators for Learning**

Several motivators for learning emerged from the data which appeared to encourage school attendance.

Being happy and enjoying school surfaced as an important motivator for school attendance during six of the eight interviews:

*...dis lekker as jy werk en so, huiswerk en so aan. Ja en as ons so uitgaan. Sports – en so ek hou van die skool. Dis 'n lekker skool. En die onderwysers, of jy kan saam met die hoof ook praat en so sê maar jy het probleme by die huis en so aan. Of saam met 'n onderwyser (...it's nice when you work and so, homework and so on. Yes, and when we go out like this. Sports – and so, I like school. It is a nice school. And the teachers or you*

*may even talk to the headmaster as well and say you have problems at home and so on. Or to a teacher) (Lily).*

*...op die oomblik is ek baie lief vir die skool (...currently I love school) (Jake). Dis eintlik 'n lekker skool juffrou (It actually is a nice school, Miss) (Jimmy).*

*...en so ek hou van die skool. Dis lekker by die skool (...and so I like school. It's nice at school) (Lily).*

Other motivators for learning that emerged from the individual interviews were: having caring and supportive teachers, school friendships and the opportunity to be involved in sport and other cultural activities. Sam, Jake, Candice and Abe specifically mentioned how they valued the support of teachers: *...ja...daar is 'n paar supportive teachers, en hulle het my reggehelp (...yes...there are a few supportive teachers, and they directed me) (Candice).* Abe's response was mentioned under section 4.4.5.1.

Having opportunities to practise sport at school emerged as a clear motivator for attending this school. Jimmy, Jake and Abe spoke about their involvement in sport, and how much they enjoyed playing soccer at school and at the clubs. Jimmy was particularly proud of his sporting achievements: *Ek kan nou sê ek is in die beste elf juffrou. Ek het laas keer trials gespeel vir die Boland span en nou die 21ste speel ek vir die Western Cape span juffrou...(I can now say I am in the best eleven, Miss. Last time I played trials for the Boland team and now on the 21<sup>st</sup> I will play for the Western Cape team, Miss...) (Jimmy).*

This theme also emerged from the collages, as four of the eight participants included pictures of healthy, fit sportsmen and sportswomen. There were clear indications of them enjoying sport and soccer in particular, with some links to their personal aspirations to be successful in life in the future.

Three of the participants commented on the value of having friends at school even though it did not appear to be a motivating factor for them to attend school. Jimmy explained that he preferred to have only a few friends as being involved in big groups often caused problems: *ek is nie nog iemand wat saam met 'n groep wil maak. Want daa's waar die moeligheid kom, juffrou. Ek is nie een van daai nie...(I am not another somebody who wants to join a group. That is where trouble starts, Miss. I am not one of those...) (Jimmy).* Sam said: *Al my vriende is nog op skool (All my friends are still at school) (Sam).*

Aspirations about their future emerged as an important issue during the individual interviews, as it appeared to contribute to the learners' motivation to attend school. Seven of the eight participants had clearly given their future some thought and shared their hopes and dreams willingly. The remainder participants' dreams surfaced through the collage.

Sam revealed that he would like to finish school and continue his studies in sports management: *ek sal graag sport en bemarking by die Boland Kollege wil doen...(I would like to do sports and marketing at Boland College...)* (Sam).

Jimmy seemed initially reluctant to express his thoughts about the future, but thereafter indicated that his main dream was to become a soccer star or a cricket coach. Failing that, he explained that he would like to own his own long-distance transport/trucking company. He revealed that he regarded it as very important to have a good and secure job: *my droom is ek wil die beste sokkerspeler ter wêreld wees. My tweede droom is om 'n goeie werk te het. Ek wil...eintlik study vir 'n coach...'n krieket coach...(my dream is I want to be the best soccer player in the world. My second dream is to have a good job. Actually...I want to study to become a coach... a cricket coach...)* (Jimmy). This personal goal to be successful in sport was also expressed in his collage where he included a picture of two soccer players and a very healthy male athlete running on the beach. Jake and Abe shared in Jimmy's dream as they also expressed the hopes to be successful as soccer players.

Lily dreamt about becoming a hairdresser. Her personal aspirations to be successful in this particular future occupation emerged through her collage that included a picture of a hairdresser subtitled by her: *Ek wil eendag my eie haarsalon oopmaak, want ek hou van mense se hare doen en gesels met hulle (I would like to open my own hairdressing saloon, because I like doing peoples' hair and to chat with them)* (Lily). Candice mentioned that she was good at dancing and athletics, but felt noticeably unsure about future work opportunities. Chaz dreamt of becoming a chef as he loved making food: *ek wil 'n kok raak eendag. Ek hou van kosmaak (I want to become a chef one day. I like cooking)* (Chaz). This desire re-surfaced in his collage that included pictures of exotic foods.

Five participants indicated that parental encouragement and a belief in the value of education served as motivators for learning and completing school. Jimmy described the moment when he realised that schooling was important:

*ek het nie eintlik belanggestel in skoolwerk nie. Ek het agterna besef juffrou jy kry niks daaruit om jou skoolwerk nie te doen nie. As jy elke jaar hier sit en toe dink ek maar ek*



*moet my skoolwerk doen, want as jy nie hoërskool gaan haal nie dan beteken jy niks. Waarvoor het jy skool toe gegaan? My ma het vir my gesê...jy wil nie hê jou kinders moet langs jou kom sit of jou broer moet vir jou inhaal nie...Ek moet maar aangaan met my skoolwerk nou (I wasn't actually interested in schoolwork. It was only afterwards, Miss, that I realised you don't get anything out of it by not doing your schoolwork. When you sit here every year, then I thought but I have to do my schoolwork, because if you can't go to high school then you mean nothing. What for did you go to school? My mother said to me...you don't want your children to come and sit next to you or you brother to catch up with you...Now I just have to continue with my schoolwork) (Jimmy).*

Chaz spoke about the dreams his mother had for him: *My ma wil hê ek moet klaar maak. Haar begeerte is vir my om klaar te maak (My mother wants me to finish. Her desire for me is to finish) (Chaz).*

The focus group participants identified three support programmes that were available to learners at the school to provide academic and emotional support which should minimise the risk for learners to drop out of school. USIKO, presented by students from the University of Stellenbosch, offered academic support and mentoring to *high-risk* learners after school (USIKO had its first intake in 2000 and was named by a most respected Zulu shaman, Credo Mutwa, meaning a number of things, including *first ritual*. It has as its aim creating programmes for young people at risk and offers mentorship and wilderness experiences to overcome the negative influences of poverty, for example, and to create a positive vision for their lives irrespective of their past circumstances (<http://www.usiko.org.za/m-history.htm>)). *High-risk* learners were identified as those who experienced difficult home circumstances, used substances, struggled academically or demonstrated behavioural or emotional difficulties. The Big-Sister Programme was formed by students from Erica ladies residence at the Stellenbosch University, and offered support to girls on Thursday afternoons. Thirdly, ABBA was a *drug-free* programme designed for boys and included different extra-mural activities, such as yoga, drama, sport and free access to a gymnasium. Boys were transported to and from such activities. In addition, the school organises a camp twice a year in conjunction with the local police for *high-risk* learners. The school also offered workshops on week-ends to support such learners: *Ons reël 'n kamp in samewerking met die polisie twee maal per jaar, en dan ook werkswinkels elke tweede week (In cooperation with the police we organise a camp twice a year and then also workshops every second week) (RI)*. Jake and Chaz described how positive they felt about the support they received from the outside, drug-free programme, ABBA. They explained that they were fetched



daily for involvement in several activities, such as sport and yoga: *Hulle is 'n groep mense wat saamwerk...hulle vat die kinders wat drugs gebruik het, vat hulle uit smiddags en...hulle doen goete en speel sports...daar's mense hulle kom kry jou by die huis (They are a group of people who work together...they take the children who have used drugs, they take them out in the afternoons and...they do things and play sports...there are people they come and fetch you at home) (Jake)*. This programme was also described as valuable by the focus group participants: *Hulle kom haal die kinders elke middag van drie-uur af vir yoga, drama en sport soos landloop en gratis gym (They fetch the children every afternoon from three o'clock for yoga, drama and sports such as cross-country run and free gym)(R1)*. The community member confirmed the availability of academic support programmes offered by the Stellenbosch University: *As Dok aansoek doen dan is daar vrywillige student wat georganiseer word deur Matie Gemeenskapsdiens (MGD) (When Doc applies then there is a voluntary student who is organised by Matie Community Service (MCS)) (R3)*.

Participant R2 of the focus group re-iterated that the positive relationship of mutual respect that existed between learners and teachers at the time that the study was conducted, also served as a motivator for learning and attending school. This was discussed in section 4.4.5.1. He explained that the school policy includes a focus on becoming a *gemeenskapskool [community school]* and that this approach contributed much to the more positive attitude that learners had towards school. In his opinion, children appeared to have developed an increased respect for the school and responded positively to wearing school uniforms: *die meeste van die kinders dra skooldrag – skooldrag se jy het respek vir die skool, vir die onderwysers wat vir jou gesê het om dit aan te trek, en die skool se etos en kultuur (most of the children wear school uniform – school uniform means you have respect for the school, the teachers who told you to wear it and for the schools's ethos and culture) (R2)*. He pointed out that the teachers at the school where the study was conducted were more involved in the learners' lives than at other schools. To illustrate this, he shared the experiences of visitors from an American University, and explained that the focus was often on Christian belief during assemblies:

*die onderwysers hier is meer betrokke by die kinders se lewe. Die saal byeenkomste is ook meer gefokus op geloof. Die Amerikaners wat hier was sê hulle is verbaas met wat hier gebeur. Want hier is daar iets anders. Hulle het ook gevind dat daar meer warmte in die skool is. By hulle hou hulle nie eers assemblies nie. Want by hulle is die skole meer taakgerig. Ek sê ons moet 'n ander manier hê, want ons kinders kry te swaar in hulle omgewing (the teachers here are more involved in the children's lives. Assemblies in the*

*hall are also focussed on religion. The Americans who were here were astonished with what happens here. Because there is something different here. They also found more warmth in the school. Back home they don't even have assemblies. Because there the schools are more task-orientated. I say we must have another way, as our children suffer too much in their environments) (R2).*

Despite this, three of the learners expressed the need for increased emotional support. Lily appeared to really enjoy the one-on-one interaction and interest in her viewpoints during the individual interview. She was noticeably disappointed when it ended: *Ek het baie lekker gepraat...ek sit nou so lekker (I enjoyed talking...I am sitting so comfortably now) (Lily).* Jake said that he found his frequent visits to the school counsellor and acting headmaster valuable: *Ek het al baie met hom gesels...selfs oor probleme by die huis en oor dagga rokery...(I have spoken to him frequently...even about problems at home and about dagga smoking);...ek het al baie met haar[school counsellor] gepraat...(I have already spoken to her [school counsellor] quite often...)* (Jake). Candice seemed to find the camps, as described by the focus group, very enjoyable and helpful, and would like to have the opportunity to go again: *Ek wil weer so 'n kamp doen waar mens kan leer. Ek hou van kamp. Hulle moet die kinders reghelp (I'd like to such a camp again where one can learn. I like camping. They must direct the children) (Candice).*

#### **4.4.5.4 Consequences of High School Dropout**

Only two of the participants spoke directly about the consequences of high school dropout. Rose mentioned examples where it led to substance abuse and unemployment, and explained that she is too scared to be friends with them: *...ek hang nie saam met hulle nie. Ek is bang. Hulle rook dagga en okkapy. Ja, hulle rook okkapy en ook dagga en ek dink tik ook. En ...rook ook dagga...(I don't hang with them. I am scared. They smoke dagga and okka pipe and I think tik too. And...smoke dagga as well...)* (Rose).

Candice agreed with her, but added that having dropped out of school usually resulted in a disinterest in school, staying at home, substance abuse and a loss of friendships: *...die een verwag...sy het skool gelos oor sy verwag. Sy sou nou in standard agt gewees het. En my ander vriendin het skool in standard ses gelos. Sy het probleme gehad met haar ma en pa en nie kos in die huis nie. Nou rook sy net tik[methamphetamine] en ganja[marijuana]. Sy's nou nie eintlik meer my vriendin nie (.the one is expecting...she dropped school because of her pregnancy. She would have been in standard eight by now. And my other friend dropped school in standard six.*

*She had problems with her mother and father and there was no food. Now she only smokes tik [methamphetamine] en ganja [marijuana]. She is actually not my friend any more) (Candice).*

#### **4.4.5.5 School Resources and Facilities**

None of the participants appeared to have difficulty getting to and from school as it was situated in the community. Most of them reported that it took them 10 minutes to walk to school; proximity to school therefore did not appear to be a reason for learners not to attend school in this community.

All the individual participants were satisfied with the basic infra-structure and described the school buildings, classrooms, toilets, science laboratories and the school hall as satisfactory: *ons het al die basiese goed (we have all the basics) (R2)*. The learners did not indicate dissatisfaction with any particular available school resources and did not identify it as a contributing factor to learners dropping out of the specific school. In response to the question whether anything should be improved at the school, Rose felt that nothing needed to change: *Nee, die skool kan bly want dit is reg...(No, the school must stay as it is, as it is right...)* (Rose). Sam agreed: *Ons het goeie fasiliteite hier (There are good facilities here) (Sam)*. None of the other participants identified any areas that they would change in the school.

The areas that were identified for upgrading by the focus group participants were the sports facilities, library and research facilities. R2 felt that they had sufficient sports equipment, but emphasised that the sportsfields were in need of attention. Furthermore, he explained that they lacked the maintenance staff to manage the upkeep of the grounds: *Ons het byvoorbeeld nie die mannekrag om die instandhouding te doen nie (We do not have the manpower to do the maintenance, for instance) (R2)*. Contrary to the information obtained from the focus group, Sam, Candice, Jimmy and Jake were more positive and of the opinion that the sports coaching and facilities at the school were satisfactory:

*Die skool is baie goed vir my, ek is ook in sports by die skool...laas jaar toe was ek in Duitsland gewies, toe kyk ek die World Cup...saam met die skool, ja...daai was die beste...(The school treats me well, I am also into sports at the school...last year I was in Germany, I saw the World Cup...with the school, yes...that was the best...)* (Jake).

*Ons het goeie fasiliteite hier. Die onderwysers gee vir ons sport soos rugby (We have excellent facilities here. The teachers train us in sports like rugby) (Sam).*

Candice mentioned the availability of athletics coaching. Jimmy was proud of the fact that he represented his school for Boland and the Western Cape in soccer.

The data indicated that there was some academic support available at the school, and that additional support was planned. The participants did not identify a lack of academic support at the school as a reason for learners dropping out. Candice explained that she valued and had made use of the extra lessons that were available in mathematics. The one focus group participant mentioned that many learners had difficulty with reading, and explained that they would implement a reading period as from July 2009. Learners from grade 10 to grade 12 were reportedly eligible for extra support in mathematics. They furthermore also planned to provide extra support in Accounting and Science in the future:

*Ons het byvoorbeeld, ekstra wiskunde klasse vir graad 10 to 12 wat hy net wiskunde doen. Ons beweeg in die rigting van ondersteuning te gee vir rekeningkunde en natuur-en skeikunde. Baie keer, in graad 12 veral, bly die onderwyser baie keer vakansiedae in, na uur se klasse wat ons nog aanbied. Dit is ondersteuning om die uitvalsyfer bietjie te laer...(We have, for example extra maths classes for grades 10 to 12 where they only do maths. We are moving in the direction of giving support in accounting and physics. Quite often, especially in grade 12 the teacher would stay in during public holidays, after-hour classes are also offered. It is support to lower the drop-out rate) (R2).*

The participants did not all agree on the effects of the disciplinary measures at the school, but the detention measures appeared to be received favourably by most of the learners and did not appear to be a reason for learners not to attend school:

*Ja ons gaan annex toe – bly dan so van Maandag to Vrydag daar. Hulle kry dan 'n ander juffrou wat kom praat met ons en films wys. Ons het toe reggekome. Daar is nog so vier[kinders] in die annex wat nie wil hoor nie...(Yes, we go to the annex – stay there from about Monday to Friday. They then get another teacher to come and talk to us and to show films. We came right. There are still four [children] in the annex who would not listen...) (Candice).*

Two of the others commented on the positive effect that detention at school had on the learners' attitudes. One participant, Jimmy, felt that he got behind in his work whilst in detention, but explained that it taught him to rather behave and do his work in class.

Only one of the participants felt that there were too many learners in a class; it therefore did not appear to be such a big problem for the majority of the learners: *maar die klassies is te groot dink ek (but I think the classes are too big) (Sam)*.

The focus group participants explained that the grade eight classes consisted of 46 learners, and that the higher grades had 40 learners per class. R2 commented on how difficult it was to give individual learners the attention that they need with such numbers, as the work load became too much with more than 40 learners: *...as jy begin met 45 tot 46 in 'n klas is individuele aandag nie altyd daar soos dit moet wees nie...ek voel sodra dit meer as 40 is dan raak dit problematies (...when they start becoming 45 to 46 in a class, then individual attention is not always what it should be...I feel as soon as it becomes more than 40 it becomes problematic) (R2)*. None of the participants directly indicated the classroom size as a contributing factor to school dropout, despite the above-mentioned difficulties.

The focus group participants were of the opinion that the learners at the school received sufficient information and support in terms of career guidance. For example, the one focus group participant (R1) mentioned a career guidance programme called PACE, which was included in life orientation. PACE is a youth development organisation specialising in the provision of career education and job-related information. The focus group participant explained that all learners had access to the programme, from grade 10 upwards, and that it should assist learners to make the link between their education and future occupation. In addition, learners had several books available where a variety of occupations were discussed. Three colleges situated in the Boland and Stellenbosch area reportedly visited the school annually during the months of June and September, to inform learners of opportunities for tertiary studies. Outings were arranged to the various technikons, and learners received guidance on how to apply for bursaries in the event of them wanting to study further:

*Hulle dra kennis van die universiteite en kolleges nou en hulle kan beurse kry en baie van hulle hoop om verder te gaan studeer (They know about universities and colleges now and they can get bursaries and many of them hope to study further) (R2)*.

Candice felt that they needed more extra-mural activities at the school, such as art, drama and dancing: *om aktiwiteite te gee wat hulle wil doen...kinders het baie talente. Kan miskien teken na skool, maar dit word nie aangebied nie...(to offer activities that we want to do...children have many talents. Maybe draw after school, but it is not offered...); Ja, as ek kan inskryf sal ek dans,*

*ek hou van kwaito en bob[type of dance] (Yes, if I may register I will dance, I like kwaito and bob [types of dance] (Candice).*

#### **4.4.6 Educational system factors contributing to and mediating school dropout**

Findings from the study indicated that the specific school have implemented the educational policies of the post-apartheid government in South Africa to provide education for all as the focus group participants indicated that no learners are ever refused entry to the school, even if they are unable to pay the school fees: .

*By ons skool...ons laat alle kinders toe, maak nie saak of hulle betaal of nie. Ons dwing kinders om te betaal R250 vir registrasie. Hy betaal niks as hy vir ons kom sê...hy kan nie betaal nie, maar hy word tog toegelaat. Hy word nie weggewys nie. So dit kan nie die rede wees vir die uitvalsifer nie. Ons betaal byvoorbeeld R820 vir 'n hele jaar se skoolfooi (At our school...we admit all children, it doesn't matter whether or not they pay. We force children to pay R250 for registration. He pays nothing when he tells us...he cannot pay, but he is admitted nevertheless. He is not turned away. So it cannot be the reason for the drop-out figure. We, for instance pay R820 school fees for a whole year) (R2).*

#### **4.4.7 Macrosystem factors contributing to and mediating school dropout**

Findings indicated that the management at the specific school of study was focussing on creating a school where all learners would feel welcome and safe, and where the teachers are more involved in the lives of the learners:

*die skool moet die lig wees vir die gemeenskap...die kinders moet behoort aan iets, so dis eintlik waaroor dit gaan, want hier is soveel kinders wat uit gesinne kom waar die ouers nie eers praat met die kinders nie (the school must be the light for the community...the children must belong to something, so that is actually what it is all about, because here are so many children who come from families where the parents not even speak to the children) (R2).*

The learners also appeared to experience the school as a comfortable place as was indicated in section 4.4.5.3.

## **4.5 Collages**

The following is a summary of the main themes that emerged from the collages that participants constructed at the end of the individual interviews. They were asked to illustrate their ideal worlds where no barriers exist. It became evident during the data analysis process that most of these themes correlated with themes that surfaced from the individual and focus group interviews.

- Love for their families
- Appreciation for support from family and community members
- The desire to finish school successfully
- Future job aspirations, such as a career in sport, helping professions and hairdressing
- The need for opportunities to practise and be successful in sport, such as cricket, soccer and athletics
- The importance of fitness
- The desire to be successful in life in the future
- The desire to be happy
- Sex with someone else's partner is wrong
- The need for the fulfilment of basic needs, such as owning a car; living in a comfortable house; having a garden; being able to afford nice clothes and good food

## **4.6 OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS**

The findings that emerged from the focus group interview, the individual interviews and the collages showed that the learners and teachers had a relatively similar perception of their personal circumstances and the possible reasons for school incompleteness. Results showed that difficult home circumstances and socio-economic factors were the overriding reasons for the difficulties that the learners experienced. In addition, it became evident that most of the learners relied on their own abilities and strengths and the support of their mothers, teachers, outside support organisations and the school counsellor as their coping measures. Most of them wished



to complete their studies despite experiencing several difficulties as noted in the sections above, in order to achieve their dreams for the future.

In conclusion, the learners identified possible answers in response to the question: what are the reasons for learners dropping out of school? Their answers were: substance abuse; involvement with drug dealers; unemployment; living conditions; emotional difficulties due to home circumstances; concentration difficulties due to difficult home circumstances; negative attitude towards and disinterest in school work; family conflict; single parenting; teenage pregnancy; poverty, and the lack of money to provide for basic needs; stealing; health implications due to substance abuse; behavioural problems; overly strict headmaster (Jake); peer pressure (Abe).

The following reasons were directly identified by the focus group participants: socio-economic problems and financial difficulties; unemployment; alcohol and drug abuse; gangsterism; peer pressure; single-parent and absent-father families; a lack of motivation due to difficult home circumstances and a lack of discipline at home.

#### **4.7 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER**

In this chapter, a profile of the participants of the focus group and individual semi-structured interviews are provided, as well as a detailed explanation of how the data was analysed. This includes a visual representation in table format of the outcomes of the coding process. Finally, a comprehensive discussion of the emerging categories and themes is provided. A more detailed discussion of the findings with links to the literature will be presented in Chapter 5.



# **CHAPTER 5**

## **DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter starts with a brief summary of the first four chapters. Thereafter, the findings with links to the literature as presented in Chapter 2 are discussed. This is followed by a conclusion of the results of the study, and a discussion of the limitations and recommendations. The chapter ends with suggestions for future research and a final summary of the chapter.

### **5.2 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 1, 2, 3 AND 4**

#### **5.2.1 Chapter One: Contextualisation and orientation to the study**

This chapter provides an introduction to the study with the following aim: to explore the dropout phenomenon of high school learners in a specific high-risk community. The aims and objectives are outlined, with a brief mentioning of some possible reasons for the occurrence of the school dropout phenomenon. Reference is made to the effects of poverty in the South African context as a possible contributor to school dropout. The importance of a sound theoretical approach is also highlighted with links to the dropout phenomenon. In addition, the research questions are identified and contextualised. A brief description of the research design and research methods is included, with reference to important ethical considerations. Finally, the chapter ends with a clarification of the different concepts used in the study.

#### **5.2.2 Chapter Two: Literature review**

Chapter two provides a comprehensive overview of the concepts, contexts, theories, implications and previous literature relevant to this study, namely the dropout concept and the psychological, social and ecological systems theories related to the topic. It includes a discussion of adolescence and the developmental challenges linked to this phase of development, as the participants of the study were between the ages of 15 and 18 years of age. Reference to social constructivism helps to explain how adolescents create knowledge and make sense of their environments. This is followed by a brief overview of the educational policies and the

development of inclusive education in South Africa, as it explains the approach to possible barriers to learning that might lead to school dropout at the time that the study was conducted. The chapter includes a discussion of the ecological systems framework to demonstrate how the individual student, family, peer and school risk factors, as well as the interaction among such factors can increase the risk of school dropout. Attention is given to the impact of environmental influences on the individuals as well as the consequences of school dropout. The chapter concludes with an overview of the research, with reference to the ecological risk factors for school dropout.

### **5.2.3 Chapter Three: Research design and methodology**

In this chapter, the interpretivist, qualitative research design used in this study is described. This design served as the framework for this study and directed the entire research process. This chapter includes an explanation of the problem statement and the research questions in order to familiarise the reader with the intention and purpose of the study. The theoretical paradigm, purpose and context of the study are then discussed. This is followed by an introduction to the methodology that was followed in the study, which includes information about the method of sampling, data production and data analysis. This study made use of qualitative research methods, namely semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview, a literature review and personal collages. Data was analysed through a process of thematic content analysis. Reliability and validity are discussed and the chapter concludes with an outline of the ethical considerations related to this research.

### **5.2.4 Chapter Four: Data analysis and interpretation of results**

Chapter four provides a profile of the participants of the focus group and individual semi-structures interviews, and gives a detailed explanation of how the data were analysed. This includes a visual representation in table format of the outcomes of the coding process. The chapter ends with a comprehensive discussion of the emerging categories and themes.

## **5.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to explore and develop a greater understanding of the school dropout phenomenon during the post-compulsory phase of education in a specific school. It was felt that this study is of importance for the fact that so many learners reportedly dropped out of the particular school. It was believed that a more comprehensive understanding of the possible reasons for the occurrence of this phenomenon within a specific context could help those involved in the education process not only to understand this, but also to address the problem.

The process was guided by the research questions as discussed in section 3.2. The study was viewed as a case study, as explained in section 3.4.1, as it explored the mentioned phenomenon in a particular case or bounded system through multiple sources of data collection.

The following categories emerged from the data analysis as indicated in section 4.3: individual characteristics; family systems; peer group systems; the school system and the social context: environmental and community issues; educational system factors; local community factors and macro-system factors.

The findings included in the categories and themes mentioned above are discussed in the following section with links to the literature. This will be done using the eco-systemic approach as framework. This model explains the direct and indirect influences that the various contexts can have on an individual's life (Swart & Pettipher, 2005), and served as a manageable way to organise the information.

### **5.3.1 Individual Characteristics contributing to and mediating dropout**

#### **5.3.1.1 Academic difficulties and school retention**

Several of the participants in this study had a history of academic difficulties and had had either repeated a year, or were repeating a grade at the time that the study was conducted. This suggested that they were at risk of dropping out of school. Even though research shows that the efficacy of grade retention [keeping a learner back for a year] has been a contentious issue, several researchers have found that there is a relationship between school dropout and grade retention. Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) claim that retained learners are more likely to drop out of school and show aggression during the developmental phase of adolescence. Hickman et al. (2008) confirmed this as they found that learners who had dropped out of school showed significantly higher levels of grade retention, absenteeism and behaviour problems. Furthermore, results from a study by Ou and Reynolds (2008), showed that grade retention could have an adverse effect on self-esteem and that it could lead to an increased risk of dropping out of school.

#### **5.3.1.2. Future goals**

Despite the above claims, most of the participants in this study regarded finishing school as important, and expressed the desire to complete their studies. In addition, most of them indicated that they had definite future and work aspirations. Dass-Brailsford (2005) found that individual characteristics, such as goal orientation, initiative, motivation and understanding of

the self as having a measure of agency, assisted learners in attaining academic achievement. Results from the Progress Report (2007) confirmed an association between a lack of motivation and dropping out of school. Findings from this study indicated an apparent ability to consider some abstract possibilities for themselves in the future which suggested that most of the individual participants had entered the cognitive stage of formal operations, as described by Piaget (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). All participants aspired to future work opportunities that would enable them to improve their personal, financial and home circumstances. This ability to develop future ideals for themselves could be evidence of increased abstract thinking during adolescence and emerged in this study as a motivator for attending school. An optimistic view of the future has been identified as one of several important factors for eventual academic success (Suh & Suh, 2006, as cited in Suh et al., 2007). Furthermore, Jozefowicz-Simbeni (2008) states that adolescents' ability to develop such future hopes and ideals for themselves and other people can act as a motivator with relation to school performance. This might explain why, even though the participants of this study were at risk of dropping out of school due to academic difficulties and other barriers to learning, they continued to show some enthusiasm for school.

### **5.3.1.3 Internal locus of control and self-concept**

The majority of the participants in this study showed indicators of internal locus of control and well developed self-insight and self-awareness. They appeared to take some form of responsibility for what happened in their lives. Most of these children at risk of dropping out showed confidence in their own abilities, especially related to sport, and expressed pride in their ability to make their own decisions, such as subject choices, refusing to belong to a gang, and giving up substances, even under trying conditions, which at times put pressure on them to drop out of school. Several systems also assisted some of them, such as supportive parents and teachers, for example. In terms of self-concept they seemed to be able to differentiate in their thinking about what they were good at (e.g. sports and hair dressing) and how important certain things were to them, such as their family and their future. These findings suggest that most of the participants in this study had a reasonably well developed self-concept and internal locus of control, which should be supported and strengthened in order to develop an increased self-belief about their own competence and academic abilities. Eccles, Adler and Kaczala (1982, as cited in Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2008) emphasised the importance of self-perceptions of ability as determinants of educational performance and success. They found that one's perception of your

ability is positively related to one's expectancy for success (Eccles et al., 1982, as cited in Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2008).

#### **5.3.1.4 Personal difficulties**

Several of the participants in the study referred to experiencing personal difficulties on a daily basis, which had an impact on their ability to cope at home and at school. This appeared to place them at risk of not completing school. These were: undesired living conditions at home, embarrassing behaviour by family members and family conflict, health difficulties and substance abuse and its implications. Masitsa (2006) identified factors related to the home environment as the most important causes of school dropout. This includes issues such as unemployment of parents, lack of parental support, ill-health, family conflict and drug abuse to name but a few (Masitsa, 2006). Risk factors within the family, such as poverty, neglect, abuse and inconsistent parenting, have also been identified as causes of negative short-term behavioural outcomes such as truancy, underachievement, discipline referrals, antisocial behaviour and experimentation with drugs and alcohol (Sprague & Walker, 2002, as cited in WCED, 2005).

#### **5.3.1.5 Substance Use**

As mentioned in the section above, substance use and abuse emerged as an important contributor to experiencing personal difficulties in this study. Six of the eight participants identified at risk of dropping out of school indicated that they had either used substances previously, or that they were still using substances at the time that the study was conducted. It became evident during the research process that the learners had realised the possible dangers of methamphetamine use, and that they were aware of the negative impact it had on their behaviour and their interest in school. Four of the participants reported that they were successful and had stopped the use of substances. One participant explained that his marijuana use formed part of his spiritual beliefs, and that he used it in a responsible manner. He believed that it made him peaceful, and willing to accept others and the world in general.

The results of this study showed that regular drug use by the participants led to school absenteeism, a loss of interest in academics and behavioural changes. The focus group participants in this study for instance reported a high prevalence of aggressive and oppositional behaviour amongst especially the grade 10 to grade 12 learners in the specific school, which often resulted in them [the teachers] enforcing disciplinary measures in the form of detention. This reportedly presented challenges for teachers. The challenging behaviour was attributed to the high prevalence of methamphetamine use, which seemingly had decreased over the past three

years due to an apparent popularity shift from methamphetamine use to marijuana use. It therefore became evident from the findings that substance use and abuse contributed to the learners' lack of interest in school, absenteeism, and aggressive and oppositional behaviour, which may result in them dropping out of school. Research shows that heavy adolescent marijuana use led to dropping out of school and continued marijuana use during adulthood (Green and Ensminger, 2006). The main findings of a review by Townsend et al. (2007) also showed a constant relationship between high school dropout and substance use. All the participants in this study appeared to be aware of the possible consequences of substance abuse and indicated that they appreciated the support they received from the school and other outside support organisations to stop using substances.

### **5.3.2 Family system factors contributing to and mediating school dropout**

#### **5.3.2.1 Family support**

A positive finding that surfaced from the individual interviews was that some of the participants received emotional and financial support and encouragement from family members. Six of them mentioned how they especially valued the support that they received from their mothers. Despite experiencing challenging family conditions, (as will be described in the following paragraph) three participants spoke in particular about the support and encouragement they received to attend school. This minimised their tendency to drop out of school. It therefore seemed as if most of the participants had a positive connection with someone in the family, which appeared to help them cope with their daily challenges. Masitsa (2006) found the role of the family to be critical to the success of learners at school. He indicated that parental involvement and support are crucial for the learner's academic performance. In addition, he pointed out that learners require financial support to provide for the basic necessities which would lead to good health. Other research also shows that support for education may encourage school completion in the context of a high-risk community where poverty is prevalent (Randolph et al., 2006). Strong emotional parent-child relationships have also been identified by Boon and Cook (2008) as promoting motivation, attentiveness and perseverance at school, and competent care-giving was mentioned as an important factor to ensure academic success despite being disadvantaged socio-economically.

#### **5.3.2.2 Family Difficulties**

However, results of this study showed that all the participants experienced family difficulties, and the majority of the participants had to cope with challenging family circumstances on a daily

basis. Most of the participants came from single-parent families where the father was absent. Some were raised by their grandparents, which reportedly resulted in a lack of discipline. Households consisted of several extended family members. The family conditions were characterised by family conflict and troubled sibling relationships where participants often felt that they were treated unfairly. Violation of trust, disrespectful siblings, substance abuse and lack of money were described as major contributors to troublesome family relationships. This appeared to affect their ability to cope with the academic pressure, caused concentration difficulties, led to absenteeism and one of the participants indicated that he considered leaving school to earn money for the household. Gouws et al. (2008) pointed out that a lack of family support may result in poor academic performance at school, low self-esteem and poor social adjustment and antisocial behaviour.

Masitsa (2006) confirmed this as he found that lack of adequate parental support, learners not living with parents, separated and divorced parents, loss of parents, single-parents families and family conflicts do not create environments that are conducive to academic activities. He regarded such conditions as possible causes for learners to drop out of school. Stone (2006) also found that continual communication with home was related to higher grades and lower likelihood of high school dropout. Findings from the 2007 Community Survey suggested that children, who had lost their parents to death of unknown whereabouts, were more vulnerable to being out of school (Fleisch et al., 2008/9). In addition, Demo and Adcock (1996, as cited in Sadock & Sadock, 2007) mentioned that low support structures and high conflict parent-child relationships can affect normal adolescent development in a negative manner.

In the progress report to the Minister of Education in South Africa of the time, Mrs Pandor (2007) the following were mentioned as potential variables for school dropout: single-parent families, older siblings, and parent-child conversations about school. It stated that parents of learners who tend to drop out were less demanding and involved and provided less educational support in general. McIntosh et al. (2008) identified several studies that have shown that learners with emotional and/or behavioural problems are twice as likely to drop out of school (Tobin & Sugai, 1999; Lehr et al., 2004, as cited in McIntosh et al., 2008). As indicated above, several of the participants mentioned having experienced emotional stress due to their home circumstances that could result in them dropping out of school. Furthermore, reported health difficulties of extended family members and having to live in overcrowded living conditions also appeared to contribute to added stress for staying at school.



Donald et al. (2005) state that it is important to consider the indirect effects that the direct consequences of poverty, such as large families, single or unmarried motherhood, teenage motherhood and unemployment or parents working long hours away from home, can have on parenting. These factors can put considerable strain on the parent, who may become exhausted, depressed or unresponsive to the physical and psychological needs of his/her children (Thomas, 1988; Richter, 1994, as cited in Donald et al., 2005). The use of alcohol may serve as an escape from reality under such circumstances (Giles, 1988; Ebigo, 1989, as cited in Donald et al., 2005). Donald et al. (2005) pointed out the value of social support networks in the form of relatives, friends, neighbours or local organisations, such as church groups to relieve such strain.

Some of the participants spoke about having strong bonds with their mothers in particular, but none reported any real relationship with their fathers. Several of the participants mentioned regular substance abuse by their parents, and spoke about being embarrassed by their behaviour. Sadock and Sadock (2007) identified parent modelling of substance use, family conflict, a lack of parental supervision and stressful life events as some of the psycho-social risk factors for the onset and severity of substance use amongst adolescents. This is relevant as most of the participants reported living under such conditions, having used substances and the effects it had on their lives. It seemed as if most of the participants had a positive connection with someone in the family, which appeared to help them cope with their daily challenges. On the other hand, it did appear as if the family circumstances and socio-economic situations made it challenging to provide a caring environment.

In conclusion, the participants created images of living in overcrowded home conditions characterised by family conflict, substance abuse and mostly troublesome relationships. Most households were headed by single parents or grandparents, where lack of discipline and lack of educational support was evident. Such parents appeared to be under emotional strain. Despite this, some of the participants reported having good relationships with their mothers or grandparents from whom they received some parental support. It became evident that the family and home conditions, as described by the participants, presented personal challenges, which might eventually lead to them dropping out of school.

### **5.3.3 Peer group system factors contributing to and mediating dropout**

The participants' responses varied in terms of their friendships. Contrary to expectations, they did not identify peer relationships as a main motivator for attending school. Most of the participants spoke about the negative influence that their friends had on their lives especially in



terms of substance abuse. Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bocken (2002, as cited in WCED, 2005), claim that children living with difficult home circumstances as described in section 5.3.2, such as absent fathers, single parents, loss of parents, often feel deprived of the basic need to belong, which may result in them being *socialised* by their peers, or unsocialised adults or gangs. Masitsa (2006) identifies one of the biggest problems that adolescents face when they need to make decisions that do not conform to that of their peers, as they run the risk of losing friends and playmates. Staff and Kreager (2008) point out that it could be rewards of peer acceptance that keep adolescents at school rather than good grades or expectations and praise from teachers. The participants in this study explained that they had a different circle of friends whilst using substances, and described how difficult it was to break off these friendships. This seemed to leave them with positive feelings of achievement, but with fewer friends who they preferred to socialize with at school. Some of the participants seemed to have adopted a coping strategy of being *indifferent to peer approval* to guard them against the negative reactions of their peers. Results from this study indicated that most of the participants had come to the realisation that it was easier to avoid peer pressure by staying at home during the afternoons, by having fewer friends, and by socialising mostly at school.

According to McWhirter et al. (2007) peer groups provide a platform for young adolescents to experiment their social and interpersonal interaction skills that they can eventually use in the adult world. The youth often measure their self-worth and self-esteem based on feedback and comments from their peers. Peer groups that engage in anti-social behaviour can present problems to individuals as it can be difficult to resist the pressure to be part of such activities. Peer status has been positively associated with achievement and adjustment at school level; it can disrupt school commitment and it has been suggested that membership to violent groups undermined educational attainment (Staff & Kreager, 2008). It would therefore be beneficial to the learners at this school if strategies can be put into place at the school of study to create opportunities for the development of positive peer relationships.

#### **5.3.4 School System factors contributing to and mediating school dropout**

As indicated in section 2.7.6, UNESCO (2007) identified several school factors relating to school dropout: overcrowded classrooms, poorly trained teachers, teacher-learner ratio and lack of learning materials. These factors were reflected in this study in varying degrees.

The focus group participants from this study mentioned the fact that the teacher-learner ratio at their school was too high, and that it made it difficult to provide individual attention to learners. The participants of the individual interviews, however, did not regard it as a big problem.

The results from this study indicated that learners appeared to respond more positively when they felt accepted, respected and supported by teachers. The value of positive teacher-learner relationships was an important theme that surfaced from the findings of this study. Most of the participants experienced the teachers as supportive and helpful. Very few of them viewed them as unsupportive or commented on having been treated unfairly by teachers. Half of the participants, however, felt that the degree of mutual respect could be increased. The focus group participants agreed with the above, but pointed out that the teachers at the school of study fulfilled a more substantial role than teachers at other schools. As several learners could not rely on positive role-models at home, teachers at the school needed to fulfil this role and mirror respect, demonstrate values, and model the expected and socially acceptable behaviour and norms to learners. Knesting (2008) found that a caring school environment where teachers engaged and listened actively to learners played a positive role in the prevention of school dropout.

As mentioned in section 5.3.1, six of the eight learners interviewed had repeated at least one grade. Findings indicated that it was the result of lack of interest due to substance abuse, emotional issues as a result of home circumstances or unfavourable subject choices, and most of the participants seemed to feel more positive about their schooling at the time that the study was conducted. It was not possible to establish whether grade repetition had any advantages for the participants in terms of academic achievement from the results of this study. Findings from previous research are contradictory in terms of the effect of grade retention on school dropout. Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) found that retained learners are more likely to drop out of school, and failed to show any advantages in terms of academic achievement. Retained learners also exhibited more aggressive behaviour. Findings from a study done by Ou and Reynolds (2008) showed an association between grade retention and low self-esteem.

Furthermore, findings of this study showed that none of the participants in this study had been pregnant before, but some were able to comment on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy at the school. They explained that they received adequate sex education, but felt that some learners at the school of study regarded falling pregnant as a new fashion. The participants regarded teenage pregnancy as a reason for learners at the school to drop out of school and reported that some learners returned after giving birth, whilst others dropped out of school. Grant and

Hallman (2006) found that a significant percentage of pregnant schoolgirls in South Africa either remained in school or re-enrolled shortly after the birth of their babies. Results of a study done by Manlove (1998) showed an association between high levels of school engagement and postponement of pregnancy. Two of the female participants in this study expressed such a belief in the postponement of pregnancy. Results from Grant and Hallman's study (2006) indicated that young women who are focussed on their education are less likely to become pregnant whilst at school, and if they do become pregnant, they are less likely to drop out of school as a result of the pregnancy. The participants regarded teenage pregnancy as one of the reasons why learners dropped out of school.

Other barriers to learning that emerged from this study were difficulties coping with academic demands due to substance abuse. Furthermore, family circumstances were described as not conducive to learning and participants complained about experiencing concentration difficulties due to emotional issues.

In terms of career guidance, Chen (2008) pointed out the value of making links for learners between their school work and future career opportunities in the world of work. He noted the value of identifying self-defeating thinking patterns in learners, and recommended skill enhancement strategies to enhance academic performance. Only two of the participants in this study responded positively when asked about their belief in the value of education. As seven of the participants talked openly about their future aspirations, there is clearly a need to help them make the link and to realise the impact that education could have on their future. This is therefore an area that could be focussed on. Most of the participants felt that they were well supported academically. Even though the focus group participants (consisting of the acting headmaster and school counsellor) described the career guidance programmes at school as sufficient, three of the individual participants (learners) felt that they would value more guidance in terms of their future careers. This is therefore an area that should be focussed on in the future.

Involvement in sport seemed to be a strong motivator for school attendance as several learners enjoyed participating in especially soccer, netball and athletics. Some participants expressed the desire to have more opportunities to participate in extra-mural art and cultural activities. As research showed that learners who drop out of school are less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities, this may be an area that should receive attention (Ekstrom and colleagues, 1986, as cited in McWhirter et al., 2007).

No additional complaints about the school and its facilities were raised by individual participants. They appeared to value having access to counselling facilities and more than half of the participants spoke positively about academic support and the additional support they received from teachers and other supportive organisations. The school appeared to be providing a safe and happy haven for most of the participants and six of the eight expressed explicitly how happy they were at school. This satisfaction with available resources appeared to be an important motivator for school attendance in this school. The focus group participants identified some academic and other supportive programmes that were linked to the school. Grade 10 to 12 learners were eligible for extra support in mathematics, and the school was planning to implement a reading programme from July 2009. Some of the participants emphasised the value that such programmes provided especially in terms of emotional support. It became evident that additional support was needed to manage the workload of the teachers at the school.

The focus group participants identified a need for an updated library with research facilities as it would provide a work space for learners, especially as most of them found it difficult to complete their work at home. They also explained that their sports fields need attention, as they did not have the maintenance staff to manage the upkeep of the grounds. They commented on the fact that teachers at the school found it challenging to teach classes with 47 learners and that the teachers at the school of study had several additional responsibilities, such as transport arrangements and to provide emotional support and care to learners. Masitsa (2004) indicated that most classrooms in South African schools are designed to accommodate 35 learners, which implies that classrooms with more than 40 learners are overcrowded. The Ministerial Committee on learner retention in the South African schooling system also identified overcrowded classrooms, lack of adequate resources and aesthetics of the learning environment as factors that hampered educational activities (Progress report, 2007). Even though the individual participants did not complain about overcrowded classroom conditions, it is important to note that Masitsa (2004) found that learners are unable to achieve their full potential under such conditions, which leads to underachievement.

### **5.3.5 Local community factors contributing to and mediating dropout**

Results from this study indicated several environmental and community issues that could impact on the lives of the learners. Participants mentioned a decrease in gang activity, but indicated that violence was still prevalent in the community. Substance abuse and teenage pregnancies were identified as important problems in the community, which could affect school attendance. As mentioned previously, home circumstances were characterised by family conflict and over-

crowded living conditions. Religion seemed to be a protective factor, but it was not explored in depth in this study. The focus group participants identified a need for additional supportive community programmes, as the existing ones were overloaded. They explained that for this reason they were not able to refer learners to outside organisations.

The negative consequences of unemployment were experienced by all the participants. Most of them complained about the lack of money for basic needs and having to live in a high-risk community where unfavourable and poverty conditions prevailed. McWhirter et al. (2007) pointed out that living in such high-risk communities, combined with other psychological stressors and dysfunctional families, could push individuals to higher levels of risk, and eventually to leave school. Keen, (1992, as cited in Masitsa, 2006) states that, although poverty cannot be isolated as a critical cause of learners dropping out of school due to the interrelatedness of many factors, it is regarded as the most significant demographic predictor by some. Even though poverty could be experienced as a psychological stressor, some learners may manage to accomplish academic achievements if they are goal-orientated, motivated or received support from their parents, school and community (Randolph, 2006; Dass-Brailsford, 2005). Results from this study indicated that most of the learners could not rely on support from their families due to uncontrollable situations; the onus would therefore fall on the school and the teachers to provide encouragement to motivate learners towards their schooling.

### **5.3.6 Educational system factors contributing to or mediating dropout**

International trends had an impact on the development of a new approach towards education in South Africa. This involved a shift since the 1980s towards integration and inclusion. The new focus was to develop a system that would cater for the needs of each and every learner, would accommodate diversity and aim to overcome possible barriers to learning (Department of Education, as cited in Swart, 2004). After the election of the first democratic government, the new Department of Education committed itself to the provision of educational opportunities for all learners, especially those who have dropped out of school or those who were experiencing barriers to learning (Education White paper 6, Section 1.1.5). This was made possible through the implementation of a policy of inclusive education, which is practice-based in a more equitable and just society, with equal opportunities for all (Swart, 2004).

The above-mentioned governmental policy appeared to have been implemented at the school of study. The focus group participants indicated clearly that no learners were ever refused entry to the school. They explained that quite a number of learners and families were unable to afford

school fees and as a consequence adapted the fee structure to make provision for such situations. They indicated that greater parent involvement would be commendable, but were concerned that it would add pressure to the already stressful lives of parents. Findings indicated that all teachers at the school were adequately and professionally qualified to perform their duties. The individual participants agreed that the resources at the school were sufficient, but the focus group participants pointed out that the library, research and sport facilities need to be upgraded.

### **5.3.7 Macrosystem factors contributing to and mediating school dropout**

As mentioned in section 2.5.1, the macro system refers to the innate beliefs, attitudes, values and ideologies in the systems of a society or culture that could have an impact on the other systems. This includes values and beliefs, such as democracy and social justice (Swart & Pettipher, 2005).

As mentioned in section 2.4.1, a new Constitution and Bill of Rights was adopted after the first democratic election in South Africa in 1994, which included the following:

- Point 32 states that “everyone has the right to basic education and equal access to education” (Bill of Rights, 1996).
- Point 8 refers to equality where it states that “every person has equal rights in the eyes of the law”, and “there may be no discrimination against any person on the grounds of race, gender, ethnic or social descent, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, faith, culture or language” (Bill of Rights, 1996).

This governmental acceptance of a policy of democracy and social justice has hopefully had an impact on all the other systems and interactions within systems related to individuals living in South Africa. It has hopefully influenced the manner in which people treat each other and given hope to those that were formerly disadvantaged by the former laws and policies. Part of the vision of inclusion is that school principals should aim to create a school that functions as a “supportive and caring community” (Swart & Pettipher, 2005, p.19). The management at the school of study seemed aware of the practical implications of inclusion in schools, as the focus group participants indicated that they were working towards creating a “gemeenskap-skool” [community school] where learners would feel safe and supported. Learners in this study confirmed this as most of them indicated that they were happy at the specific school during the semi-structured interviews.

Furthermore, the Ministerial Committee on learner retention in the South African schooling system suggested the following policy interventions to decrease learner dropout in the future:

improving learner retention should focus on the post-compulsory school phase; the Department should investigate circumstances for learner absence on a regular basis and attempts should be made to register all school-going-aged children not attending school; improving social networks to monitor and track learner attendance; addressing signs of low self-esteem and aggressive behaviour in early childhood as an association has been found between early measurable factors and behaviours and later school dropout; improving access to early childhood development programmes; promoting a positive classroom climate and supportive personal relationships with learners with difficulties, and providing staff development programmes.

## **5.4 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion of this section the results from this study showed that the general individual challenges cannot be separated from the challenges set by barriers to learning and the connecting social systems, such as that of the school. The participants spoke positively about the teacher-learner relationships and the support that they received from them, although half of them said they would appreciate more mutual respect. It became evident that the holistic demand was greater on teachers at the school, due to a lack of role-models at home.

Substance abuse and challenging home conditions were identified as important contributors to emotional stress, loss of interest in school and eventual school dropout. From a systems perspective, it appeared as if several of the participants did not receive the emotional support that they required from home, which added further stress to their lives. However, the results of this study indicated that the teachers at the school provided a positive and supportive environment, which partially protected the participants from the psychological effects of such unsupportive environments and reduced the risk of dropping out of school.

Teenage pregnancy was indicated as a reason why learners dropped out of school, although none of the participants had been pregnant before. Career guidance and emotional and academic support appeared to be available, although there seemed to be a need for additional support as learners did not seem to grasp the link between their education and their future aspirations.

In terms of facilities, participants were generally satisfied with the available resources. However, in this context, the library, research and sport facilities were identified as areas in need of upgrading.

Finally, the governmental policy of inclusive education appeared to have been implemented at the school of study as it became evident that no learners were ever refused entry to the school



and the fee structure made provision for families that were unable to afford school fees. The management at the school where the study was conducted also indicated that they were working towards creating a community school where learners will feel safe and supported. Findings indicated that this process had already been started, as all the learners indicated that they were *happy* at the school.

## **5.5 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to gain a contextual understanding of the dropout phenomenon in a specific school in a high-risk community. The aim was achieved through the identification and selection of key informants with the assistance of school staff. Informants were purposively selected according to criteria as identified in the methodology chapter. Data was collected through eight semi-structured interviews with learners at risk of dropping out of school, a semi-structured interview with a member of the community, one focus group interview, and collages that were completed by the participants of the individual interviews.

Data was then compared to previous research gleaned from an extensive literature review. The findings of the study correlated highly with many of the studies reviewed in chapter two. Results that emerged from this study indicated that the participants experienced several barriers to learning embedded in the interconnected systems, which could cause them to drop out of school. This included issues such as family conflict, single-parent families, lack of parental support, emotional difficulties due to home circumstances, substance abuse and socio-economic issues. This suggested that the areas of difficulty lie mainly within the micro- and mesosystems, but also in the exosystem. However, it is important to note that the individual's interaction with the systems is a mutually recursive one.

Although results showed that the school had seemingly adopted an inclusive policy and had made some adaptations to accommodate learners, it became evident that the learners and the teachers regarded the existing support structures within the community and the school as insufficient. Due to the nature of unsupportive and conflicting family systems for some of the learners, teachers are expected to adopt additional nurturing roles that add to an already overburdened and pressurised educational system. Recommendations to accommodate this will be made in the following section.



## 5.6 REFLEXIVITY

The researcher was aware throughout the process that her age and being of a different culture may influence responses from the participants of the study, as was illustrated by them calling her *juffrou* (Miss) throughout. It is also possible that some meaning may have been lost in translation from Afrikaans to English, as the interviews were conducted in Afrikaans and the research report was written in English. Finally, the female participants appeared to communicate more freely during the interviews, implying that gender could have played a role in the assimilation of knowledge.

## 5.7 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

During the final stages of the research process, it was evident that there were strengths and limitations to this study.

The following strengths were identified:

- It became evident through the literature review that there is a need for more qualitative studies in South Africa to explore school dropout. The qualitative method of research used in this study allowed for the exploration of the subjective experiences of the learners at the school, which gave an indication of their personal perceptions of the dropout problem at the school. The researcher views the fact that this study was conducted in a specific school as a strength, as the results of the study highlighted areas that could receive attention in order to address the problem for specific learners at risk of dropping out of school.
- Doing face-to-face interviews with the learners at risk of dropping out enabled the researcher to also observe the body language, which allowed her to become aware of the unspoken messages in their expressions and to assess for how much social desirability took place.
- The collages were particularly useful as a method of data collection, as this seems to be a somewhat novel approach and helped to end the interviews on a positive and solution-focussed note, and proved to be a useful pillar in triangulation of methods.

The following limitations were identified:

- In this study the sample consisted of adolescents who all lived in the same community. It means that the results offered a limited perspective as it reflected the perceptions from

members of a particular community. This has implications for generalising the findings to other communities.

- As the sample consisted of eight individual learners at risk of dropping out of school, it is possible that the small size of the sample has implications for the generalisation of the findings to other learners in the school.
- Similarly, the sample consisted of learners from one age group from a particular school setting. This has implications for the generalisation of findings to other schools and other age groups.
- Due to time constraints and work pressure from teachers it was not possible to conduct a focus group with six to eight members as originally planned, and adaptations therefore had to be made. Therefore only two staff members formed the focus group, and no other teachers were included. They could have had different experiences to the principal and school counsellor.

## **5.8 RECOMMENDATIONS**

This research project showed that several contextual circumstances were a major contributing factor in increasing the risk of grade ten to twelve learners to drop out of school. Living in a high-risk community where they had to cope with adverse living conditions, high prevalence of substance use and abuse, and stressful socio-economic conditions, was part of the daily lives of the learners. The participants indicated that they found it stressful to manage their everyday school lives along with the added financial and family pressures. As substance abuse was very prevalent in the community, learners might use it as a crutch to cope with the stressors in their lives. It became evident that substance use decreases their interest in school activities. It is therefore recommended that the emphasis should be on strengthening the environment where they live, which would be an opportunity for further research. Despite the limitations mentioned in section 5.5, the following recommendations are proposed as a result of this study:

- Early identification and targeting of learners who are most at risk of dropping out by intervening in their academic, social and personal lives is imperative.
- Strategies aimed to increase engagement of all learners in the school should be implemented. This should aim to provide learners with a sense of belonging, and could include extra-mural activities, such as art, dance and yoga, as these activities were particularly identified by learners in this study as letting them feel part of their school. Other interests could be identified through a questionnaire and learners at risk of dropping out of school might initially have to be invited to such activities.

- An ongoing supportive drug-free programme should be implemented in the school in conjunction with organisations such as ABBA. One of the objectives should be to prevent learners from becoming involved with substance use by providing information about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and drugs. Another objective should be to identify individuals at the early stage of substance abuse to prevent negative consequences such as school dropout.
- Linked to this, implementing a supportive community programme with the focus on the effects and consequences of substance use and abuse with links to the family and school would be beneficial.
- Programmes directed at parents to provide them with the skills and support they need to support their children in terms of their academics as well as other areas. This could be organised through the nearby Stellenbosch University, FET colleges or the church, as teachers at the school appeared to be overloaded. The University and FET Colleges could be asked to provide assistance with the implementation of such programmes.
- As learners did not appear to understand the link between their education and future aspirations, workshops should be offered to provide the learners with the opportunity to discuss the relevance of their academic work in terms of the world of work and the related challenges. This can be presented as part of the career guidance programme. Furthermore, the school can invite members of the community who work in different fields to share their experiences in the workplace with the learners. The Stellenbosch University, in particular an intern Educational Psychologist or Educational Psychology Master's student involved at the school, could also be asked to provide assistance in this area.
- Work experience internships could be arranged for interested learners, as some of the participants expressed interests, such as cooking, hairdressing and working in a bicycle shop. This could be arranged with local organisations and would provide practical experience and exposure in a range of occupations. Again, intern Educational Psychologists or the existing support programme, ABBA, could assist in this.
- Professional development workshops and in-service training should be offered to teachers in order to highlight the additional role they play in the lives of learners due to their adverse home conditions. A suggestion is that this could be an area of focus for an annual intern Educational Psychologist or Educational Psychology Master's students.
- School schedules could be altered to include advisory or study periods. This will allow more time for teacher-learner interaction and provide a space for completing homework as several of the participants in this study reported that they find it difficult to complete tasks at home due to lack of space and privacy.

- The need for the provision of additional resources, such as a well resourced library, research facilities and sport facilities were expressed by the focus group participants. This could be investigated by the school authorities as it might be possible to create such facilities through links with the University of Stellenbosch. Improved library and research facilities are essential as it would give learners the opportunity to do research at school and to become independent learners. Improved sport facilities would encourage participation in sport as well as a healthy lifestyle.
- The continuation of the existing support programmes that were organised by the Stellenbosch University, such as USIKO, ABBA, and the Big Sister Programme, is recommended.

## **5.9 FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES**

- As South Africa is such a diverse country, it would be beneficial to look at a broader spectrum of learners to get a more representative idea of the school dropout phenomenon in the country from a qualitative perspective.
- This study focussed on learners at risk of dropping out of school between grades 10 and 12. It would be useful to explore the dropout phenomenon amongst younger learners at the feeder school to the school of study, in order to address factors that could possibly prevent school dropout at a later stage. The results of this study could assist educators in identifying possible risk factors contributing to learners dropping out of school.
- It became evident during the data analysis process that school dropout is a complex phenomenon, but the emergence of substance use and abuse as one of the most prevalent contributors to school dropout in the specific school stood out in the results of this study. A study that addresses this issue in more detail could be beneficial to the learners and educators at the school. Several themes emanated from this exploratory research. A possibility would be to take one theme and analyse it in even more depth.

## **5.10 CONCLUSION**

The present study consists of an exploration of the school dropout phenomenon, and aims to provide qualitative data on this phenomenon in a Stellenbosch, Western Cape community. It indicated that school dropout seems to be a complex phenomenon, with a number of factors interacting at various levels that either contribute or are protective against school dropout. This has implications if educational programmes are to be implemented.

## References

- Ali, S. & Kelly, M. (2004). Ethics and social research. In Seale, C. (Ed.) *Researching Society and Culture (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)* (pp.116-126). London: Sage Publications.
- Babbie, E. & Mouton, J. (2001). *The Practise of Social Research*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Berger, K.S. (2005). *The developing person. Through the life span*. New York: Worth Publishers.
- Bill of Rights, South African Constitution, 1996. <http://www.polity.org.za/pol/policy/>
- Boon, H.J. & Cook, J. (2008). Risk or resilience? What makes a difference? *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 35(1), 81-102. Retrieved from EBSCOHOST on March 16, 2009.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: experiments by design and nature*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1992). Ecological systems theory. In Vasta, R. (Ed.), *Six theories of child development: revised formulations and new trends*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 187-249.
- Byrne, B. (2004). Qualitative Interviewing. In Seale, C. (Ed.). *Researching Society and Culture (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)* (pp.179-192). London: Sage Publications.
- Cardoso, A.R. & Verner, D. (2007). School drop-out and push-out factors in Brazil. The role of early parenthood, child labor, and poverty. *Social Development Department, March 2007*. Latin America and the Carribean Region: The World Bank.
- Chen, C.P. (2008). Career guidance for at-risk students via social learning. *Perspectives on Education*, 26(4), 6-16. Retrieved form EBSCOHOST on April 18, 2009.
- Chmelynski, C. (2006). Getting High-School Dropouts Back in School. *School Board News*, 26, 38-41. Retrieved March 17, 2007 from EBSCOHOST database.
- Coombe, C. (2001). *HIV/AIDS and Trauma among learners: Sexual Violence and Deprivation in South Africa. Lifeskills within the caring professions: a career counselling perspective for the bio-technical age*. Cape Town: Heinemann Educational Publishers.

- Dass-Brailsford, P. (2005). Exploring resiliency: academic achievement among disadvantaged black youth in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 35(3), 574-591. Retrieved on April 14, 2009 from EBSCOHOST.
- Donald, D., Lazarus, S. & Lolwana, P. (2005). *Educational Psychology in Social Context*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Durrheim, K. & Terre Blanche, M. (2006). History of the present: social science research in context. In Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K. & Painter, D. *Research in Practise* (pp. 2-17). Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press (Pty) Ltd.
- Durrheim, K. (2006). Research Design. In Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K. & Painter, D. *Research in Practise* (pp. 34-58). Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press (Pty) Ltd.
- Du Toit, L. (1996). An introduction to specialised education. In: Engelbrecht, P., Kriegler, M.I., & Booysen, M.I. (Eds.) *Perspectives on learning disabilities*. Pretoria: Van Schaiks Publishers.
- Department of Education. (1997). *Quality education for all. Overcoming barriers to learning and development*. Report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS). Pretoria: Department of Education. (Available at schools).
- Department of Education. (2001). *Education White Paper 6. Special needs education. Building an inclusive education and training system*. Pretoria: Department of Education. <http://education.pwv.gov.za>
- Department of Education. (2002). *Guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education (Second draft)*. Pretoria: Department of Education, Directorate: Inclusive Education (Also available on-line, <http://education.pwv.gov.za>)
- Eloff, I., Maree, J.G. & Ebersohn, L. (2006). Some thoughts on the perceptions of the role of educational psychologists in early childhood intervention. *Early Child Development and Care*, 176(2), 111-127. Retrieved March 2008, from EBSCOHOST database.
- Engelbrecht, P. & Green, L. (Eds.), (2001). *Promoting learner development. Preventing and working with barriers to learning*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Erikson, E.H. (1963). *Childhood and society* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). New York: Norton.

- Erikson, E.H. (1968). *Identity, youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Fleisch, B., Shindler, J. & Perry, H. (2008/2009). Children out of school:evidence from the community survey. *South African Child Guage, 2008/2009*, 41-49.
- Flisher, A.J., Townsend, L., Chikobvu, P., Lombard, C. & King, G. (2004). *Substance use and high school dropout*. Poster presentation at the American Public Health Association 132<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting, Washington DC, November 6-10, 2004.
- Fritz, E. & Beekman, L. (2007). Engaging clients actively in telling stories and actualising dreams. In Maree, K. *Shaping the story: A guide to facilitating narrative counselling* (pp. 163-174). Pretoria: Van Schaik Boekhandel.
- Gouws, E., Kruger, N. & Burger, S. (2008). *The adolescent (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed)*. Johannesburg: Heinemann Publishers (Pty) Ltd.
- Grant, M. & Hallman, K. (2006). *Pregnancy-related school dropout and prior school performance in South Africa*. New York: The Population Inc.
- Green, K.M. & Ensminger, M.E. (2006). Adult social behavioural effects of heavy adolescent marijuana use among African Americans. *Developmental Psychology, 42(6)*, 1168-1178. Retrieved March 20, from EBSCOHOST database.
- Hardre, P.L. & Reeve, J. (2003). A motivational model of rural students' intentions to persist in, versus drop out of, high school. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 95(2)*, 347-356. Retrieved from EBSCOHOST on March 16, 2009.
- Henning, E., Gravett, S. & Van Rensburg, W. (2005). *Finding your way in academic writing (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed)*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Henning, E., Van Rensburg, W. & Smit, B. (2004). *Finding your way in qualitative research*. Pretoria: Van Schaick Publishers.
- <http://learning-theories.com/identity-status-theory-marcia.html>. Retrieved 09/04/09.

Hickman, G.P., Bartholomew, M. & Mathwig, J. (2008). Differential developmental pathways of high school dropouts and graduates. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 102(1), 3-13. Retrieved from EBSCOHOST database on March 14, 2009.

<http://www.usiko.org.za/m-history.htm>

Interview with Headmaster: 12 March 2009.

Interview with Community member: 6 July 2009.

Jansen, SAFM Interview, 9 April 2009.

Jimerson, S.R. & Ferguson, P. (2007). A longitudinal study of grade retention: academic and behavioural outcomes of retained students through adolescence. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 22(3), 314-339. Retrieved from EBSCOHOST on March 16, 2009.

Johnson, B. & Christensen, L. (2008). *Educational Research. Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Approaches (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed)*. USA: Sage Publications.

Johnson, L. & Dorrington, R. (2001). *The Impact of AIDS on Orphanhood in South Africa: A Quantitative Analysis*. Centre for Actuarial Research (CARE) – Research Unit of University of Cape Town. CARE Monograph No. 4, October, 2001.

Jozefowicz-Simbeni, D.M.H. (2008). An ecological and developmental perspective on dropout risk factors in early adolescence: role of school social workers in dropout prevention efforts. *Children & Schools*, 30(1), 49-62. Retrieved from EBSCOHOST on March 18, 2009.

Kaniki, A.M. (2006). Doing and information search. In Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K. & Painter, D. *Research in Practise*. (pp 18-32). Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press (Pty) Ltd.

Kelly, K. (2006). From encounter to text: Collecting data in qualitative research. In Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K. & Painter, D. *Research in Practise* (pp. 285-320). Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press (Pty) Ltd.

Keating, C. (2008). Senior pupils drop out. *The Argus*, February, 26, 2008.

Kindersorg Suid-Afrika. *Community profile 2009*.



- Knesting, K. (2008). Students at risk for school dropout:supporting their persistence. *Preventing School Failure*, 52(4), 3-10. Retrieved from EBSCOHOST on April 14, 2009.
- Lomofsky, L., & Lazarus, S. (2001). South Africa: first steps in the development of an inclusive education system. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 31(3). (download from Ebscohost Research Databases/Education Journals on Proquest on [http://www.sun.ac.za/library/afr/Information\\_sources/e\\_databases\\_int.htm](http://www.sun.ac.za/library/afr/Information_sources/e_databases_int.htm))
- Manlove, J. (1998). The influence of high school dropout and school disengagement on the risk of school-age pregnancy. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 8(2), 187-220. Retrieved on March 16, 2007 from EBSCOHOST database.
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G.B. (1999). *Designing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications
- Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 3, pp. 551-558.
- Marks, G.N. (2007). Do schools matter for early school leaving? Individual and school influences in Australia. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 18(4), 429-450. Retrieved from EBSCOHOST on March 16, 2009.
- Masitsa, G. (2004). Four critical causes of underachievement in township secondary schools. *Acta Academia*, 36(1), 213-245. Retrieved from SABINET on March 23, 2007.
- Masitsa, G. (2006). Drop-out in township secondary schools: educators' perspectives. *Acta Academica*, 38(3), 165-191. Retrieved in February, 2008 from SAePublications.
- McIntosh, K., Flannery, K.B., Sugai, G., Braun, D.H. & Cochrane, K.L. (2008). Relationships between academics and problem behaviour in the transition from middle school to high school. *Journal of Positive Behaviour Interventions*, 10(4), 243-254. Retrieved from EBSCOHOST database on March 18, 2009.
- McWhirter, J.J., McWhirter, B.T., McWhirter, E.H. & McWhirter, R.J. (2007). *At Risk Youth*. United States of America: Thomson Brooks/Cole.
- Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

- Merriam, S.B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mouton, J. (2004). *How to succeed in your master's and doctoral studies: A South African guide and resource book*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Neuman, W.L. (1994). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Neuman, W. L. (2002). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches (4<sup>th</sup> edition)*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Neuman, W. L. (2006). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches (6<sup>th</sup> edition)*. Boston: Pearson Education Inc.
- Normand, C. (2007). *Exploring the resilience in youth living in a high-risk community*. Master's thesis. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.
- Ou, S. & Reynolds, A.J. (2008). Predictors of educational attainment in the Chicago longitudinal study. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23(2), 199-229. Retrieved on March 16, 2009.
- Patton, M.Q. (1987). *How to use qualitative methods in evaluation*. Newbury Park, California: SAGE Publications.
- Poplin, M.S. (1988). Holistic/constructivistic principles of the teaching/learning process: Implications for the field of learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 21(7), Aug./Sept. 1988: 401-416. (Library or Ebscohost Research Databases/Education Journals on Proquest) .[http://www.sun.ac.za/library/afr/Information\\_sources/e\\_databases\\_int.htm](http://www.sun.ac.za/library/afr/Information_sources/e_databases_int.htm)
- Progress Report to the Minister of Education (October, 2007). Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling system.
- Punch, K.F. (1998). *Introduction to Social Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Pillay, J. & Nesengani, R.I. (2006). The educational challenges facing early adolescents who head families in rural Limpopo Province. Faculty of Education, Dept of Educational Psychology, University of Johannesburg. Retrieved March 16, 2007 from EBSCOHOST database.

- Prinsloo, E. (2004). The impact of poverty and social economic decline on the new education dispensation in South Africa. *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* 44(2&3), 158-166. Retrieved March 19, 2007 from SAePublications.
- Randolph, K.A., Fraser, M.W. & Orthner, D.K. (2006). A strategy for assessing the impact of time-varying family risk factors on high school dropout. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27(7), 933-949. Retrieved from SAGE Publications on March 16, 2007.
- Ratele, K. (2007). Poverty. In M. Visser (Ed.) *Contextualising Community Psychology in South Africa*. (pp 217 – 228). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Sadock, B.J. & Sadock, V.A. (2007). *Kaplan & Sadock's synopsis of psychiatry: behavioural sciences/clinical psychiatry*. USA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Sands, D.J., Kozleski, E.B. & French, N.K. (2000). *Inclusive education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning. Chapters 1, 4 & 5.
- Seale, C. (2004). Coding and analyzing data. In Seale, C. (Ed.). *Researching Society and Culture* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). London: Sage Publications.
- Staff, J. & Kreager, D.A. (2008). Too cool for school? Violence, peer status and high school dropout. *Social Forces*, (87)1, 445-471. Retrieved from ProQuest Education Journals on February 10, 2009.
- Stillwel, R. & Hoffman, L. (2008). *Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data : School year 2005-2006* (NCES 2008-353). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C. Retrieved February 05 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid+2008353>.
- Stone, S. (2006). Correlates of change in student reported parent involvement in schooling : a new look at the national educational longitudinal study of 1988. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 76(4), 518-530. Retrieved from EBSCOHOST on March 18, 2007.
- Suh, S. & Suh, J. (2006). Educational engagement and degree attainment among high school dropouts. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 29(3), 11-20. Retrieved on March 17, 2007 from EBSCOHOST database.

- Suh, S., Suh, J. & Houston, I. (2007). Predictors of categorical at-risk high school dropouts. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 85 (Spring), 196-203. Retrieved from EBSCOHOST on June 20, 2008.
- Sunday Times, June, 21, 2009.
- Swart, E. (2004). Inclusive Education. In: Eloff, I. & Ebersöhn, L. *Keys to educational psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press, pp. 230-247.
- Swart, E. & Pettipher, R. (2005). A framework for understanding inclusion. In Landsberg, E., Krüger, D. & Nel, N. (Eds.). *Addressing barriers to learning. A South African perspective*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Sweeten, G. (2006). Who Will Graduate? Disruption of High School Education by Arrest and Court Involvement. *Justice Quarterly*, 23(4), 463-480. Retrieved on March 16, 2007 from EBSCOHOST database.
- Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K. & Painter, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Research in practice*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press (Pty) Ltd.
- Terre Blanche, M. & Durrheim, K. (2006). Histories of the present: social science research in context. In Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K. & Painter, D. *Research in Practise* (pp. 1-17). Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Terry, M. (2003). The effects that family members and peers have on students' decisions to drop out of school. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 31(3), 26-38. Retrieved on March 18, 2007 from EBSCOHOST database.
- The Argus, February, 26, 2008.
- The Draft National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (DNSSIAS) (May 2005). Pretoria: Directorate Inclusive Education.
- Tindall, C. (1996). Personal Construct Approaches. In P. Bannister, E. Burman, I. Parker, M. Taylor & C. Tindall (Eds). *Qualitative Methods in Psychology. A Research Guide* (pp.142-159). USA: Open University Press.
- Townsend, L., Flisher, A.J., Chikobvu, P., Lombard, C. & King, G. (2008). The relationship between bullying behaviours and high school dropout in Cape Town, South Africa. *South*

- African Journal of Psychology*, 38(1), 21-32. Retrieved on April 2008 from EBSCOHOST database.
- Townsend, L., Flisher, A.J. & King, G. (2007). A systematic review of the relationship between high school dropout and substance use. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology*, 10(4), 295-316. Retrieved on February 15, 2009 from EBSCOHOST database.
- UNESCO (2002). *The New Courier*. May 2002, No. 0. Paris: UNESCO
- UNESCO (2007). Summary report: Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2007. Paris: UNESCO.
- U.S. Department of Education, National center for Education Statistics. (2006). *The Condition of Education 2006* (NCES 2006-071). Retrieved May 10, 2007 from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=16>
- Van der Merwe, A. (1996). Life skills education: Empowering pupils for the future. In Engelbrecht, P., Kriegler, S.M. & Booysen, M.I. (Eds.). (pp.283-285). *Perspectives on learning difficulties. International concerns and South African realities*. Pretoria: Van Schaick Publishers.
- Vaughn, S., Bos, C.S., & Schumm, J.S. (2000). *Teaching exceptional, diverse and at-risk students in the general education classroom*. United States of America: Allyn & Bacon.
- Visser, M. (2007). *Contextualising community psychology in South Africa*. Pretoria: Van Schaick Publishers.
- Wait, J., Meyer, J. & Loxton, H. (2005). *Human development a psychosocial approach*. Parow East: Ebony Books.
- Wassenaar, D. (2006). Ethical issues in social science research. In In Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K. & Painter, D. *Research in Practise*. (pp. 60-80). Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press (Pty) Ltd.
- Welman, Kruger & Mitchell (2005). *Research methodology (3<sup>rd</sup> edition)*. Southern Africa: Oxford University Press.
- Western Cape Education Department. (2005). Strategy for encouraging positive behaviour and responding to challenging behaviour in public schools. Cape Town: Western Cape Education Department.

Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology. Adventures in theory and method*. United Kingdom: Open University Press.





## APPENDIX B

Figure 3.10: Age-specific enrolment rates from various surveys and censuses: Whites

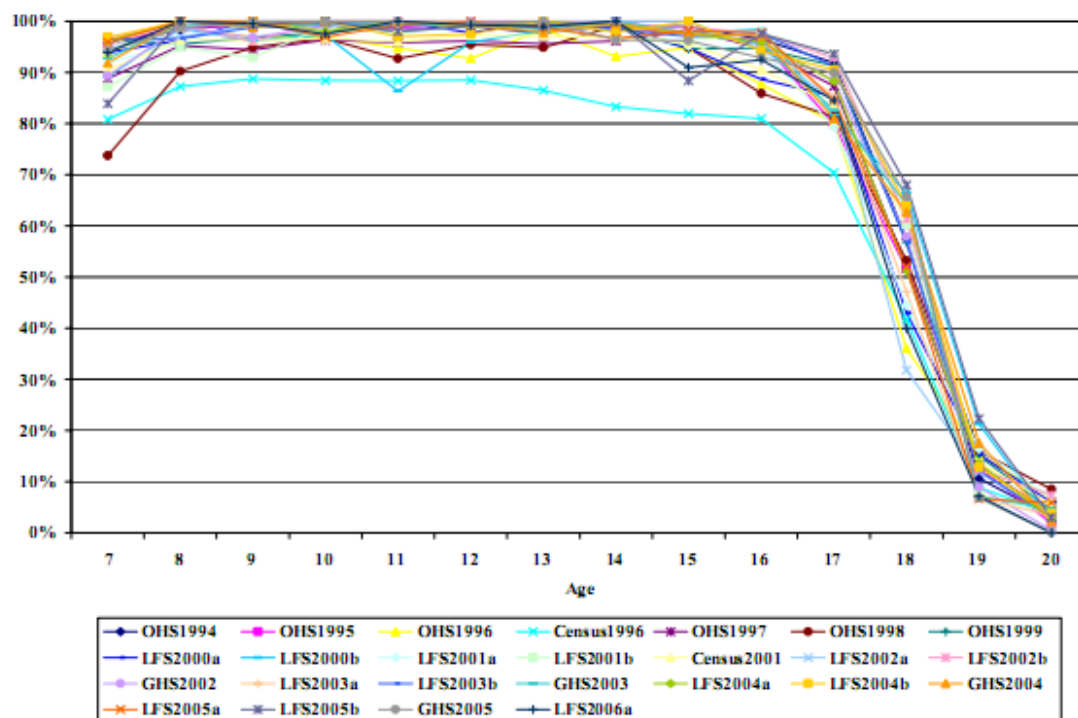
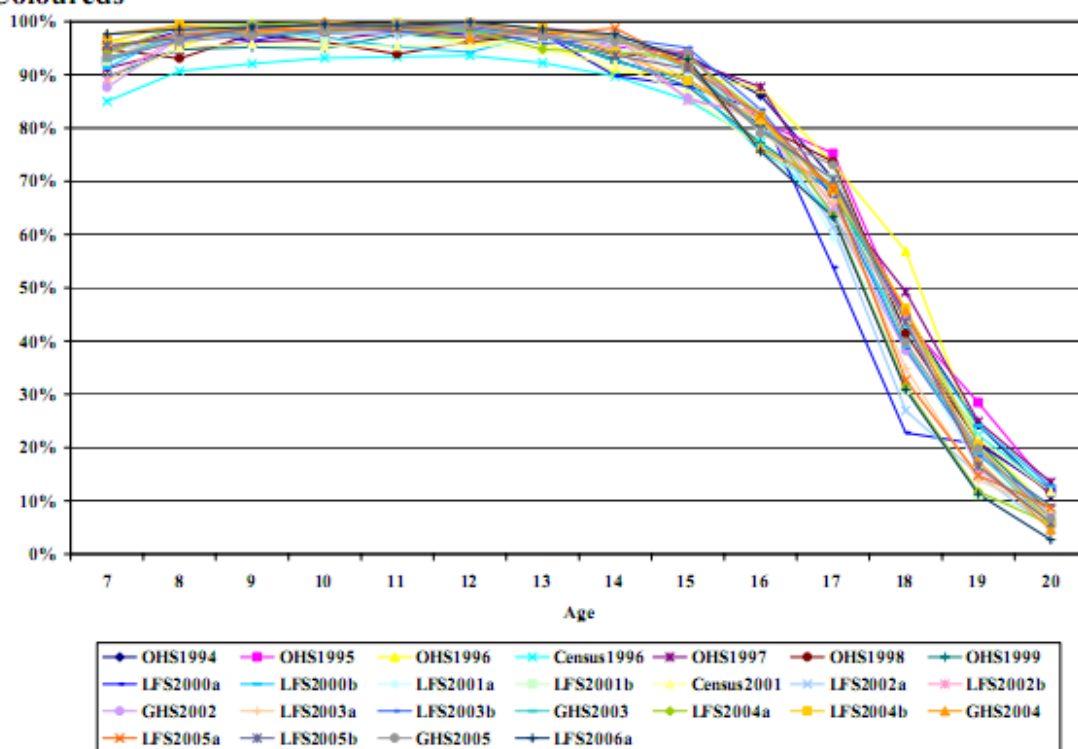


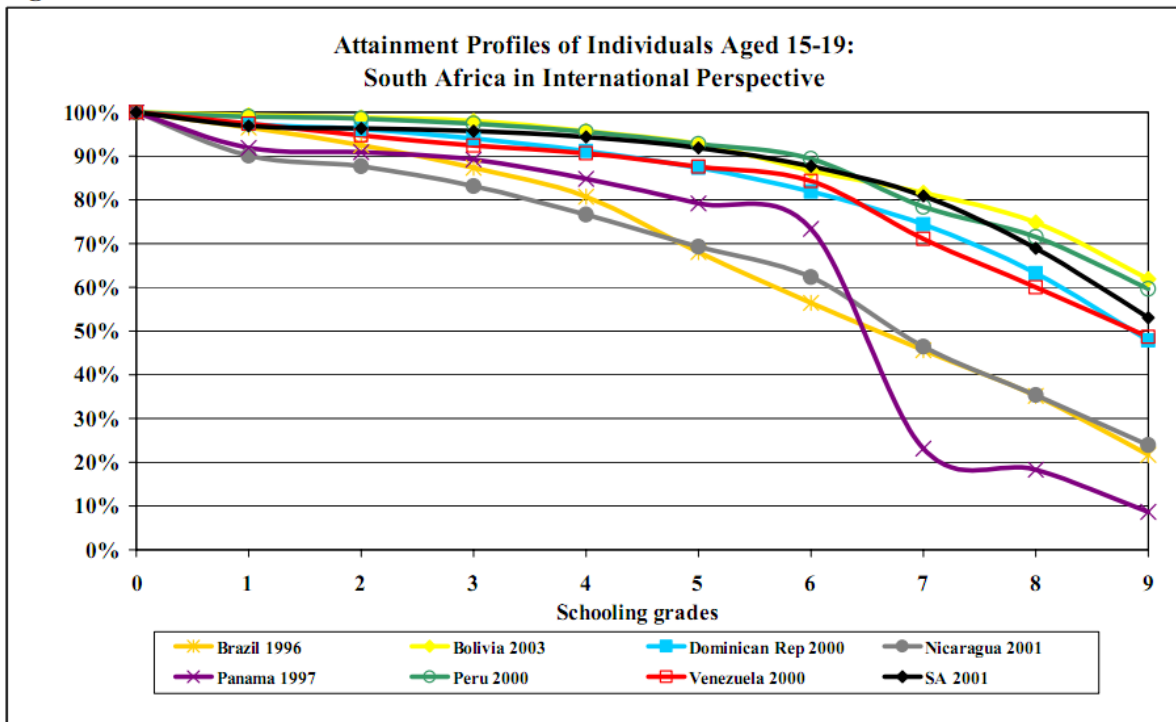
Figure 3.11: Age-specific enrolment rates from various surveys and censuses: Coloureds





# APPENDIX C

Figure 3.18



# APPENDIX D

## STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

---

### EXPLORING THE DROPOUT PHENOMENON IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL SITUATED IN A HIGH-RISK COMMUNITY

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Ms GC Inglis (BA Psych(Hons) (US)HDE(PP)MEdPsych Intern(US), from the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University. The results of this study will contribute to a research paper. You were selected as a possible participant in this study either because you are in Grade 10, 11 or 12, or are a current teacher at the school. Your views on the reasons why learners drop out of school are of great importance to the study and the researcher.

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The goal of this investigation is to gain a contextual understanding of the reasons for learners dropping out of school during the post compulsory phase of their education in a particular school of Stellenbosch in South Africa, and to compare the perceptions of learners and teachers regarding this phenomenon in this high-risk community.

#### **2. PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following:

Learners:

A semi-structured individual interview will be conducted with each of the eight participants. Each interview should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. In addition, the individual participants will be asked to each make a list of the barriers that may prevent them from achieving their academic goals. Thereafter they will be asked to visualize what their lives would be like if these barriers did not exist and make a collage of this ideal world. This activity should take an additional 30 minutes.

Teachers:

A focus-group with eight participants will be facilitated. These participants should be current teachers at the particular secondary school in the identified high-risk community. The purpose is to obtain their perceptions of the school dropout phenomenon in the particular school. This group interview should last approximately one and a half hours.

### **3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The above interviews, activities and focus-group discussions will be scheduled in collaboration with the individuals in order to avoid any inconveniences. Should any of the participants decide to terminate their participation at any stage, their decision will be respected.

### **4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

My motivation for engaging in this study is to explore and develop a more in-depth understanding of the high school dropout phenomenon during the post compulsory school phase in this particular community. I will aim to explore the reasons for at-risk learners to drop out of school and investigate the value of teacher/learner relationships in particular, as the results of a pilot study that I conducted showed that supportive and positive relationships seemed to encourage school attendance. A more thorough understanding of the reasons for high school dropout should assist us in formulating suggestions for possible interventions; thus helping us supporting the youth in this community. The participants in this study may therefore benefit from such interventions.

### **5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

There will be no remuneration of any kind involved in this study.

### **6. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by the use of pseudonyms as informants have the right to remain anonymous. Interviews will be conducted in a private room on the school premises. No reference will be made to their school or community in the research report. Interviews will be transcribed from audio-tapes which will be erased afterwards. The results of this study will be published, but anonymity of participants will be maintained throughout.

### **7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. Your participation in this study will have no impact on your academic results as a learner, and will not jeopardize your future as learner or as teacher at the school. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

### **8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. A. Lewis from the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Stellenbosch at 0828746112, or myself at 0825762167.

## **9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Maryke Hunter-Hüsselmann ([mh3@sun.ac.za](mailto:mh3@sun.ac.za); 021 808 4623) at the Division for Research Development.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR LEARNERS**

#### **PERSONAL DETAILS:**

Surname:

First name:

Gender:

Age:

Address:

Grade:

Previous school:

Time period at current school:

#### **FAMILY FACTORS:**

- Tell me about you parents and your family
- What do they do?
- Tell me about their schooling/education
- How would you describe your relationship with your parents/caregivers?
  - How often do they praise you?
  - How do they discipline you?
  - What are the kinds of things that get you into trouble with your parents/caregivers?
- How often do people argue in your home?
  - How do people show when they are angry in your house?
- How do/did your parents react when you don't/did not go to school?
- How important is religion/going to church in your family?

#### **FRIENDS:**

- Tell me about your friends
- Are they at school or have they left school already?
- If they have left – what were the reasons for them leaving school before Grade 12?
- Do/did they like school?

- What do you like doing together?
- How do you feel about teenage pregnancy/having a child during your teenager/high school years?
- Can you share your thoughts about drinking/using drugs? Would you say it is a problem at your school?
- How important is it to have money, do you think? In what way can make a difference to your life?
- What do you know about HIV/AIDS?
  - How often do you and your friends talk about it?
  - Do you know anyone who has HIV/AIDS?
  - Are you concerned about it?

### **SCHOOL:**

- Tell me about your school
- How far is it from your house?
- How long does it take you to get to school?
- What grade are you now?
- Does your school have good facilities?
  - What can be improved on at your school/what makes your school worse than other schools?
  - What are the things that make your school special/better than other schools?
- What is the size of your class?
- What responsibilities do you think a Grade 10 (or 11) learner has?
  - In terms of your school work
  - Life at home/towards your parents
  - Towards your friends
- Do children attend school regularly at your school/are children often absent at your school?
  - Why/why not?
  - In your view - What are the reasons for children not attending school?
- Tell me about the teachers at your school:
  - How would you describe the teachers at your school?
  - Are your teacher(s) always around?

- Are you kept occupied in your class at all times?
- What do you think the relationship between a teacher and learner should be like?
- How would you like to be treated as a learner by teachers?
- How are you disciplined at school?
- How do you think one could encourage children to come to class?
- How often have you yourself been absent/were you absent from school?
- What do you like least about school?
- What do you like most about school?



## **APPENDIX F**

### **INTERVIEW WITH FOCUS-GROUP**

#### **PERSONAL DETAILS (R1)**

SURNAME:

NAME:

GENDER:

AGE:

#### **PERSONAL DETAILS (R2)**

SURNAME:

NAME:

GENDER:

AGE:

#### **SCHOOL and ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS:**

What is the correct name of the school?

What is the name of the area that the school is situated in?

Since when have you been at this school?

How would you describe the background of the learners that attend this school?

- SES
- Both parents or single-parent families
- Number of children
- Violence
- Drug use
- Alcohol use
- Working parents/staying at home parents

Tell me about the school's facilities?

What is the school enrolment?

What is the teacher/learner ratio?

Tell me about your feelings about the teacher/learner ratio. Is there anything that can be done about it?

What are the qualifications of the teachers?

Do most children attend school regularly?

How serious a problem is school dropout in this school?

What is the percentage of learner dropout per year?

- 2008
- 2009

What do you think the factors are that lead to school dropout in this area?

What do you think keep learners at school?

What actions have the school taken to address this issue?

What is the view of the families about the importance of education?



CATEGORIES	THEMES	CODES	REFERENCES							
			ROSE	SAM	JIMMY	LILY	JAKE	CANDICE	CHAZ	ABE
FAMILY SYSTEMS	FAMILY DIFFICULTIES	SINGLE PARENTING	Y		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
		ABSENT FATHER	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
		FAMILY CONFLICT			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
		TROUBLED SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS			Y	Y			Y	
		PERCEIVED UNFAIR TREATMENT BY FAMILY			Y	Y		Y	Y	
		PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE			Y	Y	Y	Y		
		PARENTS AND SIBLINGS SUBSTANCE USE & DRUG DEALING				Y	Y		Y	Y
		OVERCROWDED LIVING CONDITIONS				Y		Y	Y	Y
		HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF EXTENDED FAMILY	Y			Y	Y		Y	
		TROUBLED PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS			Y	Y		Y	Y	
	FAMILY SUPPORT	GOOD RELATIONSHIP PARENTS & SIBLINGS	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	
		LITTLE-FAMILY CONFLICT		Y						
		MATERNAL AND PATERNAL SUPPORT				Y		Y	Y	
		ENCOURAGEMENT TO ATTEND SCHOOL			Y	Y			Y	
		VERBAL RATHER THAN PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE				Y	Y		Y	Y
PEER GROUP SYSTEMS	PEER RELATIONSHIPS	SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
		SOCIALIZE WITH FRIENDS MAINLY AT SCHOOL				Y			Y	
		PEER CONFLICT						Y		
		NEG PEER INFLUENCE			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
		SUBSTANCE USE WITH FRIENDS				Y		Y		
		DIFFICULTY TO BREAK TIES WITH FRIENDS					Y	Y		
		INDIFFERENT TO PEER APPROVAL				Y			Y	Y
SOCIAL CONTEXT, ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY ISSUES	ISSUES CONCERNING WELLNESS AND SAFETY IN COMMUNITY	GANGSTERISM			Y				Y	
		VIOLENCE			Y			Y	Y	
		SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND CONSEQUENCES			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
		TEENAGE PREGNANCY			Y	Y		Y	Y	
		PREVALENCE OF THEFT			Y				Y	
		LACK OF SUPPORTIVE PROGRAMMES - YOUTH							Y	
		UNEMPLOYMENT				Y	Y		Y	
		FAMILY CONFLICT - PHYSICAL ABUSE					Y	Y	Y	
		OVERCROWDED LIVING CONDITIONS				Y		Y	Y	
	RELIGIOUS BELIEFS				Y					
	SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES	EMPLOYMENT VS UNEMPLOYMENT	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	
		BASIC NEEDS NOT BEING MET			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
		POVERTY AND LIVING CONDITIONS			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	

CATEGORIES	THEMES	CODES	REFERENCES							
			ROSE	SAM	JIMMY	LILY	JAKE	CANDICE	CHAZ	ABE
SCHOOL SYSTEM	LEARNER/TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS	SUPPORTIVE VS UNSUPPORTIVE TEACHERS			☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
		UNFAIR TREATMENT BY TEACHERS		☑	☑					☑
		LACK OF MUTUAL RESPECT		☑	☑		☑	☑		
		UNFAIR DISCIPLINARY MEASURES			☑			☑		☑
		VALUE OF SCHOOL COUNSELLOR			☑			☑		
	BARRIERS TO LEARNING	GRADE REPETITION			☑		☑		☑	☑
		DIFFICULTIES IN THE CLASSROOM		☑	☑			☑	☑	☑
		HOMEWORK ISSUES			☑	☑		☑	☑	☑
		LACK OF INTEREST		☑	☑	☑			☑	
		CONCENTRATION DIFFICULTIES	☑		☑	☑			☑	
		ABSENTEEISM	☑		☑	☑	☑	☑		☑
		LACK OF GUIDANCE		☑		☑		☑		
		REGULAR SUBSTANCE USE	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	
		TEENAGE PREGNANCY			☑	☑		☑	☑	
		FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES			☑				☑	
		SUSPENSION					☑			
	INVOLVEMENT IN GANGS			☑					☑	
	MOTIVATORS FOR LEARNING	HAPPY AT SCHOOL	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑			☑
		CARING AND SUPPORTIVE TEACHERS		☑			☑			
		INVOLVEMENT IN SPORTS			☑		☑			☑
		SCHOOL FRIENDSHIPS	☑	☑	☑					
		FUTURE ASPIRATIONS			☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	
		BELIEF IN VALUE OF EDUCATION			☑		☑			
		PARENTAL ENCOURAGEMENT						☑	☑	☑
	DETENTION: CHANGE OF ATTITUDE		☑	☑			☑	☑		
	CONSEQUENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT	SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND CONSEQUENCES	☑					☑		
		UNEMPLOYMENT	☑					☑		
		DISINTEREST IN SCHOOL						☑		
		LOSS OF FRIENDSHIP								
	SCHOOL RESOURCES AND FACILITIES	CLOSE PROXIMITY		☑	☑		☑			
		GOOD FACILITIES		☑				☑		
		CLASSROOM CONDITIONS			☑		☑	☑	☑	
		SUPPORTIVE ACTIVITIES			☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	
EXTRA-MURAL ACTIVITIES					☑		☑			
AVAILABILITY OF COUNSELLING					☑	☑	☑			

## APPENDIX H

### VAKGETALLE- 2008 - C.S.S.S.

VAKKE	GR.10	GR.11	GR. 12
Afrikaans	343	219	170
Engels	343	219	170
Wiskunde	67	48	31
Wiskunde Geletterdheid	276	171	139
Lewensoriëntering	343	219	170
Fisiese Wetenskap	37	30	20
Lewenswetenskap	135	88	41
Aardrykskunde	142	75	70
Geskiedenis	209	96	56
Rekeningkunde	101	68	65
Besigheidstudies	126	77	74
Ekonomie	92	100	102
Rekenaartoepassings Tegnologie	24	37	40
Verbruikerstudie	163	86	42

GR. 8 – 295 AFR. ENG. WISK. WET. GESK.

GR. 9 - 300 AARD. EBW. L.O. K&K. TEG.  
REK. GELETTERDHEID.

# APPENDIX I

Navrac  
Enquiries **Dr RS Cornelissen**  
IMibuzo  
  
Telefoon  
Telephone **(021) 467-2286**  
IFoni  
  
Faks  
Fax **(021) 425-7445**  
IFeksi  
  
Verwysing  
Reference **20080815-0038**  
ISalathiso



---

**Wes-Kaap Onderwysdepartement**

---

**Western Cape Education Department**

---

**ISebe leMfundo leNtshona Koloni**

---

Mrs GC Inglis  
Department of Educational Psychology  
University of Stellenbosch  
Private Bag X1  
MATIELAND  
7602

**Dear Mrs G. Inglis**

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL: EXPLORING THE DROPOUT PHENOMENON IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL IN A HIGH-RISK COMMUNITY.**

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **18<sup>th</sup> August 2008 to 26<sup>th</sup> September 2008**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr R. Cornelissen at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as submitted to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

**The Director: Research Services  
Western Cape Education Department  
Private Bag X9114  
CAPE TOWN  
8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Ronald S. Cornelissen  
for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**  
**DATE: 18<sup>th</sup> August 2008**

---

MELD ASSEBLIEF VERWYSINGSNOMMERS IN ALLE KORRESPONDENSIE / PLEASE QUOTE REFERENCE NUMBERS IN ALL CORRESPONDENCE /  
NCEDA UBHALE IINOMBOLO ZESALATHISO KUYO YONKE IMBALELWANO

GRAND CENTRAL TOWERS, LAER-PARLEMENTSTRAAT, PRIVAATSAK X9114, KAAPSTAD 8000  
GRAND CENTRAL TOWERS, LOWER PARLIAMENT STREET, PRIVATE BAG X9114, CAPE TOWN 8000

WEB: <http://wced.wcape.gov.za>

**INBELSENTRUM /CALL CENTRE**

INDIENSNEMING- EN SALARISNAVRAE/EMPLOYMENT AND SALARY QUERIES ☎0861 92 33 22  
VEILIGE SKOLE/SAFE SCHOOLS ☎ 0800 45 46 47

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE**

The information above was described to ..... by ..... in ..... and ..... in command of this language. .... was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to ..... satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the participant may participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Subject/Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**



**SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR**

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to \_\_\_\_\_ and/or [his/her] representative \_\_\_\_\_ [*name of the representative*]. [*He/she*] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in [*Afrikaans/\*English/\*Xhosa/\*Other*] an no translator was used.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Investigator**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**