

**An interpretive study of high school dropouts in the
context of a former disadvantaged community**

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand and to interpret the complex array of factors that contribute to the phenomenon of learners dropping out of school. This investigation highlights the phenomenon of high school dropouts in particular. Whilst I am not entirely comfortable with the term “dropout”, I have decided to use it based on its use in a report of the Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling System that was published in October 2007. This report provides various understandings of the term, and I use the term with reference to said report.

The research methodology for the study is interpretive analysis, and the purpose thereof is to provide “thick description”, which means a thorough description of the characteristics, processes, transactions, and contexts that constitute the phenomenon being studied. The analysis is couched in a language not alien to the phenomenon, and takes into account the researcher’s role in constructing the description.

The research data have identified a number of factors within families, within schools, and within communities that affect whether learners are likely to drop out, or to graduate, from high school. These are: poverty, almost all the parents of the participants were school dropouts themselves (did not complete their schooling), teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, the lack of home and school stability, social behaviour, rebellion, peer pressure, and a sense of caring.

KEYWORDS: school dropout, disadvantaged, school, learner, educator, education policy.

OPSOMMING

Die doel van die studie was om die legio faktore wat bydrae tot die verskynsel van leerders wat by skole uitval te verstaan en te intrepreteer. Hierdie ondersoek lê veral klem op die hoë uitvalsifer van hoërskoolleerders. Hoewel ek nie gemaklik voel met die term “drop out” of uitval nie, het ek besluit om die term te gebruik aangesien die woord “drop out” gebaseer is op 'n Ministeriële Komitee verslag oor die behoud van leerders in die Suid Afrikaanse Skoolstelsel, wat in Oktober 2007 gepubliseer is. Die verslag dui op verskillende interpretasies van diè term, en ek gebruik diè term met verwysing na diè verslag.

Die navorsingsmetodologie vir die studie is interprevistiese analise, en die doel daarvan is om 'n uitgebreide beskrywing te verskaf, waarmee bedoel word 'n deeglike beskrywing van die eienskappe, prosesse, ooreenkomste en die konteks wat die verskynsel verteenwoordig. Die analise word aangebied in 'n taal wat nie vreemd is tot die verskynsel nie, en poog ook om die navorser se rol in die konstruksie en samestelling van die beskrywing uit te beeld.

Die navorsingsbevindinge het menige faktore binne families, binne skole en binne gemeenskappe geïdentifiseer wat leerders affekteer wat waarskynlik sou uitval of verhoed om hul hoërskoolloopbaan te voltooi. Dit is: armoede, ouers wat self skool vroeg verlaat het (“drop out”), tienerswangerskappe, dwelmmisbruik, gebrek aan huislike en skool stabiliteit, sosiale gedrag, rebelseid, groepsdruk en omgee.

SLEUTELWOORDE: skool “drop out”, minderbevoorreg, skool, leerder, opvoeder, opvoedkundige beleid.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

AIDS	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
ANC	African National Congress
CEMIS/EMIS	(centralised) educational management information system
DoE	Department of Education
EFA	Education for All
FET	Further Education and Training
GHS	General Household Survey
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
MP	Member of Parliament
NCOP	National Council of Provinces
NUMSA	National Union of Mineworkers in South Africa
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SASA	South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act 84 of 1996)
SDRG	socially defined racial group
SGB	school governing body
SKAV	skills, knowledge, attitudes and values
TB	tuberculosis
UCT	University of Cape Town
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US ED	United States Department of Education
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to understand and to interpret the complex array of factors that contribute to the phenomenon of learners dropping out of school. With this investigation, I wanted to highlight the phenomenon of high school dropouts in particular. I agree with Knesting (2008:3) that a critical need exists for research on learner dropouts that go beyond individual student characteristics, to include the influence of school factors on learner's educational decisions. As a teacher, I am deeply concerned about the effectiveness of education in sub-economic and township schools, and about the alarming number of learners who drop out of the schooling system. What motivated me even more to undertake the study was the feeling that the profession of teaching has lost its status in public schools.

I am convinced that there is an urgent need for scholarly research into the phenomenon of school dropouts that is prevalent in the schooling system in (formerly) disadvantaged communities. To this end, this study on school dropouts took place in the False Bay area, in the Western Cape, South Africa, and the unit of analysis was a formerly disadvantaged high school. For ethical reasons, it is not possible to report the precise location of the community involved, due to a restriction by the education authorities. However, the community was designated for occupation by those classified as "coloured" under the Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950, and the Group Areas Act No. 41 of 1950 (Flisher & Chalton 1995:107). In this study, I analyse some of the policy texts that are pertinent to dropouts, particularly the School Fee Exemption policy, that sets out the amended national norms and standards for the school funding of public schools in relation to compulsory attendance and human rights, in terms of the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (SASA).

In this chapter, I elaborate on the context for, and the rationale for, my research. I also describe the theoretical points of departure, and the research methods and methodology that I used in my exploration of the chosen topic.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

My interest in the study stemmed from the fact that I have taught at a previously disadvantaged coloured high school for learners from Grades 8 to 12 (previously Standards 6 to 10) for the last 26 years. Over the years, I have observed a worrying number of learners leave school without completing either Grade 9 or Grade 12. My study was conducted at another school, in line with adherence to ethical requirements. I chose the school at which to conduct my study due to my interest in its learners who were at risk of dropping out of school, as well as due to the seeming contradiction regarding the school's reputation among the learners and within the community. At-risk learners attending the school frequently discussed among themselves the school's "skyrocketing" dropout rate. In contrast, within the local community, the school had a positive reputation.

My daily interaction with many learners from the area in question gave me an idea of how many dropped out from school in the community. My engagement with the learners highlighted that the rate of consumption of, and addiction to, drugs and alcohol was very high, and that gang activity was a destabilising factor amongst the community members who dropped out of school. Due to the community members sharing their experiences in the community with me, I felt prompted to plan an interpretive study of high school dropouts in the context of a former disadvantaged community. I had an acute sense that the schooling community was concerned about the number of learners who did not complete their schooling. Liddle (2005:4), a community worker in the community where the study took place, argues that the whole community is earmarked by dysfunctional families. This, she states, is worsened by the negative aspects of overpopulation, and by teenagers in the community prostituting themselves to meet their everyday needs.

How many learners tend to leave school during the course of a year is worrying both to me and to the people living in the township where the study took place. Due to my interest in the issue, I started to probe the reason for learners dropping out of school. I conducted preliminary interviews with community members in the township, and with the local police liaison officer, as well as with representatives of the schools in the township. The interviewees confirmed that the level of consumption of drugs and alcohol was very high, and that gang activity was a destabilising feature amongst the learners who dropped out of school. With the decline in the national pass rate to 60.6%, the National Union of Mineworkers in South Africa (NUMSA) expressed annoyance regarding the

matriculation results of 2010. The Union stated that the results obtained confirmed the need for the Education Department's to help alleviate poverty in working-class and poor households (Ngobese, 2010:1). Castro Ngobese, NUMSA national spokesperson, further stated that the situation resembled a bomb that was waiting to explode. My experience as a teacher indicates that such poor matriculation results have given rise to a devastating number of school dropouts in our township schools.

I was also motivated to do the study by the worrying results of the 2003 General Household Survey (GHS), as described by Lewis (2007:57). According to said GHS, 18% of the Western Cape's adult population was illiterate, of whom almost all were black or coloured adults (SSA, 2003). Schools attended by coloured and black learners, on average, tend to report high dropout and failure rates, with the majority of the learners involved facing a lifetime of having to work at low-wage subsistence jobs. Lewis (2007:57) states that, if we are serious about our pro-poor policies, we need to place dropout prevention at the top of the agenda.

I have also noticed similarities between the previously disadvantaged schools where I have taught for nine years. I sense that the school communities are concerned about the number of learners who do not complete their schooling. In this research assignment, I draw on Guttmann (in Sen & Williams, 1982:271), who argues that education gives learners what is uniquely human and moral: control over their inclinations; a socially determined morality; and a language that enables them to communicate that morality to their peers. I also draw on Power (1982:346), who argues whether, in or out of school, education is the principal means for preserving and improving the social structure that makes civilised life possible. Today, a high school (matriculation) senior certificate is considered a minimum educational credential for many careers. On a personal level, I fail to understand why learners do not realise that education gives them what is uniquely human and moral. What motivated me further to do the study was the question whether, if the purpose of education is to understand the complexity of the communities in which we live, and how to participate successfully in collaborative social activities over protracted timescales, such a purpose can be achieved if the educational system continues to be plagued by learners dropping out of high school.

I have witnessed and experienced how the learners at the school where I am currently teaching struggle to come to grips with everyday life expectations. It, thus, became

important for me to understand the learners concerned, so that my teaching could be more effective. I felt the need to understand the learners and the community in which they have grown up. I realise that much of the complexity that is inherent in the situation comes from within the community itself, from where it is transferred to the school where it adversely affects both the quality of life of the teachers and the learners involved.

Those who are younger than eighteen years old need positive relationships and role models, in order for them to develop responsible attitudes and mutual interdependence. However, most dropouts spend a large portion of their lives in uncertainty, being periodically unemployed, or depending on family members or state grants, or, at best, earning only a small salary. They also pay no, or lower, taxes than do those who are permanently employed and, as is evident in the Western Cape, can be a burden on the health and criminal justice systems. The qualitative aspects of the problem have, so far, undergone scant examination. The question arises as to why so many learners are not equipped to complete the Further Education and Training (FET) band. Youngsters who do not complete their schooling are unlikely to be able to break the circle of poverty in their communities and to become what they are destined to be.

I based my study on section 29 of the Bill of Rights, which stipulates that every child has the right to receive a basic education. Pritchett (in Lomborg, 2004:218) confirms my argument that the receipt of a basic education is a human right, and it is an essential element of well-being in the modern world. In the South African context, basic education starts at Grade 1 and ends at Grade 9. This implies that those learners who leave school before completing Grade 9 are regarded as dropouts (Brunton, 2003:2). However, Grade 9 is not yet an exit point, at the end of which a learner receives a school-leaving certificate. Prior to the introduction of the new Constitution with the Bill of Rights, the term “dropout” referred to a learner who left school before completing Grade 12. The situation will remain the same until Grade 9 becomes an exit point.

In terms of SASA, the Department of Education (DoE) must investigate the reasons for learner’s absence from schools, and take the necessary steps to remedy the situation. The school system should aim to retain learners in the schools for as long as possible, given the legislative provisions for compulsory education, and post-compulsory schooling should be made progressively more available. However, the DoE does not investigate the reasons for learner absence, despite such investigation being provided for in terms of the

SASA. No attempts have, as yet, been made by the DoE to investigate the reasons for learners' absence to establish why some learners of school-going age are not attending school.

Since no country can afford to have large numbers of its citizens undereducated and incapable of working in gainful employment, every effort must be made to curb the phenomenon of dropping out of school. In South Africa, dropout rates are high: 60% of learners who enrolled in Grade 1 dropped out before reaching Grade 12 (Department of Education, 2003 in Townsend *et al.*, 2008:22). On average, dropouts are labelled as "outcasts" and "losers", and their lives are filled with negativity and lack of purpose. I further agree with Beauvais *et al.* (in Townsend *et al.*, 2008:22) that dropping out of school dramatically increases the probability of a downward spiral into greater emotional, physical, and economic problems than the individual concerned might otherwise have experienced.

I draw on Young and Kraaks' (2001:1) argument that every major policy document on science and education in South Africa that has been produced since 1994 contains, in the preamble, bold statements about the country's role in the global economy, the importance of economic and educational competitiveness within a globalised community, and the growth of new technologies and innovation. In such a context, demands are also made for new kinds of workers who should be prepared for such globalised realities in the 21st century. The proliferation of new modes of knowledge production, based on international partnerships and norms to which South African knowledge industries should aspire, is also extensively encouraged.

Through this research, change can also be established by different types of organisations, such as those that foster the development of sport or social activities in the community. My argument is that the participants in the study would be able to break the cycle of poverty in their communities by completing their schooling. Communities should become aware of support systems in their midst, and they will be able to introduce value systems to fellow community members. Moreover, the pervasiveness of the phenomenon of dropping out of high school points to the need for urgent intervention in this area.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This inquiry concerns school dropouts, and although I am not entirely comfortable with the term “dropout”, I have decided to use the term, based on its use in a report of the Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling System that was brought out in October 2007. This report provides various understandings of the term, and I use the term with reference to said report.

My observation is that an alarming proportion of learners starting Grade 9 are not in a position to finish school, and the system provides insufficient alternatives to them. The question that we should ask ourselves is: How successful is the South African school system at retaining learners from Grade 9 to Grade 12, and why do learners drop out of the schooling system? The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) has the responsibility, through deliberative and carefully planned intervention at school level, for delivering on its key mandate, which is to reduce the existing inequalities for those whose children have no choice, who are confined to poverty-stricken ghettos. These children, are dropping out of school, and will likely remain unemployed, thus reproducing the cycle of poverty. They are treated with the greatest inequality, and their communities are robbed of people who could be a resource to them by virtue of their education, skills and resourcefulness, and by them being role models, despite the very depressed circumstances in which they live (Lewis *et al.*, 2007:57).

The principal of the school where I teach agrees that learners who do not complete school create problems for the school, the community, and, ultimately, for the broader society. One of the implications of learners dropping out from school is that two teachers have been declared as being in excess at the school, due to the declining learner numbers. The DoE cannot afford to lose its teachers due to learners not completing their schooling. When schools have a smaller staff complement, it means that the remaining teachers have to work harder to cope with the workload. Under such conditions, the number of learners per class will obviously increase, and the set-up at the school will tend to have a negative impact on the morale of both the learners and the teachers concerned. I agree with Lloyd (1976:7), who claims that we, as teachers, regard the completion of schooling by learners as being highly desirable.

Relevant to this study, Popkewitz (1998:65) argues that learners' problems are no longer social, institutional, or epistemological. Instead, learners have problems that come from their personal lack of certain attributes, such as motivation, self-esteem and self-discipline. Through my observations as a teacher, I have found that some learners do not care about receiving schooling, and about their educational needs. However, other learners want to complete their schooling, and to fulfil their desires and dreams. This is despite such constraints as poverty and unemployment posing a difficult challenge for them. We all, but especially the teachers among us, have a responsibility to become involved in finding solutions to fix the problems that we encounter at our schools. I have experienced and observed other circumstances that play a role in learners' decision to leave school. Such circumstances include situations of hopelessness, where learners experience no positive influence from the society in which they reside that encourages them to complete their schooling.

This study specifically focuses on school dropouts, what the link (if any) is between education and society, and how dropouts impact on the school in question, and on the broader society within which they live. I have a clear sense of what is problematic in my school today, and everybody in my school community complains about the current conditions in which schools and the schooling environment have currently to operate. However, I wanted to gather scientific evidence that could be applicable to other schools, as well as my own.

My aim as a researcher was to analyse the phenomenon of dropping out of school, which involved concerns for "what is excellent, worthy and necessary" in our schools and in our society. South Africa is plagued by huge social and economic inequalities, the most fundamental of which have been inherited from decades, if not centuries, of racial discrimination and injustice. The most profound and enduring effects of these inequalities are to be found in the field of education, including a legacy of extremely inadequate infrastructure and facilities for the poor, a lack of proper amenities, an artificially constructed parallel system of "special" and "ordinary" education that marginalises and excludes many vulnerable learners, and inadequate training of teachers. I feel that society does not succeed in making young people "feel they are valued". The schooling community, in exercising our rights as citizens, has to demand the right for a better education both from the national, provincial and local governments, and from ourselves.

My argument is that the persistence of poverty, due to the number of learners dropping out of school, the wide income disparities and unemployment, the debilitating effects of illness and premature death (especially as a result of the human immunodeficiency virus / acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), tuberculosis (TB) and other life-threatening diseases that thrive in conditions of poverty), and other threats to our environment are important challenges faced by our nation, and by our education system, at the beginning of the 21st century.

1.4 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

In this section I discuss my research question(s), and the methodology and the methods that I used in my research.

1.4.1 Research Questions

Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2009:540) argue that a research question refers to the question that a researcher wants answered by a study. The question focuses on the phenomenon investigated, and it tends to be thought of as a question, as it is often expressed in the form of a query. A good research question must be one that can be answered. This condition that has been set for a good question also implies that what exists must be measurable. A good research question should be important enough to elicit an investigation.

The main research question for this study was set as:

How can the complex phenomenon of learners dropping out of high school in Grades 9 to 12 in a former disadvantaged community be expressed, explained and interpreted?

The sub-questions are:

- 1. How do high school dropouts articulate and interpret their reasons for leaving school?*
- 2. What is the influence of school factors on learners' educational decisions?*
- 3. What characterises the complex interplay between the phenomenon of high school dropouts and their communities?*

1.4.2 Research Methodology

In this section, I provide a brief historical background to the methodology that was employed for this study, namely that of interpretation. I discuss the development of interpretive analysis, define and explain how it operates, and indicate why I decided to use said research methodology. I also elaborate on the resources used in the process of investigating the research topic.

For purposes of this study, I wish to draw a distinction between methodology and method. Harvey (1990:1-2) views methodology as the interface between methodic practice, substantive theory, and epistemological underpinnings. Epistemology can be used to refer to the presuppositions about the nature of knowledge and of science that inform practical inquiry. Methodology is, thus, the point at which method, theory and epistemology coalesce in an overt way in the process of directly investigating specific instances within the social world. Methodologies, in grounding enquiry in empirical instances, thus make explicit the presuppositions that inform the knowledge that is generated by the enquiry. Regarding methodology as a broad framework, Van Wyk (2004:25) further argues that it might also be considered as a paradigm.

My research methodology will be that of interpretive analysis. My interests in interpretive analysis were encouraged by Terre Blanche *et al.* (2009:321), who argue that the key to interpretive analysis is to stay close to the data and to interpret them from a position of empathic understanding. Durrheim and Painter (2009:321) argue that the purpose of interpretive analysis is to provide “thick description”, which means a thorough description of the characteristics, processes, transactions, and contexts that constitute the phenomenon being studied, couched in a language not alien to the phenomenon, as well as an account of the researcher’s role in constructing the description.

What further attracted me to interpretive analysis is the idea that its purpose is to place real-life events and phenomena into some kind of perspective. A useful aphorism that is associated with interpretive research, and with all forms of qualitative research, is making the strange familiar, and the familiar strange. Doing interpretive research focuses on the need to listen, to observe, to question, and to interpret. As an interpretive researcher, I, therefore, needed to describe and to interpret my own presence in relation to researching the phenomenon of school dropouts.

The aim of qualitative research, from an interpretive perspective, is to make sense of feelings, experiences, social situations or phenomena as they occur in the real world. In terms of such a perspective, the desire is, therefore, to study the above in their natural setting. Kelly (in Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2009:287) argues that the urge to study individuals and groups as they go about their lives, rather than under artificially created conditions, should be clear. Interpretive researchers argue that one should not disturb the context unduly, but one should attempt to become a natural part of the context in which the phenomenon occurs. This can be achieved by entering the research setting with necessary care, and by engaging with research participants in an open and empathic manner. The reason for me to conduct my study from an interpretive perspective was due to my intention to analyse the complexity of learners dropping out of school within a disadvantaged context.

The skill of interpretation is derived from *hermeneutics*, which is a systematic, scientific approach to understanding. The term “hermeneutics” stems from the Greek verb *hermeneúein*, which has three meanings: to make something explicit (i.e. to express it); to unfold something (i.e. to explain it); and to translate something (i.e. to interpret it) (Danner, 1995:223). Hermeneutics may be understood as the “art of interpretation”. While hermeneutics is often limited to the interpretation of texts, Danner argues that it cannot be reduced to the interpretation of texts without misrepresenting its real and full content. The interpretation of texts is a special and important case of hermeneutics. Generally speaking, one could say that, when we deal with human beings and human products, we are involved in a hermeneutic process. As I dealt with (mostly young) people, who talked, gesticulated, dealt with other persons, produced things, painted, wrote, solved tasks in mathematics, and took part in other activities, I chose to engage in interpretive analysis. All this – not only the theory of education or the writings of famous educators – must be understood.

The basis of Gadamer’s (1960) thinking as a hermeneutic philosopher is that there are three ways of understanding the world. The first way is objectivist, according to which the knower is detached from the outside world, standing above or outside that world, and trying to explain the world in terms of universal laws. The perspectives of others in that world can be wrong, and their incorrect vision can be explained by underlying causalities or motives. The second way is subjectivist, according to which the knower tries to

understand the world by placing him- or herself in the footsteps of practitioners living in that world. Both the objectivist and subjectivist stance are problematic, according to Gadamer. The third way goes beyond objectivism and relativism (Bernstein, 1983), and is dialogical. Accordingly, the knower engages with the world around him/her, taking fully into account what the world means for him/her, and vice versa. The knower listens to the other from a readiness to accept the other's input as being relevant to him- or herself. Knower and known engage in a joint learning process, in which both change in identity and new horizons emerge. The knower no longer just looks at the world, but interacts with, and takes responsibility for, the process of development in the world (Abma & Widdershoven in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:672).

However, one must ask what a hermeneutic situation is. Philosophical hermeneutics tell us that if we do not interpret a situation, we do not understand it. This kind of situation is, therefore, defined by the existence of a certain relationship between a reader, a text, and a canon that is recognised within a particular tradition and a particular community. Descombes (in Silverman, 1991:264) argues that the text is always right. If someone is mistaken, it will necessarily be the reader. The hermeneutic situation is one that we must interpret, failing which we will not be able to do something else that we either want, or have an obligation, to do.

Gadamer effectively argues that one can never be outside an interpretive framework. Sartre, De Beauvoir, and Baldwin argue that subordinated groups (whether Jews, women, or black people) face the danger of learning the lessons of inferiority taught by our society. Groups whose discourses, histories, and traditions are marginalised need to struggle for the self-affirmation that is both a condition and a consequence of naming oneself as an interpreter. Thus, a philosophy of interpretation must go beyond Gadamer's conceptualisation to incorporate analyses of power and of dominance, as well as of subordination, inclusion and exclusion. Through such analyses individuals who are marginalised or subordinated stand to become empowered (Schott in Silverman, 1991:209).

I argue that I deal with real people in a real world. Therefore, in adopting an interpretive approach, I gained more data and information than would normally have been the case. I, thus, interpreted specific policy documents that impact on how to deal with student dropouts on a daily basis. The views of the learner dropouts were collected by means of

semi-structured interviews. I linked these policy documents and the interviews to show why the phenomenon of learners dropping out of school is still a worrying factor regarding traditionally disadvantaged schools and communities.

1.4.3 Research Methods

Terre Blanche *et al.* (2009:123) refer to a method as the approach that you adopt for gathering and analysing data. To describe a method used is to state, in broad terms, what kind of approach was used and why, and then to present a detailed description of the procedures followed. The description should give sufficient information to enable another researcher to replicate the study. The instruments that were used to collect the data in the current study are described in detail below.

Research methods also refer to the range of approaches that is used in educational research to collect data that can be used for interpretation and explanations (see Cohen, Mansion & Morisson, 2002:409). My research methods involved reviewing the relevant literature, accompanied by interpretive analysis and reflection on learner dropouts in a formerly disadvantaged community. I explored the current nature of learner dropouts in such a community. The exploration involved the use of semi-structured interviews that were tape-recorded and transcribed. For the purpose of this study, I used the following research methods.

1.4.3.1 Analysing a Concept

My aim, in this study, was to analyse the concept of “dropouts”, with the aim of understanding and interpreting the concept. Apparent misunderstandings or disagreements are often attributable to people using the “same” terms or concepts in tacitly different ways; by becoming clearer about these varied meanings, it becomes possible to focus more accurately on what is actually in dispute. Hirst and Peters (1970:3) argue that philosophy is concerned with questions about the analysis of concepts, and with questions about the grounds for knowledge, beliefs, actions and activities. The use of words has to be examined in order to see what principle(s) govern their use. Accordingly, I analysed the concept of “school dropouts”.

Various understandings of what a school dropout is, and how the concept is interpreted, exist. A measure that is provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is that of dropout rate per grade, defined as the percentage of pupils who drop out from a given grade in a given school year. The measure considers the difference between 100% attendance, and the sum of the promotion and repetition rates concerned (UNESCO, 2007:347 in the Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling System, 2007:6).

For the purpose of this study, I adopted the UNESCO definition (meaning that a dropout is defined as the percentage of pupils who drop out from a given grade in a given school year) to ensure that South Africa's reporting schedules on the Millennium Development Goals were within the international guidelines set by UNESCO (Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling System, 2007:6). In the case of a learner deciding to attend another school, the current practice is that such a learner must receive a transfer from his school of origin, meaning that such a person still retains a centralised educational management information system (CEMIS) number. In that instance, the learner cannot be classified as a dropout. A learner may only be regarded as a dropout if he/she learner leaves the school system, and is taken off the CEMIS system. However, for the purpose of this study, a dropout is defined as a young adult (between 18 and 25 years old) who has not received a senior certificate (which is the diploma obtained on successfully completing high school), and who did not require special schooling.

In order to advance my understanding of the concept of "dropout", I interviewed a sample of seven high school dropouts in my community. I also analysed policy documents and reviewed the related literature to gain a deeper understanding of the various and complex ways in which the concept was being used.

1.4.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Conducting a semi-structured interview is a reasonably natural form of interacting with people, and therefore it fit well with the interpretive approach to my research. I needed to engage with the study and to be part of it, to learn from the learners' lived experiences of high school dropouts. In terms of an interpretive approach, semi-structured interviews are seen as being a means to an end (namely, to try to find out how people really feel about, or experience, particular things). Such interviews are therefore, within such an approach,

an attempt to create an environment of openness and trust, within which the interviewee is able to express him- or herself authentically (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2009:297). I used interviews to find out what was going on in the mind of the interviewee, in other words to gauge the life view of the interviewee. Rubin and Rubin (1995 in Mncube, 2008:7) suggest that qualitative interviews are a way of uncovering, and of exploring, the meanings that underpin people's lives, routines, behaviours, and feelings.

According to Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:529), there are good reasons why qualitative research is based on interviews. By using interviewing, the researcher can reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible, such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes. The interview is also a very convenient way of overcoming distances both in space and in time; past events or faraway experiences can be studied by interviewing people who took part in them.

Robson (2002:278) argues that interviewers have their shopping list of topics, to which they want to obtain responses; however, they have considerable freedom in the sequencing of questions, in their exact wording, and in the amount of time and attention that is given to different topics. Such interviews are also widely used in flexible designs, either as the sole method used, or in combination with other methods.

I carefully planned to conduct the interviews with the participants at times that would suit them. Such careful preparation included making arrangements to visit the interviewees, seeking permission to conduct the interviews, confirming the arrangements, and rescheduling appointments, when doing so became necessary. Furthermore, during the process of interviewing, notes had to be written up. I recorded the interviews on tape to allow for the verification and analysis of the information, for which I had to obtain permission from the participants.

In order to further develop my understanding of the concept of "dropout", I interviewed a sample of seven high school dropouts in my community. For my interviews, I developed an "interview schedule" in advance. I interviewed the participants for approximately one hour to find out the complex array of reasons that they had for dropping out of the school, how they interpreted their own actions at the time of the interview, and to what understanding they had come after they had been out of school for some time. I also

attempted to establish what the complex interplay between schooling and the community was.

1.5 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The specific key concepts that are relevant to the research are discussed below.

1.5.1 School Dropout

There are various understandings of who a school dropout is, and how the term is interpreted. Some researchers have tried to explain the dropout phenomenon by using the interaction, or cause-and-effect, relationships of contributing factors. For example, Holt (1995 in Suh & Suh, 2007:3) suggests that low achievers usually come to school lacking basic skills that are prerequisites for learning. Academic failure increases learners' alienation from school, leading to absenteeism, which, in turn, increases the risk of dropout. Devine (1996 in Suh & Suh, 2007:3) also argues that speculated potential dropouts might have behavioural problems, as a result of their lack of interest in their schooling, as well as due to their poor academic performance.

In the South African context, the concept “dropouts” is used in relation to an education starting at Grade 1 and ending at Grade 9, which implies that learners who leave school before completing Grade 9 are regarded as dropouts. Learners who have completed Grade 9 are assumed to be literate. However, Masitsa (2005:1) argues that Grade 9 is not yet regarded as an exit point, at which point a learner can receive a school-leaving certificate. Prior to the introduction of the new Constitution with the Bill of Rights, the term “dropout” referred to a learner who left school before completing Grade 12. This will remain the case until Grade 9 becomes an exit point. In this research assignment, the term “dropout” refers to a learner who leaves school before completing Grade 12.

My aim was to analyse the concept of “dropouts”, with the intention of understanding and interpreting the concept. I, therefore, also analysed policy documents and reviewed the literature to gain a deeper understanding of the various and complex ways in which the concept was being used at the time of the study. In order to further develop my understanding of the concept of “dropout”, I interviewed a sample of seven high school dropouts in my community.

1.5.2 Disadvantaged

In my understanding of the concept “disadvantaged” I align myself with Mortimer and Blackstone (1982:3), who state that, when the term “disadvantaged” is used in relation to education, the following groups can be described as being “educationally disadvantaged”:

- those who are denied equal access to educational opportunities, in terms of type of school, resources, teachers, or curriculum;
- those who, despite performing well at school, leave it at the earliest opportunity; and
- those who underachieve, or who perform less well than they might otherwise do, because of a variety of social and environmental factors, resulting in them being unable to take advantage of the educational opportunities that are made available to them.

Also, in the South African context, the study took place in a former so-called “coloured area”, which can be considered to have been disadvantaged. I align myself with Lloyd (1976:11), who argues that any child is at a disadvantage who comes from a home where material conditions are poor, where language and discipline are radically different from that which is experienced in the school, where family relationships are poor, and where parents are unfavourably disposed towards educational institutions, and to those who teach at them. I also find that children in this situation start off poorly in their early years of life, so that they are already behind when they begin school, and are less able to benefit from being there than are other children who come from wealthier homes. Not only do the attitudes of the former’s parents towards school tend to be unhelpful, but often their teachers’ attitudes towards them tend to be unhelpful.

1.5.3 School

SASA (Brunton, 2003:B-4) defines a school as a public school or as an independent school that enrolls learners in one or more grades from Grade R (i.e. Reception) to Grade 12. Beare *et al.* (1989:83-89 in Pretorius & Lemmer, 2004:45) describe the school as being a multidimensional organisation, since the principal’s management functions can be divided into different areas. They state further that the application of management functions might differ within these areas. The school is a unique organisation, with its own terrain, competence, nature, task, and structure. The school is, essentially, an

organisation that exists within the education system, and that has teaching and learning as its primary goal. The structural elements that give a school its unique educational nature and character can be summarised as follows:

- The school is a public institution.
- Its task and purpose is the planned and organised education of learners.
- It involves learners whose diverse nature and characteristics determine its limits and possibilities.
- It involves educators who are equipped with professional knowledge and skills to execute its unique task and purpose.

According to Theron (2002:113 in Pretorius & Lemmer, 2004:42), it would appear that the school is an organisation within which people are grouped together in an orderly, hierarchical authority structure with a common goal, namely educative teaching.

Husen (in Cummings & McGinn, 1997:175) defines school as an institution that requires “full-time attendance of specific age groups in teacher-supervised classrooms for the study of graded curricula”. However, Wells and Claxton (2002:204) argue that schools should be concerned with the dispositions that learners develop, and with the identities that they form, as well as with the “content” of the curriculum that they are required to master. It is clear that the activities in which schools engage cannot be focused simply on the acquisition of basic skills and knowledge. If our intention is to foster the development of learners who are critical and creative thinkers, and who are problem solvers, who not only think about what needs to be done, why and how, but who also have the determination to carry through with knowing in action, both individually and in collaboration with others, these qualities must be emphasised throughout the course of their education. Schools must, therefore, be places in which learners are apprenticed into a way of living, of thinking, of feeling, and of acting.

1.5.4 Learner

A “learner” is any person receiving an education, or who is obligated, in terms of SASA, to receive an education (Brunton, 2003:4).

1.5.5 Educator

An “educator” is any person, excluding a person who is appointed exclusively to perform extracurricular duties, who teaches, educates or trains other persons, or who provides

professional educational services, including professional therapy and education psychological services, at a school. Educators, who are managers of certain activities, all work with and through people to achieve particular objectives by means of planning, organising, leading and controlling.

The roles of educators, and the associated set of applied competences (norms) and qualifications (standards) for their development, are stated in the RSA policy document (2000:9; 11-13). The following list of roles and competences describes what it means to be a competent educator. A competent educator must be capable of:

- mediating learning that is sensitive to the diverse needs of learners;
- interpreting and designing learning programmes and materials;
- achieving ongoing personal, academic, occupational and professional growth through pursuing reflective practice and research in the learning area taught, as well as in broader professional and educational matters and related fields;
- practising and promoting a critical, committed and ethical attitude towards developing respect and responsibility towards others;
- understanding the necessity, purposes, methods, and effects of assessment and of providing helpful feedback to learners;
- possessing a well-developed understanding of the knowledge, skills, values, principles, methods, approaches and procedures that are relevant to the discipline subject, learning area, phase of study, or the professional or occupational practice (Pretorius & Lemmer, 2004:34-35).

1.6 PROGRAMME OF STUDY

Chapter 2: Literature Review: School Dropouts

In Chapter 2, I start by making a case for conceptualising the notion of learner dropouts. A literature review of material on learner dropouts contextualises my research project, by showing how it fits into broader educational research. My research project does not exist in isolation, but has built upon what has been done previously; therefore, I review previous research in the chapter. In addition, I also analyse such policies as the Progress Report that was made to the Minister of Education GNM Pandor, Member of Parliament (MP), Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling System in October 2007.

Dropping out of school is a complicated and multifaceted phenomenon. Researchers have found that dropping out of school is a process, and not an event. The process, for some learners, begins in early primary school (Rumberger & Ah Lim, 2008:1). The research indicates that the children who are most vulnerable of dropping out of school are those who are over 16 years old, and youth in the FET phases (Grades 10 to 12), as well as youth who have repeated grades a number of times and who are struggling academically. Of youths aged 16 to 18, 10% were found to leave due to the repetition of grades and difficulties associated with them being older than their classmates. Especially in the Western Cape, 22% of coloured youth aged 16 to 18 years old do not attend school, with 48% of coloured youth in this age group who reside on farms not attending school. Children who live in poverty-stricken households and learners who fall pregnant are particularly vulnerable (DoE, 2010 in *The Educator's Voice*, 2010:16). In this chapter, I further elaborate on the main theoretical approach that I adopted in my semi-structured interviews, which drew on interpretive analysis.

Chapter 3: Policy Analysis

This chapter provides an analysis of relevant policies. SASA (1996) promotes access, quality and democratic governance in the schooling system. It ensures that all learners have the right of access to quality education without discrimination, and makes schooling compulsory for children aged 7 to 15. However, in practice, the right to education has turned out to be a symbolic policy, rather than a substantive one. My argument is that the government does not provide free, basic education for all learners. Instead, the policy that all parents or guardians of learners should pay school fees, or should at least apply for being exempt from having to pay them, has resulted in learners being excluded from schooling, and it has thereby denied them their rights.

Moreover, although the policy of equal rights means that discrimination on the basis of race is not allowed, it is mainly black children who have, so far, been denied their rights to an education (Christie, 2008:144). What this illustrates is that statements of rights do not, in themselves, deliver rights in practice. The provision that is made in the Act for democratic school governance through school governing bodies (SGBs) is now in place in public schools. The school funding norms, outlined in SASA, prioritise redress and target poverty with regard to the allocation of funds for the public schooling system (Christie, 2008:159). Policies provide a framework within which a range of

implementation activities takes place (Christie, 2008:155), thus providing the regulatory framework on which education systems depend.

Chapter 4: Lived Experiences of High School Dropouts

Chapter 4 deals with the analysis and the interpretation of the data collected. The findings acquired from the semi-structured interviews are presented in this chapter. I also engage in interpretive analysis about the research findings. In order to develop my understanding of the concept of “dropouts”, I interviewed a small sample of seven participants (of whom three were of the male, and four were of the female, gender) of high school dropouts in the community where the study was to be conducted. The participants were all linked to the same community. The participants were all under the age of 25 years, and older than 18. None had been out of school for more than ten years. I argue that the participants were all in the same age group, so that, together, they all spoke as a unit. The implications of the semi-structured interviews gave me a good indication of the lived experiences of high school dropouts in their communities.

The capturing of the data made available to me was essential, for, after the interview, I needed to transcribe exactly what was said during the interview. Interviewing is probably one of the methods that is most often used for gaining information in any qualitative educational research setting. An interview is a personal face-to-face contact situation, allowing for focused and relaxed conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee, in order to gain relevant information regarding the authentic voices of the interviewees. I, therefore, made use of semi-structured interviews as a research method, as doing so produced high-quality data.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter 5 outlines the findings from the relevant research literature and from the interviews with the participants. This chapter also provides recommendations and the conclusion, as well as topics for further research.

1.7 SUMMARY

In this chapter, a framework for the research has been explored. The chapter outlines the methodology, the design, and the research questions, as well as clarifying the key concepts and the researcher’s role. It has been argued that dropout rates are related to a

variety of individual and family demographic and socio-economic characteristics. In general, dropout rates are higher among minority students, and among those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Dropout rates are higher among coloured learners than they are among white learners. In recent years, the dropout rates for male and female learners have been similar, although, in the past, dropout rates for the former tended to be higher than were those for the latter.

My research was motivated by the need to expose the high dropout rate at township schools, and the impact that it has on education in our society as a whole. My observation is that an alarming proportion of learners starting Grade 9 are not in a position to finish high school, and the system currently does not provide sufficient alternatives that they might otherwise pursue.

Firstly, the background of the research was stated. The chapter further provided the statement of the problem, highlighting aspects of dropping out from school. The aim of the research was to explore and to analyse the phenomenon of school dropouts, which involved concerns regarding what could be viewed as excellent, worthy and necessary. The intention was to explain certain concepts relevant to the study, and to consolidate meaning by means of the research methods. The rationale for choosing the qualitative research method for this study was described. It was stated that the required data would be collected by means of individual semi-structured interviews. The data collection instrument used in this research was relevant research literature, and interviews with school dropouts. However, the participants were candidates for the Grade 12 examinations, which gave me a clear understanding of their lived experiences as dropouts in the community.

In the next chapter, the relevant research literature on dropouts will be discussed.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: SCHOOL DROPOUTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The theory that I gathered from the literature with which I engaged, together with my experience as a teacher who has been in practice for 26 years, formed the basis of my research. When I selected my reading material, I consciously set about reading about and around the issues related to my topic. Conducting a literature review of material on learner dropouts involved identifying and analysing information resources, and the literature related to student dropouts, including books, journals, electronic materials and oral information.

2.2 PURPOSE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this study was to examine why many learners do not complete their schooling, at least not at public schools, which formed part of this study. Reviewing the literature relevant to this study required, firstly, that I familiarise myself with the purposes of a literature review. As I went about my literature review, I started to reflect on what I was doing. I then thought that it would be useful to first read what the purposes of a literature review are, to find out how conducting such a review would impact on my research.

Eisenhart and Jurow (in Denzil & Lincoln, 2011:712) helped me to clarify my research, by arguing that a literature review is informative and that it leads into, or gives rise to, all aspects of the research: the field; the particular topic; the methodology; the data analysis; and the implications for future research on the phenomenon of school dropouts. In addition, a literature review provided essential and up-to-date information on the topic that I was researching. I further aligned myself with the thinking of Eisenhart and Jurow (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:712), who define the literature review as a summary of important previous research.

According to Cohen *et al.* (2011:112), in contrast, a literature review serves many purposes, so that it could be seen as an essential part of my research. It ensured that I, as a researcher, would not simply recycle existing material. In other words, undertaking the

review gave credibility and legitimacy to the research, showing that I, the researcher, had done my homework and knew the up-to-date key issues, and the theoretical, conceptual, methodological and substantive problems in the field in which the research was being done. The literature review served to clarify the key concepts, the issues, the terms, and the meanings related to the research topic. It further acted as a springboard into my own study, raising issues concerning school dropouts, showing where there were gaps in the research field, and providing a partial justification for the research, as well as stressing the need for the research to be undertaken.

Like Cohen *et al.*, the literature review indicated my own critical judgement on prior research and on theoretical matters in the field. It provided new theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and substantive insights and issues for research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011:112). It set the context of school dropouts for the research and established the key issues associated with the *individual characteristics* of the learners, and factors associated with the *institutional characteristics* of their families, schools, and communities that had to be addressed (Rumberger & Ah Lim, 2008:1). The purposes of the literature review made it clear where new ground had to be broken in the field of school dropouts, and it showed where, how and why the proposed research would break new ground and/or serve to plug any gaps in the current field.

2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The questions that I wanted to address related to me wanting to know what the main causes for school dropouts were. Secondly, I also wanted to explore the lived experiences of school dropouts in a disadvantaged community through their authentic voices. The literature review was aimed at answering these concerns.

My study population was all the learners who attended a disadvantaged school in Cape Town. The first two digits of the postal codes in Cape Town define a geographical area that is generally homogenous in terms of such factors as: social class; socially defined racial group (SDRG); housing density; unemployment rates; and the proportion of dependent members, relative to working members, of families. Part of the reason for the homogeneity that characterised the demographics of the situation was that the codes were defined in the apartheid era, when each neighbourhood was designated for occupation by the members of a single racial group only. I argue that, although there have been social

changes since the advent of a democratic system of government in 1994, neighbourhoods still tend to consist of those of a single SDRG, especially in terms of the disadvantaged communities. Consequently, the schools in each geographical area thus defined still tend to be homogenous in terms of size, in terms of the SDRG of the educators and learners concerned, and in terms of the quality of the facilities available (Flisher *et al.*, 2010:240).

I will, therefore, start this section with a review of the South African literature available.

2.3.1 South African Literature Pertaining to the Phenomenon of Dropping Out

Scant research literature records the phenomenon of dropping out in South Africa from the retrospective viewpoint of learners who have taken this journey, and who are now seeking to take advantage of a second chance to improve their academic skills through availing themselves of the opportunity provided by adult basic education and training (ABET) facilities to complete their senior certificate. The seven role-players whom I interviewed were all candidates for the matriculation examination (senior certificate), who had attended ABET classes after they had dropped out of school. This original research report thus adds a critical dimension to the existing literature on the topic.

It is my opinion that high school dropouts face a bleak future if they do not return to school to finish their schooling. However, they have several options for how they can do so: they can earn their senior certificate by re-enrolling in high school; they can earn an alternative high school credential, through independent schools or through sector education and training authorities (SETAs); or they can enter a FET college to obtain their senior certificate. By availing themselves of such opportunities, learners who have dropped out of school can come to realise that it is never too late to qualify for their matriculation senior certificate. I am trying to keep hope alive for these high school dropouts, so that they can improve their lifestyle. After all, it is also my opinion that the importance of obtaining your matriculation certificate will shape your life and career for the better.

Efforts to bring clarity to the phenomenon of school dropouts brought me to the following question: How could I link the purposes of a literature (2.2) to the literature review in (2.3)? As an educator who struggles to deal with learner dropouts and the effects that dropping out from school have on disadvantaged communities, my research assignment

highlights the purpose of this study. My intention was to identify, to evaluate, and to compare the impact of the different factors that contribute to school dropout rates among learners, thereby helping to prevent school dropouts. It is imperative to me that more innovative ways of keeping learners who are at risk of dropping out in the classroom are found. I think that having such learners out of the classroom is not an option; their legitimate career aspirations cannot be ignored.

The WCED (in Lewis *et al.*, 2008:98) argues that, at 12% and 15% respectively, repetition and dropout rates are particularly high in the FET phase, and that there is a considerable decrease in enrolment rates between Grades 11 and 12. However, this study highlighted the causes of school dropout by means of interpretive analysis, and obtained the authentic voices of the lived experiences of school dropouts in disadvantaged communities by means of semi-structured interviews.

In South Africa, education is compulsory for ten years, or until a learner reaches the age of 15. However, Lewis *et al.* (2008:13) argue that, although it is not stated policy, learners are encouraged to stay in school until the end of Grade 12. Therefore, learners in the 15 to 18 year age group who are neither in an education institution nor employed should not necessarily be considered as part of the unemployed, but rather as dropouts. Since the WCED is responsible for skills training at FET colleges, every effort should be made to retain all learners beyond the compulsory schooling phase, which is not being done in South Africa at the moment.

Unlike in Western countries, there are neither enforced legal penalties, nor welfare systems in place to encourage school attendance. This, together with the social and economic problems faced by large populations of South Africans, makes learners' dropping out a major problem (Liang, Flisher & Chalton, 2002:257). Learner dropout affects all segments of society, but it is on the increase, especially among young people. It is my opinion that skills, knowledge, attitudes and values (SKAV) are the indispensable ingredients of a productive life. What is known, according to Lewis *et al.* (2007:57), is that communities are robbed of the input of those who could be a resource to them by virtue of their education, skills and resourcefulness, and by them being role models in very depressed circumstances. After all, I am of the meaning that our youth (i.e. those people who are under 35 years old) should be icons of integrity for our societies.

I find it relatively rare for learners to make a snap judgment to leave school. My experience as a teacher in a disadvantaged school is that learners commonly offer such reasons for leaving school as low grades, the inability to get along, the need to work, and pregnancy. However, the above reasons might not be the true causes, but merely rationalisations, or simplifications, of more complex circumstances. It is my opinion that those who fall prey to dropping out do so due to a variety of individual and family demographic and socio-economic characteristics. In general, dropout rates are higher for minority learners, and for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, than they are for other learners. At the same time, however, dropout rates are also higher among learners of colour than they are among white learners. In recent years, the dropout rates among male and female learners have been similar, although, in earlier years, the dropout rates among male learners tended to be higher than they were among female learners.

Consequently, the rate of high school dropouts remain high; literacy and numeracy rates remain low; levels of mathematics, science and technology learning among learners of colour remains low; and matriculation exemption rates among learners of colour remain low (Swartz, 2007:3). Currently, many disadvantaged schools still lack the educational resources that are required to provide quality education and equal educational opportunities. Lewis *et al.* (2007:53) argue that putting transformatory educational changes into effect, such as minimising the dropout rate, was not prioritised during the first five years of democracy in South Africa. Despite the continuing transformation of education, it has not resulted in improved quality. However, it is my opinion that the country depends on the Education Department to produce adults who are able to contribute positively to the economy and to the development of South Africa as a whole.

South Africa spends, on average, 22% of its budget on education, well above the 16% that is spent by some other countries. The need for redress to assist schools that were systematically deprived during more than four decades of apartheid is dire, and the overlap between poor schooling, race, poverty, and disadvantage is substantial. Whereas the Western Cape can be regarded as a comparatively advantaged province, my argument is that many schools are not functioning at an optimal level, and this is reflected in the repetition and dropout rates experienced.

It is the contention of officials in the WCED that the dropout rate is not as high as it is often stated to be (45–50%), as this figure does not include the learners who transfer from

school to FET colleges, independent schools, or sector education and training authorities (SETAs). Also, learners who leave school after completing Grade 9 are not supposed to be regarded as dropouts, as they would have completed their period of compulsory schooling if such a system had been in place. However, I align myself with the Department of the Treasury, which regards Grade 9 learners who leave the system as dropouts, as they are not able to access the general economy. A 100% retention and progression rate would require more schools and teachers, which has considerable financial implications, while at FET colleges, insufficient loans and bursaries are available to cover the registration and course fees for specifically disadvantaged learners (Hartley in Lewis *et al.*, 2007:54).

Currently, the challenging economic climate in South Africa contributes to the challenges that our learners encounter on a daily basis in education. I find that the economic challenges are marked by social inequality, by high levels of poverty, by unemployment, and by slow economic growth.

Education in poverty-stricken communities in South Africa is hampered by a lack of order in the community structures, vandalism, negative peer group influences, the lack of intellectual stimulation in the environment, a poor disposition to schooling and learning, and conflict between the values of the school and those of the home. The outcome among the country's learners is a negative academic self-concept, low levels of motivation, and cumulative academic disadvantage (Prinsloo, 2004:158). These factors in particular contribute to failure at school, and, ultimately, to dropping out of school. Poor and uncertain prospects of employment contribute to a continuing cycle of poverty and disadvantage. South African school dropout figures reflect a dismal scenario of inequality, poverty, and wasted human potential. According to Lewis *et al.* (2007:54), many learners do not complete their schooling, at least not at public schools, as can be seen from Table 1 below.

Table 1: Repetition and dropout in public schools in the Western Cape, 2004

	No. of learners (2003)	No. of learners (2004)	No. of repeaters	Repetition rate (%)	No. of dropouts	Dropout rate (%)
Foundation Phase (Gr. 1–3)	267 724	268 441	16 089	6	6 128	2
Intermediate phase (Gr. 4–6)	255 415	221 934	7 009	3	2 068	1
Senior phase (Gr. 7–9)	253 631	252 900	14 221	6	12 396	5
FET phase (Gr. 10–12)	174 406	176 175	20 935	12	26 653	15

*As calculated per formula provided in December report

Source: Western Cape Education Department, Annual Survey 2004, Hartley in Lewis *et al.*, 2007:54.

In South Africa, dropout rates are high: 60% of learners who enrol in Grade 1 drop out before reaching Grade 12 (Department of Education, 2003 in Townsend *et al.*, 2008:22). Of the 94 784 learners who enrolled in public schools in the Western Cape in 1997, only 43 470 reached Grade 12. Of those learners who remained in school, only 33% qualified for matriculation exemption (Western Cape Government, 2010:11). Clearly, these data underpin the need for prevention efforts.

Another report of the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2011) also discusses the dropout phenomenon. The overall drop-out rate from the school system (from Grades 1 to 11) was 4%. In this report the drop-out rate before Grade 9 was extremely low. It was around 1% in Grades 1 and 3 and less than 1% in Grades 2 and 4. From grades 5 to 8 the drop-out rate was minimal, ranging between 2% and 4%. The low drop-out rate in the lower grades was consistent with the high enrolment rates in these grades. From Grade 9 upwards, however, the drop-out rate increases, reaching almost 12% in both Grades 10 and 11. In total 10% of learners who had been enrolled in Grades 9 to 11 dropped out of school between 2007 and 2008.

I would like to make it clear that, if we do not pay attention today to the alarming number of students who currently are not completing their schooling, the youth, especially those who are disadvantaged, will remain useless. Young people have a critical role to play in their community, so that they can apply their skills to the benefit of the broader community. The 2001 census revealed a dismal analysis that only 35% of the Western Cape adult population had a Grade 12 or higher education. The dropout rate is highly correlated with race. School enrolment up to the age of 17 is almost 100% for white people, but it is lower among black people, and the lowest among coloured people. Seekings (2003) and WCED EMIS (in WCED, 2006 in Lewis *et al.*, 2007: 55) argue that dropout rates are higher among those of the male gender than they are among those of the female gender.

In the Western Cape, roughly four-fifths of learners are in schools that historically received less funding than did the previously whites only schools. Many of the former schools still lack the educational resources to provide a quality education. Consequently, dropout rates are high among learners of colour, especially among coloured learners (Hartley in Lewis, 2007:52).

Bearing witness to Lewis's (2007:5) argument, I have also found that some learners who do not complete high school are able to do well, but that them doing so usually depends on their socio-economic status. A young person from a poor family is less likely to succeed if she or he drops out than a person from a middle class or wealthy family is likely to do. Most school dropouts will spend a large portion of their lives in uncertainty – being periodically unemployed, or depending on family members or on state grants, or, at best, earning a small salary. They also tend to pay no, or lower, income taxes than do people who are permanently employed and, as is evident in the Western Cape, they can be a burden on the health and criminal justice systems.

The Educator's Voice (2010:16) reports the following about trends in the Western Cape: 22% of coloured youth aged 16 to 18 years old do not attend school, with 48% of coloured youth in this age group who reside on farms not attending school. Social Surveys further argues that learners living in poverty-stricken households, disabled children, and learners who fall pregnant are most vulnerable in regard to dropping out of school.

The literature indicates complex reasons for the phenomenon of out-of-school learners, which are linked to the conditions prevailing in township schools on the Cape Flats and in the surrounding communities, as farm communities, for example, lack of access to good quality education. There is gangsterism and substance abuse, especially of alcohol and of the drug called “tik”, amongst teenagers. Scant research, as yet, has been undertaken in developing countries to investigate the dynamics contributing to early school leaving. Wegner *et al.* (2008:422) found that adolescents who dropped out of school had higher rates of cigarette and alcohol use compared with those who were still in school, and that girl dropouts were more likely to engage in sexual intercourse than were girl learners. Not surprisingly, Liang *et al.* (2002:259) emphasises that South African high school dropouts have shown increased rates of substance abuse and sexual intercourse.

In addition, I align myself with Flisher and Chalton (1995:106), who argue that a high proportion of South African adolescents are exposed to the adverse consequences of not completing their schooling. Such adverse consequences include: (1) having a low level of academic skills (Alexander *et al.*, 1985); (2) reduced probability of securing steady employment and an adequate income, both in the short and long term; (3) relatively poor mental and physical health, either directly or indirectly (through unemployment or the earning of a low income) (Ichilov, 1978; Stafford *et al.*, 1980; Donovan & Oddy, 1982; Jackson *et al.*, 1983; Rumberger, 1987); and (4) an increased use of psychiatric and social services, due to drug-related problems (Holmberg, 1985). Leaving school prematurely also has important negative consequences for the society as a whole. Examples of such consequences include: (1) forgone national income and tax revenues (Rumberger, 1987); (2) an increased demand for social services; and (3) increased crime rates (Rumberger, 1987; Flisher & Chalton, 1995:106).

Indeed, cost is one of the main obstacles to completing a secondary education. Half of all reasons for non-attendance of school relate to the cost of schooling, or to the need to work, either in a job or in the home. This suggests that a combination of fee waivers and of income support for learners who are over 14 years old could reduce by up to half the number of all teenagers who quit school.

Table 2: The reasons why some learners in South Africa aged 14–17 years do not attend school

Reason	%
No money available for school fees	37
The uselessness of education	17
Family commitments (e.g. childminding)	8
Failed	8
Illness	8
Pregnancy	7
Working	5
Distance of school from home	2
Finished with studies	1
Other/No response	7
Total	100

Source: Statistics South Africa (2006) General Household Survey 2005, Pretoria, Cape Town Statistics South Africa. Analysis by Debbie Budlender, Centre for Actuarial Research, UCT.

Whether they dropped out of high school due to the costs involved, or lived in areas where schools did not operate as they should, I have found that learners who lack access to school also tend to lose their access to the government programmes that are implemented through schools. The “no fee schools” policy has abolished the fees that used to be required for attending such schools in the poorest 40% of wards. Children who are unable to access school also lose out on participating in the National School Nutrition Programme, which provides some relief from hunger for the poorest learners (Hall & Monson, 2006:50).

2.3.2 International Perspectives

School dropout rates are staggeringly high in developing countries (Graeff-Martins *et al.*, 2006:442). Various causes and explanations have been offered for dropping out of school, including: family background; one- or two-parent homes (Howell & Frese, 1982); parental lack of education (Hill, 1979; Mare, 1980); socio-economic status (Beck & Muia, 1980); self-concept (Mahan & Johnson, 1983); and achievement (Lloyd, 1978; Reyes & Jason, 1991:221).

The US Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (High School and Beyond Survey, Sophomore Cohort, 1989) confirms that dropout rates are higher for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, from single-parent families, and from

non-English-speaking family backgrounds. Learners whose parents or siblings were dropouts are themselves more likely to drop out. Similar issues apply to those who marry and who have children before graduating from high school. The dropout rate is greater in cities than it is in suburbs and non-metropolitan areas (US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, High School and Beyond Survey, Sophomore Cohort, 1989). Ziomek-Daigle (2010:377) argues that serious social and economic consequences affect the local and national levels of dropping out of school.

In contrast, researchers into the phenomenon of high school dropouts have provided numerous descriptions of learners who leave school early. Recent studies have broadened the knowledge base concerned, by considering how schools affect learners' educational decisions (Altenbaugh *et al.*, 1995; Fine, 1991 in Knesting, 2008:4). It was also found that increased levels of "parental support" (such as the presence of study aids at home; differences in parenting styles; and the parents' monitoring of their children, reactions to grades, and involvement in academic matters) encourage learners to finish high school (Ekstrom, Pollack & Rock 1986; Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, & Dornbusch, 1990 in Carbonaro, 1998:297). High rates of truancy and absenteeism are often associated with a higher likelihood of dropping out of school (Wehlage & Rutter in Carbonaro, 1998:297).

I find that no single factor can completely account for a learner's decision to continue in school until graduation. Just as learners themselves report a variety of reasons for quitting school, the research literature also identifies a number of factors that appear to influence the decision. Also, the research shows that the decision to drop out is not simply a result of what happens in school. Clearly, learners' behaviour and performance in school influences their decision to stay in school or to leave, but learners' activities and behaviours outside of school – particularly as regards engaging in deviant and criminal behaviour – also influences their likelihood of remaining in school (Rumberger & Ah Lim, 2008:2).

On the basis of the aforementioned theoretical perspectives, I attempted in this study to identify the most significant factors contributing to school dropout by categorising learners according to factors that predict whether they drop out or graduate from high school. First, the research review identified two types of factors that predicted whether the learners dropped out or graduated from high school. The one type of factor was

associated with the *individual characteristics* of the learners, whereas the other type of factor was associated with the *institutional characteristics* of the learners' families, schools, and communities. Second, the research on dropouts has identified a number of individual factors regarding their educational performance, behaviours, attitudes, and background (Rumberger & Ah Lim, 2008:1).

In order to further develop my understanding of the concept of "school dropout" and the lived experiences of the high school dropout in the community, I have identified the following factors in the literature relating to school dropouts as the main causes for such a phenomenon, in terms of the research on dropouts.

2.3.3 Individual Predictors

Further research into individual predictors indicated individual factors that predict whether learners drop out or graduate from high school fall into four areas: (1) educational performance; (2) behaviours; (3) attitudes; and (4) background. Additional research into dropouts also enabled me to identify a number of core factors within learners' families, schools, and communities that predict the tendency to drop out of high school.

In his research, Crouch (2005:16) revealed the contrast between male and female learners. Pritchett (in Lomborg, 2004:182) argues in some (though not all) regions of the world, girls are also significantly less likely than are boys to attend school and to complete their basic education. However, he stresses that, in South Africa, it is more often boys who tend to drop out of school much earlier than do girls. The following facts stand out. Some 6% to 8% of learners are adversely affected by school fees. No other factor stands out as having a major impact on the age group as a whole.

When viewed as affecting the dropouts themselves, school fees stand out as a major factor. The fact that education can be uninteresting affects a rather large proportion of the boys (17%), whereas pregnancy, marriage, or family concerns affect a very large percentage of the girls (13%+3%+10%=26%). The difference between the percentage of male and female dropouts who find education useless or uninteresting is notable.

However, the Progress Report made to the Minister of Education GNM Pandor, MP (2007:xvi) revealed that the educational levels of parents related strongly to dropping out, and interacted with gender. Girls with highly educated parents were found to have a lower risk of dropping out than did boys with highly educated parents.

2.3.3.1 Demographic Factors: Poverty

Poverty is a significant factor prompting learners to leave school and to seek employment to support their families. Townsend (1979 in Mortimore, 1982:24) has contributed to the development of an explanation of poverty. Townsend argues that it is both inappropriate and misleading to discuss poverty in absolute terms, since societies vary according to their culturally defined needs. He suggests that living standards should be judged not only on cash income, but on four other resources: capital assets; employment benefits; the receipt of public social services; and the receipt of benefits in kind, such as gifts.

The World Bank and the United Nations define absolute poverty as the level (or line) below which a person cannot afford a minimal, nutritionally adequate diet, plus essential non-food requirements (Zachariah in Cummings & McGinn, 2007:476). Undoubtedly, all these factors need to be taken into account when the extent of poverty is considered.

Le Roux (1994:35-6 in Masitsa, 2006:174), in contrast, regards poverty as the most significant demographic predictor of who will drop out of school. He further contends that education in a culture of poverty is hampered, among others, by insecurity, poor orientation towards schooling, and clashes between the value orientation of the family and that of the school. This results in learners having a negative academic self-concept and experiencing discomfort in a school situation, which contributes to failure at school and, frequently, to them dropping out of school.

However, I find that images of poverty portray a bleak picture of comfortless housing, inadequate diet, lack of social life and holidays, no birthday parties or pocket money for the children, and constant worry over unemployment and over having to make ends meet. A low income might mean that parents have to spend more time at work, or on household tasks, which leaves them less time to spend with their children. Under such circumstances, parents will also have less money to spend on books, crayons, puzzles or outings to help their child's development, and to develop the skills that the school

rewards (Mortimore, 1982:25). Liang *et al.* (2002:259) recognise and highlight the pervasive problem of poverty, and suggest that alleviating poverty is crucial in tackling the problem of inequality in education. In turn, my argument is that having access to an improved education impacts positively on employment and aids people to break free from the negative consequences of poverty.

I further align myself with Behrman *et al.* (in Lomborg, 2004:363), who argue that studies have found that there is a definite link between poverty and education. Hungry children are less likely to pay attention in school, and thus might tend to learn less, even if they have no long-term impairment of intellectual ability. Behrman *et al.* (in Lomborg, 2004:373) argue further that there are three broad ways in which malnutrition can affect education. First, malnourished children might receive less education. This might be due to them suffering from relatively high rates of morbidity, and, thus, experiencing greater rates of absenteeism from school and learning less while in school. In the case of delayed entry to school, which is the second way in which malnutrition might influence schooling, late enrolment leads to lower expected lifetime earnings. The third pathway from malnutrition to educational outcomes is via the capacity to learn, with a direct consequence of the impact of poor nutrition on cognitive development being described above.

2.3.3.2 Educational Performance: Learner Retention

I also align myself with Anderson *et al.* (2001:25 in Motala *et al.*, 2009:260), who confirm that research shows that those learners who are not in the correct age for their grade are likely to be struggling with their schoolwork, which might make them more vulnerable to dropping out. By Grade 9, only 36% of the learners were the appropriate age of 14 or 15 years. Anderson *et al.* (2001:25 in Motala *et al.*, 2009:260) argue further that African learners disadvantage in schools is not primarily the result of dropping out of school early, but it is rather the result of them having obtained a lower grade earlier in their schooling years.

Broadly arguing, those learners with low-income, low-skill and low-education family backgrounds are about twice as likely to drop out of school as are learners from affluent families. Minority learners are especially vulnerable to dropping out of school without a diploma. The Ministerial Committee on Retention (DoE, 2008) has confirmed, through

their research that dropping out of school is preceded by indicators of unsuccessful school experiences. The risk of dropping out of school is high for learners who are older than the median age when they enter Grade 2 (Motala *et al.*, 2009:260).

At the same time, Clarke (2008:14) has also identified grade repetition in his research as being the single most powerful predictor of dropping out. Studies conducted internationally have revealed that learners who have repeated a grade in their schooling career are most likely to drop out of school. As a result of the repetition, learners become disillusioned, and generally tend to disengage from school activities. The fact that grade repeaters are taken through exactly the same material and content when repeating the grade exacerbates the situation (Clarke, 2008:14).

2.3.3.3 Attitudes: Leisure Boredom

Sometimes, I find learners doing absolutely nothing, and just sleeping. They just do not do their work; they just sit and reflect, or do their own thing, although they have work to do while they are in class. The lack of learner motivation, work habits, and parent involvement makes teaching difficult at times. Through my observation as a teacher, I have found that some learners do not care about schooling and their educational needs. Whenever they are reprimanded, they ask why you are stressing about them. It is obvious to me that the less that you, as a teacher, expect from the learners, the less schoolwork they will do. This is unacceptable.

Wegner (2008:423) argues that leisure boredom has not previously been investigated in relation to dropping out of school. Leisure boredom is defined as “the subjective perception that available leisure experiences are not sufficient to instrumentally satisfy needs for optimal arousal” (Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1990:4 in Wegner, 2008:423). However, I have found that there is evidence that the levels of leisure boredom among South African learners are high, and that such boredom plays a significant role in learners’ negative attitudes toward their schooling. In a recent study of learners living in a socially impoverished area of South Africa, it was found that they had limited opportunities to become involved in leisure activities, due to the lack of leisure resources within the environment. Many young people were found to spend their time sitting around or “hanging out” in groups outside the school and on the streets, as they had nothing else to do (Wegner & Magner, 2002 in Wegner, 2008:423).

Also, according to Sutherland (1988:59), there is evidence that educators in some Western democracies feel that their system is deficient, as it does not produce, in most young people, feelings of concern for the rest of society and a desire for membership in the larger society. Many young people, it is claimed, feel no responsibility for their own well-being, or for the well-being of their immediate community. My argument is, thus, that leisure boredom increases the risk of dropping out of school for many learners.

However, a small percentage of learners at the disadvantaged school where I am a teacher are motivated to see the value of education in respect of their future, and they are monitored on an ongoing basis by the educators. The school motivates the learners by increasing their interest in, and commitment to, schooling. To achieve this, the school sets high expectations for the learners, and provides adequate learner support through people in the community who are doing voluntary work at the school. The learners are encouraged to participate in regular motivational camps. The school rewards learner achievements, and promotes learners completing their schooling through holding a prize-giving each year. The educators at the school have also established a learner bursary fund to promote the learners undertaking further studies at tertiary institutions. I am under the impression that effective educators understand that each learner is unique, and they try to learn as much as they can about their learners, as a means of helping to curb learners dropping out of school.

2.3.3.4 Behaviours

According to me, learners are increasingly showing signs of poor discipline in the classroom. Often I struggle with the thought of learners' rights. I am also under the impression that some educators do not understand the policy guidelines, process and procedures, as well as the programmes that are directed at learner behaviour management needs. The visual space in many classrooms is dominated by reminders that educational life is governed by rules and classifications (Popkewitz, 1998:114). Each school should have its own code of conduct, according to SASA (1996), that is in line with the prescriptions of the Education Department and to which learners should adhere. Whenever learners do not adhere to their school's code of conduct, they must face the consequences of that particular policy statement. The educator has to report to the school's disciplinary committee, so that the learners concerned can be reprimanded, and, above all, be forbidden to make themselves guilty of any misconduct in future.

Weber (2006:153) has shown that, almost always, individual learners who tend to give the most trouble came from homes where family life had been disrupted by poverty, unemployment, crime, and marital strife. These are the learners who are likely to bunk school most often, who are absent most often from school, or who are most disruptive in class. It is argued that this, in turn, impacts on the dropout rate, which is very high at disadvantaged schools, as educators are unable to investigate the problem areas.

However, my experience as an educator is that early indicators of low self-esteem and aggressive behaviour amongst learners are closely linked to later school dropout. A number of authors have argued that learners who admitted having learning problems (or who were less academically successful), were more likely to be absent without authorisation (Weideman *et al.*, 2007:26). Not surprisingly, it is argued that deviant behaviour has also been well documented as having a direct impact on the high school dropout rate. Deviant behaviours are often expressed as disruptive school behaviours and frequent delinquent behaviours, which increase the risk of dropping out of school for many learners (Farmer & Payne, 1992; Gruskin *et al.*, 1987; Reyes, 1989; Tindall, 1988 in Suh *et al.*, 2007:196).

Also, in Woods' (1980 in Mortimore & Blackstone, 1982:83) study of absenteeism, which forms part of the ILEA Literacy Survey, learners who were considered by teachers to exhibit relatively bad behaviour also tended to have lower attendance rates. I align myself with Hirst and Peters (1970:125), who argue that all learning involves discipline, thus education necessarily involves discipline.

2.3.3.5 Substance Abuse

Townsend (2008:22) argues that school dropouts have been shown to use tobacco, alcohol, and a variety of other illegal substances much more than do their in-school peers.

Several studies (Kandell, 1975; McKirnan & Johnson, 1986; Pirie *et al.*, 1988; Chavez *et al.*, 1989; Eggert *et al.*, 1990 in Flisher & Chalton, 1995:106) have concluded that dropping out of school is a risk factor for such risk-taking behaviour as substance abuse. Cross-sectional studies have also found that dropouts (Aloise-Young, Cruikshank & Chavez, 2002; Gfroerer, Greenblatt & Wright, 1997; Zimmerman & Maton, 1992) and

those who are at risk of dropping out (Eggert & Herting, 1993) are more likely than their peers to be current and heavy smokers (Flisher, Townsend, Chikobvu, Lombard & King, 2010:238).

Flisher, Chalton and LAMIC's (1995) investigation into early school leaving and substance use among adolescents in a working-class community in Cape Town found that dropouts had higher rates of current cigarette use, lifetime cannabis use, and current and heavy alcohol use than did those still attending school. However, Flisher *et al.* (2010:237) highlight a need for further research to address the relationship between school dropouts and substance use in South Africa.

2.3.4 Institutional Predictors

I firmly believe that understanding the problem of high school dropouts requires looking beyond the limited scope of individual learner characteristics to include school-related factors in learners' decisions to stay in, or to leave, school. Attention also needs to be given to the influence that schools, including their organisation, leadership, and teachers, might have on a learner's decision to stay in, or to drop out of, school (Rumberger, 1987 in Knesting, 2008:3). In her ethnographic case study of an urban high school Fine (1991 in Knesting, 2008:3) describes an environment that frequently pushes learners out of school, rather than attempting to keep them in school. According to Fine (1991 in Knesting, 2008:3), students perceived teachers as being uncaring and not having a vested interest in their learning.

In contrast, Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko and Fernandez (1989; Wehlage, Rutter & Turnbaugh, 1986 in Knesting, 2008:3) describe the important influence that is exerted by caring school communities. Learners' behaviour often changes when they feel as though they are a part of the community at a school. A sense of belonging increases the likelihood that learners will accept school rules and policy. As they become important and valued members of their school's network of peers and adults, learners become more invested in school. Also, learners are more likely to take educational risks when they feel safe in their school environment.

Mahn and John-Steiner (in Wells & Claxton, 2002:12) point out that a core aspect of effective learning is confidence. They stress the importance of caring support from

teachers in enabling learners to be risk-takers in initiating new ideas and in pursuing new directions. The quality of the relationship between the learner and the teacher is, thus, crucial for Vygotsky, to ensure that the learner succeeds in his/her education.

Researchers into high school dropouts have provided numerous descriptions of learners who leave school early. Recent studies have broadened the knowledge base by considering how schools affect learner's educational decisions (Altenbaugh *et al.*, 1995; Fine, 1991 in Knesting, 2008:4).

2.3.4.1 Family Background: Parental Support

Parental involvement and support for every child's education is invaluable for the child's academic performance. However, my experience is that such factors as the lack of, or inadequate, parental support, learners not living with their parents, the divorce or the separation of parents, the loss of parents, single-parent families, and family conflicts do not create a situation in which learners can freely pursue academic activities. Therefore, I align myself with Masitsa's (2006:175) argument that the above factors are often causes of dropping out. Further research has also found that increased levels of "parental support" (such as the presence of study aids at home, differences in parenting styles and the parents' monitoring of their children, reactions to grades, and involvement in academic matters) encourage learners to finish high school. High rates of truancy and absenteeism are often associated with a relatively high likelihood of dropping out of school (Wehlage & Rutter in Carbonaro, 1998:297).

In particular, I align myself with Overman's (2002:124 in Masitsa, 2006:176) argument that, due to inadequate support, teenagers from single-parent families are much more likely to drop out of school. Research by Ensminger and Slussarcick (1992) and Rumberger (1995 in Townsend, 2008:22) confirms that being raised in single-parent families and in female-headed households relates to dropping out of school.

The need to take the risk factors of dropping out of school seriously prompted me to identify the main causes of, and the risk factors that are associated with, dropping out of school, according to the literature review. Studies by Schargel, Thacker and Bell (2009:2) have shown that, by identifying individual risk factors, personal characteristics, habits, and experience, as well as family situations, and peer and community relationships that

lead to dropping out of school, the challenge can be addressed by school leaders, in a way that positively and directly influences school attendance and achievement. The risk factors, as identified in the literature, often occur when the learners involved have:

- been absent 20 or more times during the previous school year;
- been retained in at least one grade;
- received low grades (Cs and Ds, or below);
- disciplinary problems, or disruptive behaviour;
- attended five or more schools during their schooling;
- an external locus of control (meaning that they are in agreement with others' perceptions, believed or actual, of their individual ability, worth, or value);
- low self-esteem;
- at least one disability (e.g. attention deficit hyperactivity disorder);
- partaken in early sexual activity;
- abused substances;
- given birth to a child;
- had to work to help support the family;
- come from single-parent households;
- experienced poor parent–child relationships;
- been a member of a family that has received public assistance;
- been a member of a family in which neither the parent nor the guardian is employed;
- been a member of a family in which the primary language has not been English;
- experienced a sibling dropping out of school; and
- had a parent or parents who did not graduate from high school.

Soudien (2007:viii) argues that school is an institution that provides young people with opportunities to acquire skills and to gain experience in dealing with the world. However, my experience as a teacher in a disadvantaged school is that our schools continue to fail most young people, which can be seen in how many learners drop out of school. Amano (in Cummings & McGinn 2007:369) notes that the number of dropouts increases by the year in high school. The findings from the literature review indicate that the following school-caused risk factors influence a learner's decision to drop out of school:

- an ineffective discipline system;
- overburdened school counsellors;

- a negative school climate;
- the use of retention and/or suspensions to control discipline, instead of addressing the causes of the problems themselves;
- disregarding of the students' different learning styles; and
- the use of passive instructional strategies.

Clearly, as has been mentioned above, dropping out of school is a complicated and multifaceted phenomenon. Researchers argue that dropping out is a process, and not an event, and hold that the process, for some learners, begins in early primary school (Rumberger & Ah Lim, 2008:1).

2.3.4.2 Pregnancies

Young people, especially girls, have a critical role to play in our communities. I argue that education is the most powerful tool for liberating our girls from falling pregnant while they are attending school. Pregnant learners are often deprived of many chances to experiment with their learning, leaving them fragile and immature adolescents who are unable to perform to their best potential.

Most worrying, according to Eloundou-Enyegue (2004:3), is the fact that pregnancy is the leading cause of girls dropping out of school in three countries – Mozambique (25.8%), South Africa, and the Central African Republic (37%). Grant and Hallman (2006 in The Ministerial Report, 2007:80) conducted research in South Africa into school pregnancies, linking the research to the phenomenon of dropping out of school. Their main findings were that prior school performance was strongly associated with a young woman's likelihood of becoming pregnant while enrolled in school, with the probability of her dropping out of school if she became pregnant, and with her not returning to school following a pregnancy-related dropout.

Although “schoolgirl pregnancy” is commonly thought to be a key reason why many young women in developing countries do not complete their education, an analysis of Demographic and Health Survey data indicates that early pregnancy and marriage generally account for only about 20% of school dropouts among female adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa (Ball & Melhado, 2008:147). Among those who left school prematurely, the proportion who reported that pregnancy was the primary reason ranged

from 1% in Niger to 31% in South Africa; however, the proportion was no more than 10% in 15 countries and no more than 5% in nine others. Further research has revealed that peer pressure, social circumstances, not choosing to use contraceptives, sexual abuse, rape, access to a social grant, and raging hormones are reasons for teenage pregnancies as described (The Teacher, 2010:10).

2.3.4.3 Caring School Communities

A huge part of my educator's role at school and of my involvement in extramural activities involves working with learners on a relatively informal level. I find that the learners' behaviour often changes for the better when they feel as though they are a part of a school community. A sense of belonging increases the likelihood that learners will accept school rules and policy. As they become important and valued members of their school's network of peers and adults, I experience that learners become more invested in their school.

Furthermore, learners are more likely to take educational risks when they feel safe in their school environment. When they feel part of the school community, they tend to want to participate in most of the activities at school. It is quite clear to me that, as an educator, playing a supportive role to these learners helps to keep them in school.

After all, it is in the classroom, where the "rubber hits the road" of educating, that the teacher's manner of applying rules exists. Here each teacher (who is only human, I believe) must encourage, challenge, love, discipline, teach, learn, grow and remember that each learner in the class is precious cargo. However, the task of "educating" our learners is not ours as teachers alone. This shared responsibility must incorporate its other role-players, whether they want the associated responsibility or not, as this is the only way in which the problem of dropping out of school will be curbed.

In the classroom, the teacher is certainly a dominant feature of the environment, Sutherland (1988:96) argues. It has, therefore, seemed to be important to discover what kind of reinforcement of learning the teacher offers. Therefore, frequent negative reactions are possibly not the best way of encouraging learning, and of conditioning learners to have positive attitudes towards continuing with their schoolwork.

According to Popkewitz (1998:67), discourses of teaching have focused on the classroom as a place in which the weaknesses/deficiencies of learners' upbringing could be overcome.

In further pursuit of the above-mentioned argument, teachers have to care about their learners in their school, and they have to treat their learners with compassion. Nussbaum (in Coulter & Wiens, 2008:149) describes compassion as the recognition that another person, who is, in some ways, similar to oneself, has suffered some significant pain or misfortune in a way for which that person is not, or is, at least, not fully, to blame. Nussbaum reminds us that, as teachers we are, in general, the nurturers, the guides, the friends, and the role models in the life of learners. This positioning of the teacher can be viewed as part of the development of a system of trust, through which pastoral care is inscribed.

As a teacher at an extremely disadvantaged school, I need the classroom to be the site of an unstressful, friendly and encouraging community. I believe that it is of utmost importance that the school is seen as a safe, secure, and psychologically supportive environment for learners who live in a harsh environment, which is earmarked by violence and poverty, outside the school. I firmly believe that every South African should receive a decent education, so as to become a trained, responsible and productive citizen.

2.3.4.4 School Fees

Cost is one of the main obstacles to completing secondary education. Fifty per cent of all reasons for non-attendance relate to the cost of schooling, or to the need to work, either in a job outside the home, or in the home. This suggests that a combination of fee waivers and income support for learners who are over 14 years old could reduce by up to half the number of all teenagers who quit school.

A study by Wöbmann (in Lomborg, 2004:245) emphasises that school fees might seem rather low to outside observers. However, school fees prove to be prohibitive for people living in extreme poverty. Even though the parents concerned might be well aware of the potentially substantial future benefits of education for their children, the mere need to obtain the means to survive inhibits them financing school fees for their children. Pritchett (2004, as cited by Wöbmann in Lomborg, 2004:245) predicts that, if you make

schooling free, learners will attend school. This has certainly proved to be the case in Malawi and Uganda, where, when direct primary school fees were abolished in the mid-1990s, school enrolment figures immediately increased substantially (cf. Al-Samarrai & Zaman, 2002; Deininger, 2003 in Wöbmann in Lomborg, 2004:245).

Kremer (2003 in Wöbmann in Lomborg, 2004:245) presents additional evidence that school participation is quite elastic in its response to cost. Spohr (2003 in Wöbmann in Lomborg, 2004:245) reports the noteworthy effects of an extension of tuition-free education from six to nine years in Taiwan. Still, the potential importance of school fees seems to be largely neglected in current initiatives, such as in Education for All (EFA) (Wöbmann in Lomborg, 2004:245).

Pritchett (2004 in Wöbmann in Lomborg, 2004:244) stresses that the problem of dropping out of school is much graver than is the problem of never enrolling in school. Wöbmann (in Lomborg, 2004:244) argues that both problems are probably mainly due to similar reasons (high costs, relative to household income), and that they could be solved by similar policy remedies. Thus, if the main constraint on learners staying in school is the high school fees that are involved, this factor will probably lead some households to decide that they cannot afford to enrol (some of) their children at all. Simultaneously, it might lead other households to decide that they can afford to enrol (some of) their children for, say, a period of three years, after which they will have to drop out of school.

2.3.4.5 Low Attendance / Learner Absenteeism

Research conducted in South Africa reveals high levels of unauthorised absence. In a study that was done in three schools in the Frances Baard region in the Northern Cape, it was found that four or more learners per class missed certain lessons during the week, with mathematics and biology lessons being most likely to be missed (Weideman *et al.*, 2007:26).

However, I have found that, within a disadvantaged community school, attendance might not be viewed as being beneficial. Hall and Manson (2006:46) challenge the findings relating to the low attendance rates of learners. According to them, learners' attendance rates tend to drop dramatically from age 15 onwards, reaching a low of 85% at the age of 17 years (Hall & Manson, 2006:46).

Poor school attendance has negative consequences for both the learner and the society. Consistent with findings in the developed world, socio-economic factors play a considerable role in school attendance problems. In contrast, Liang *et al.* (2002:259) state that poor accessibility to schools due to distance is likely to play a major contributory role. I have found that, in poor families, it is more valuable for learners to work or to beg than it is for them to attend school. This, to me, is a serious problem.

2.4 MAIN CAUSES OF SCHOOL DROPOUT, AS IDENTIFIED IN THE LITERATURE

Through my research I became aware that disadvantaged community members do not primarily see the school as a platform for their learners to advance up the socio-economic ladder. The persistence of poverty, wide income disparities and unemployment, the debilitating effects of illness and premature death (especially as a result of HIV/AIDS, TB and other life-threatening disease, which thrive in conditions of poverty), and the threats to our environment are important challenges faced both by disadvantaged communities and by the education system.

For the most part, it is quite clear to me that the nature of family life in a context of endemic poverty informs the way in which disadvantaged schools are accessed and valued. Domestic life in the community where the study takes place is generally unstable and fragile. Having to contend with the hunger and morbidity of school-going learners, the school is at the professional end of this domestic fragile situation. Liddle (1998:23), who is a community worker where my study takes place, argues that the community concerned falls within an economically depressed area, which is characterised by high welfare dependency.

I found the following factors in the literature about school dropouts identified as being the main causes of such a phenomenon. Related to the home are such causes as poverty, the poor education of the parents, and the lack of, or inadequate, parental support. Factors in the education system that were highlighted were poor academic performance, a poor culture of teaching and learning, and inadequate facilities and resources, as well as peer pressure and dominance, and poor peer choices. Other factors identified were gender-related, including teenage pregnancies, and factors relating to substance abuse and to school fees. Certain factors on which focus was laid were those that were inherent in

society, and the inadequacy of available role models, exposure to poor role models, and unemployment. Such factors are known in our community as being the precursors of dropping out of school.

Given this background, the teenagers in the disadvantaged community where the current study took place tend to have little to do. Liddle (1998:23), not surprisingly, argues that their idleness gives rise to teenage pregnancies and to drug abuse. I spoke to the local law enforcement officials, who informed me that the community was plagued by family disruptions, which went along with such negative aspects as addiction to drugs and alcohol, and overpopulation. The high levels of unemployment also gave rise to housebreakings and robberies. Liddle (1998:23) highlights that many teenagers in the community where the study took place turned to prostitution just to earn enough money to buy food and other necessities. Malnutrition occurred in the community due to the high levels of poverty. The wet climate in the area, the overpopulation, the poor housing and the unbalanced diet also gave rise to the high levels of tuberculosis and AIDS in the community, thus adding to the school dropout rate in the community.

2.5 SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed literature on learner dropouts which involved the identification and the analysis of information resources and up-to-date information from the literature related to learner dropouts. The literature included books, journal articles, reports, research papers, newspaper articles, conference papers, theses, reviews, government documents, electronic materials, and oral information. I align myself with Wegner (2008:423), who argues that there is a need for prospective research designs to promote better prediction and understanding of school dropouts in the developing world. Wegner elaborates that this is particularly so for South Africa, where there is a high rate of school dropouts, as well as relatively high levels of leisure boredom among high school learners (Wegner *et al.*, 2006 in Wegner, 2008:423).

I am, thus, using the results of the literature review on school dropouts, in conjunction with the guidance from theoretical perspectives, to develop a conceptual framework of school dropouts. In this research assignment, I consider the notion of Eisenhart (1991 in Cohen *et al.*, 2011:712), who argues in favour of the conceptual framework as a skeletal structure for organising, or guiding, a new study. Liang *et al.* (2002:259) confirm that

they, too, required further research to elucidate the causes of non-attendance, and that they, therefore, explored alternative methods of making education both attractive and accessible to our most needy population.

CHAPTER 3

POLICY ANALYSIS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

I am of the opinion that the education system does not relate to the needs of disadvantaged learners. The education system sets steep challenges for academic success and for the matriculation senior certificate; however, some of the schools do not provide the necessary instructions for learners to meet the challenges. The result is that a large portion of the learner population gives up on the school system.

Unlike in Western countries, there are neither enforced legal penalties, nor welfare systems, in place to encourage school attendance. This, together with the social and economic problems faced by large populations of South Africans, makes dropping out of school an important problem (Liang, Flisher & Chalton, 2002:257). Learner dropout affects all segments of society, and even more worrying is the fact that dropping out of school is on the increase, especially among young people. I argue that SKAV are the indispensable ingredients of a productive life.

The primary aim is not to create barriers for learners, but to encourage and to assist learners to attend school, and to create public awareness of educational policies and the impact that they have on schools. However, the aim of education policy is to initiate a process that intervenes in the current situation with a view to consolidating and supporting strengths, and to improving existing conditions and practices (Weber, 2006:155).

In its preamble, SASA states that South Africa needs a new national school system to redress past injustices in education, to provide education of high quality, so that society can be transformed, poverty can be eradicated, and the economic well-being of society can be improved. All South Africans have a constitutional right to education. In the case of children, the state is charged with delivering on this right (SASA April/May 1997).

In particular, in this chapter I familiarise myself by analysing and synthesising the existing research of day-to-day policies that focus directly on school dropouts. In

addition, I describe the undertaking of new research to inform policymakers and the public about the nature of school dropouts in South Africa. This section also examines educational policies that are designed to help those learners who are disadvantaged as they have experienced, or are likely to experience, difficulty in obtaining their Grade 12 matriculation certificate. The examination keeps in mind that some learners absent themselves from school, due to feelings that the school is offering them little that they consider to be useful or relevant. I also stress the context, the process, and the real-life conditions under which these policies are implemented.

I, therefore, analyse SASA Chapters 2 and 4, and the amended national norms and standards for public schools and human rights, in depth. In addition, I also analyse policies that are daily declared on the phenomenon of dropouts, such as the Progress Report that was submitted to the Minister of Education GNM Pandor, MP (who sat on the Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling System in October 2007), the Policy on Learner Attendance (promulgated in terms of section 3 of the National Education Policy Act No. 27 of 1996) and the amended National Norms and Standards for Schools Policy to assess the impact that they have on schools, especially on the dropout phenomenon.

The basic aims of SASA are to improve our educational system, by making it more efficient and more just for our learners. The implementers of the Act have also sought to create a single, non-discriminatory school system that is based on fundamental rights that are entrenched in the Constitution. However, I needed to understand how these policies address the problem of dropping out of school. Moreover, I chose to focus on the effectiveness of these policies. It was quite clear to me that, if these policies were to have been effective, there would have been no dropouts from the schooling system. Moreover, as South Africa entered a new global arena, in which education played a supportive role, it was imperative to analyse the effectiveness of these policies. What I sought was meaning making within these policies, relative to school dropouts. However, a gap has emerged between the intentions of the policy and the state's ability to establish an equitable system.

Education policy reform in South Africa's post-apartheid period has had an ambiguous legacy. Declrq (1997 in Fataar, 2007:599) has suggested that the policy has been based on a strong forward mapping approach, reflecting a decisive break with the legacy of

apartheid education. This policy vision has signalled a radical approach to reform. According to Fataar (2007:599), there is broad consensus by the state as far as acknowledging the fact that the inequalities in education have deepened, and that reform initiatives have faltered. The example of disjunction shows how reforms have been hampered by new difficulties with respect to social conditions, and with respect to relations both in, and around, schools.

3.2 THE NATURE OF EDUCATION POLICY

I am trying to make sense of the meaning of education policies in South Africa that address the phenomenon of school dropouts. Codd and Prunty (1995:1-2 in McLaughlin, 2000:441) explain the relationship between educational policies and politics, power and control. Prunty (in Codd, 1995:1 in McLaughlin, 2000:442) defines education policymaking as “an exercise of power and control directed towards the attainment or preservation of some preferred arrangement of schools and society”. McLaughlin (2000:442), in contrast, argues that Prunty and Codd seem to imply that educational policies can be formulated only by those who exercise power and control, and who are involved in politics in this sense.

What is central to the notion of an educational policy is that its focus is that of being a detailed prescription for action that is aimed at the preservation, or the alteration, of educational institutions or practices. This is why I am making a concerted effort to raise awareness on the effectiveness of school policies that relate to dropping out of school, and the effects that doing so has on the society.

The focus of my research in this chapter is, thus, on educational policy, and on the related notion of “educational policymaking” which can either be (i) related to power and control, or (ii) “influence aspirant” in relation to senses and contexts.

In exploring the educational policies, I find that it is useful to note the distinction between different (though interrelated) aspects of educational policy and policymaking: (i) the process of educational policymaking; (ii) the policy itself; and (iii) the application and evaluation of the policy. Policies originate at different levels and in different contexts in the educational system, and are developed by a number of different agents and agencies,

ranging from national to school (including even the classroom). Educational policies also differ in the scope of their content and in their application.

Scheffler (1991 in Mclaughlin, 2000:444) argues why policymaking cannot be reduced to mere technical considerations. Policy is made, he argues, in the context of multiple human activities, experiences, purposes and needs (Mclaughlin, 2000:104). Ham and Hill (in Codd, 1995:2-3 in Mclaughlin, 2000:449) draw a distinction between “analysis for policy” and “analysis of policy”. “Analysis for policy” contributes to the formulation of policy and takes two forms: firstly, “policy advocacy” (which involves the making of specific policy recommendations), and secondly, “information for policy” (which provides policymakers with “information and data” that are relevant to policy formulation or revision).

Secondly, “analysis of policy”, according to Ham and Hill (in Codd, 1995:3 in Mclaughlin, 2000:449), can also take two forms: the “analysis of policy determination and effects” (which examines the processes and the outcomes of policy), and “analysis of policy content”, which examines the values, the assumptions and the social theories underpinning the policy process. Mclaughlin (2000:453) argues for policymakers to acknowledge the extent to which the “content” of their work, and the context in which it is undertaken, is saturated with assumptions, concepts, beliefs, values and commitments.

Parliament is the institution that draws up the laws of South Africa. To understand the process of educational policymaking during and after the period of transformation in South Africa, it is necessary to consider the roles and the powers of the National Assembly and of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Education (Pandor in Jansen & Lewin, 1999:75). Parliament consists of the National Assembly and of the second house, the National Council of Provinces (NCOP).

3.2.1 Policy and Contradiction

Soudien, Jacklin and Hadley (in Jansen & Lewin, 1999:79) argue that, if policy is to include the idea of “any system of management based on self-interest as opposed to equity”, “finesse in general”, or even artifice, it must be read in more complex political and performative terms. Policy needs to be read as a site and a moment of engagement in which enunciation is preceded by displacement, and where the act of inscription is

fundamentally also an act of negation. In these terms, the objects of analysis have to include, simultaneously, the policy text at its moment of generation, at its implementation, and at its analysis.

I align myself with Ball (1990, 1994) and Bowe *et al.* (1996 in Jansen & Lewin, 1999:79), who argue, in seeking to comprehend the complexity of South Africa's education policy, for the full panorama or landscape in which policy is implicated, or which is even present in a digestible form.

3.3 ANALYSIS OF POLICIES

In this section, I discuss what makes my research a policy analysis, and I analyse relevant policies.

3.3.1 What Makes My Research a Policy Analysis

Policies provide a framework, within which a range of implementation activities take place. Policies are, thus, narratives that provide: visions and principles; rules and regulations; frameworks for funding; governance; curriculum and assessment; qualifications and conditions of work for teachers. Therefore, insight into education policies reflects the broad social, economic and political contexts in which they are formed (Christie, 2008:149). Smith and Foster (2002:3) argue that policies are important, as they provide a vision of government policy on a given issue, and a statement of policy-in-intention; however, they are of little interest, unless they are followed by some form of legislative action. However, Elmore (in Cummings & McGinn, 1997:301) argues that policymaking toward education is primarily about agenda formation and enactment, rather than about implementation and sustained change in public institutions.

I further align myself with Elmore (in Cummings & McGinn, 1997:301), who argues that reforms seldom, if ever, penetrate the core of teaching and learning. Those changes that do occur in the core are isolated and largely disconnected from public policy. The sheer volume of policymaking activity can be mistaken for an interest in, and commitment to, reform, when, in fact, it is a demonstration of the disconnection between policy and practice.

Like Hoppers (in Pampallis, 1997:12), I realise that the present global context is characterised by material, regional, racial, and gender inequalities. The aim of policies is to lay the basis for the elimination of such disparities within a paradigm of transformation and of the promotion of critical understanding.

The policy that everyone should pay fees, or should, at least, apply for fee exemptions, has resulted in certain children being excluded from school, and thereby being denied their rights (Christie, 2008:144). Although the policy of equal rights means that discrimination on the basis of race is not allowed, I find that it is mainly coloured and black learners who are denied their rights to education. I align myself with Christie (2008:211), who argues that framework policies are enlightened on paper, but they have proven almost impossible to implement with the current levels of resources and of capacity (Christie, 2008:211).

Education is compulsory only up to Grade 9, or up to when a learner is 15 years old, although there are many social and economic reasons for it being desirable for learners to complete their schooling up to Grade 12. School fees should, therefore, not be allowed to become an obstacle in the schooling process, or a barrier preventing access to schools, especially as far as the most marginalised are concerned.

I further align myself with Ball (2008:11), who argues that, in terms of policy, education is now regarded primarily from an economic point of view. The study shows that the social and the economic purposes of education have been collapsed into a single, overriding emphasis on policymaking for economic competitiveness, and an increasing neglect or side-lining (other than in the rhetoric) of the social purposes of education.

The evidence that “[e]ducation is increasingly subject to ‘the normative assumptions and prescriptions of economism’” (Lingard *et al.* 1998:84 in Ball, 2008:12) is evident across a wide range of policy texts. The 1998 Green Paper, *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998a:1 in Ball, 2008:12), begins with expressing a belief that “[l]earning is the key to prosperity – for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation of South Africa as a whole.” This is why the government, according to Ball (2008:12), promotes learning to the extent that it does.

The discourses that are currently in play, in a whole variety of diverse policy settings, as argued by Ball (2008:13), are important in two ways. First, they are important in their contribution to the construction of the need for reform, particularly in the context of globalisation and international economic competition, and the requirements of the knowledge economy. Second, they are important in providing and in making obvious and necessary appropriate policy responses and solutions.

These constructions, and their rationales, privilege particular social goals and human qualities, and currently give overwhelming emphasis to the economic role of education. Policies are both systems of values and symbolic systems, being ways of accounting for, and legitimating, political decisions. Ball (2008:13) argues further by saying that policies, to a greater or lesser extent, have a semantic and ontological force. They play their part in the construction of a social world of meanings, of causes and effects, of relationships, and of imperatives and inevitabilities.

By attending to the changing language and to the rhetorical constructions of education policy, we can begin to see the ways in which policies have histories and the way in which they connect within and across, different policy fields. I need to establish whether these educational policies are effective in developing schools, and if they are not, how different aims will ensure action to achieve the set outcomes in schools, thereby creating a positive environment that will foster a reduction in the number of school dropouts. Such a reduction especially needs to take place in our disadvantaged schools. The phenomenon of dropping out of high school requires mechanisms of support and the involvement of relevant role players.

3.3.2 Policies Explored in This Study

The following policies are informed by the Bill of Rights.

3.3.2.1 The Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Education (2007)

The Committee's first major task was to process the White Paper on Education, which was the first major education policy statement drawn up by South Africa's democratic government. The Portfolio Committee held public hearings involving all the national education stakeholders' bodies, at which various organisations presented oral and written

submissions on the Education White Paper process. The Committee saw its role as ensuring that the Education Bill would directly address the legitimate aspirations of all South Africans for an equitable, well-resourced, quality education system.

3.3.2.2 The Education Bill (1996)

The Education Bill, which was passed by Parliament, met with firm resistance from the policymakers who had overseen and shaped the apartheid education policy. The parties concerned referred the Education Bill to the Constitutional Court, claiming that the Bill violated the terms of the Interim Constitution. However, the court ruled that the Bill was, in fact, in line with the Constitution. The parties that had opposed the Bill did not have the transformative policy model of the RDP as their guide, and, as a consequence, unlike the African National Congress (ANC) MPs, they failed to recognise that policy formulation is central to the challenge of transformation.

Since the 1996 Education Bill, which set out the guiding national norms and standards for education, several other policy challenges have been met. Among these are: the passing of the South African Qualifications Authority Act No. 58 of 1995, the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997, and SASA; and the completion of a national survey and of a register of educational resource needs. In addition, a report on gender equity in education has been tabled, and a new curriculum framework – Curriculum 2005 – has been adopted, as well as has a report on a future model of FET.

3.3.2.3 Parliament's Future Role (1996)

The Portfolio Committee is equipped with the policy tools to monitor and to evaluate educational change. The Committee is set to move into a phase of investigation and evaluation, the focus of which will be on the impact of policy on education practice. Recent history has shown that financial resources have a significant impact on policy implementation. The Portfolio Committee is likely to have a strong interest in monitoring the use of resources allocated to education in the provinces. Thus far, the Committee has sought to give legislative effect to the right to education that is entrenched in the Constitution. The effects of the policy on practice will now be studied and strengthened, or amended, to ensure that all South Africans enjoy their right to education (Pandor in Jansen & Lewin, 1999:77).

Sayed (1997 in Lewis, 2007:53) argues that, after the 1994 elections, “there was a period of policy hiatus in the educational sphere”. The first education policy initiative after the elections was taken in the form of SASA, which introduced educational changes at both the national and the provincial level. Such changes included the introduction of ten years of compulsory schooling, and of SGBs, as well as of a more equitable distribution of funding between the provinces.

3.3.2.4 The Constitution and the Bill of Rights (1996)

I argue that the clause entrenching the right to an education is directly interwoven with other clauses in the Bill of Rights. Section 9 (Equality) protects individuals against discrimination by providing that learners may not be excluded from school activities on grounds of race, language or religion.

The principles of democracy and human rights are, thus, informed by particular perspectives that shape the way in which they are understood, and even implemented, on a daily basis. In an article by Kgobe (2002:3), Dieltiens and Vally argue that clauses in the Bill of Rights, such as that which asserts the right to an education, are derived from abstract moral goals; hence, translating them into operational terms that can be identified, measured, and monitored is problematic.

The implicit argument that is raised by Dieltiens and Vally (in Kgobe, 2002:3) is that a moralistic reading of human rights has the potential of minimising the obligation of the state towards ensuring that such rights are implemented. Kgobe (2002:3) argues that it is difficult to oblige the state to implement moral principles. It is within this context that Dieltiens and Vally (in Kgobe, 2002:2) criticise what seems to be a policy shift, from a “rights” discourse to a “morality” discourse.

Kgobe (2002:2) argues further that access to an education is regarded as a right that must be enjoyed by all learners. State efforts in reforming education, and in infusing a human rights culture into society, are being undertaken by such statutory bodies as the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and the Commission for Gender Equality. For Dieltiens and Vally (in Kgobe, 2002:2), fostering respect for human rights has direct implications for education, and will obviously help to curb the phenomenon of dropping out of school. All human beings have the right to receive an education in conditions of

peace and stability that are free from fear and insecurity. They all have a right to be treated fairly while they are becoming educated. What is essential is that the educational authorities can, in no instance, deny learners their rights, or violate them if they become school dropouts.

Basic rights (Habermas, 2002:212) are inferring subjective ingredients of a system of laws that is founded in mutual recognition and self-legislation. These rights guarantee both private autonomy and the right to political participation, ensuring that the law “preserves its connection with the socially integrative force of communicative action”. The system of rights should “contain precisely the basic rights that citizens must mutually grant one another if they want to legitimately regulate their life in common by means of positive law”.

Dewey (in Habermas, 2002:217) agrees that individual rights are also social rights, although responsible social rights are not possible without individual freedom. Obviously a free society, like free individuals, requires the attainment of such a balance. For Dewey the good of the whole is not the good of the common or group other over against the absolute rights of the individual. The good of the whole is the proper relation between the individual and the common other, as the whole is the community, and the community encompasses the individual and the common other in an ongoing process of adjustment.

I find that the fundamental weaknesses in the Freedom and Obligation document is that it fails to analyse correctly what is termed “moral regeneration”. Moreover, said concept is narrowly understood to be a response to the escalating rate of crime, and to other related “social ills” that largely result from poverty and the deep sense of anger and alienation that young learners are tending to experience (Kgobe, 2002:3).

I will take this opportunity to add some additional aspects to my argument by analysing the Progress Report to the Minister of Education GNM Pandor, MP (Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling System, October 2007), the Policy on Learner Attendance, promulgated in terms of section 3 of the National Education Policy Act No. 27 of 1996 and the amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding to establish what impacts they have on schools, and on the school dropout phenomenon.

3.3.4 School Difficulty Resulting from Reality Problems

Through my research, I have found that school policies and practices do matter in relation to high school. Learners are less likely to drop out if they attend schools with a reasonably strong academic climate, as can be seen by how many of the learners concerned take academic courses and do their homework. In contrast, learners are more likely to drop out of schools with a poor disciplinary climate, as can be seen by the number of learner disruptions that occur in class, or in school. No consistent effect appears to be made regarding the effect of exit exams on dropout rates, although relatively recent high school exams appear lower in category in high school completion (Rumberger & Ah Lim, 2008:3).

Schargel, Thacker and Bell (2008:1) emphasise that America's schools can improve, and present examples of excellence in the form of educational leaders who firmly believe that all children can succeed; schools that effectively meet the needs of non-traditional learners; and educational communities that persist with learners who are at risk of dropping out. The above-mentioned authors also identify: individual risk factors, personal characteristics, habits, and experience; family situations; and peer and community relationships. They then address the factors over which school leaders can have a more direct influence than the above, namely school climate and culture, connectedness, safety, attendance, and achievement.

This brings me to the question as to which policies, in particular, relate to the phenomenon of dropping out of school.

3.3.5 The Amended National Norms and Standards for the Funding of Public Schools

3.3.5.1 “No Fee Schools” Policy at Schools for the Poor

The school exemption policy, promulgated in terms of section 125 of SASA, was introduced to provide access to fee-paying schools for learners who were unable to afford the fees concerned. The criteria for fee exemption are means tests that are set for the learners. However, the impact of this policy has been limited. The government has attempted to limit the adverse effects of the school fee policy by declaring schools

serving poor communities to be “no fee schools”. Schools are classified by the Education Department on a scale of one to five, according to the financial conditions of the area around the school. In terms of this system, which is called the “quintile” system, the Education Department awards the most funding to quintile one schools, which are located in the poorest areas, with the least funding being awarded the quintile five schools, which are in the most affluent areas.

While the creation of a national quintile system has been welcomed, it does mean that some schools, which were formerly deemed poor, now find themselves located in the less poor quintiles. However, the aim of the system is to redistribute public funds, in order to move towards greater equity. Schools that are situated in quintiles one, two and three are progressively being included in the “no fee schools” category, while schools in quintiles four and five charge school fees (Motala *et al.*, 2009:253). In particular, schools in quintile five, which now receive no funding, have questioned their status, especially those schools that are located in disadvantaged areas. In addition, the poverty score, which considers both the poverty of the community and the poverty of the school, might not always accurately capture the constitution of the learner population that attends the school.

The implementation of the “no fee” policy has also brought with it its own challenges. The “no fee” policy uses ranks, according to the level of poverty prevalent in the surrounding area. This means that poor learners, who attend school in wards that are not rated amongst the poorest, are likely to attend fee-paying schools. Consequently, I have found that many learners are unable to afford books and stationery, and that they will often go through a whole term without having a notebook. Most disadvantaged schools have feeding schemes in place to cater for learners who come from homes where they have comparatively little access to nutritious food. These disadvantaged schools are struggling to make ends meet in the face of the severe budget restrictions imposed by the Education Department, which has grouped these learning institutions together with more affluent schools in their area.

The lack of funding that is available to disadvantaged schools means that the schools concerned cannot hire additional teachers, and that matters of maintenance and repairs have to be prioritised. My argument is that the education subsidies can only have limited success if the system is flawed. Ultimately, my argument is that the problem lies with the

quintile system. The data that are currently used to categorise schools are taken from the national census conducted by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA), according to Bronach Casey, who is spokesperson for the Western Cape Education Member of the Executive Council (MEC), Donald Grant. McCain's (2012:2) description of the quintile system shows that it leaves schools with little hope. The victims of the quintile system are obviously those learners whose parents are not in a position to pay their children's school fees. This destabilising factor gives rise to learners not attending school, meaning that they will, eventually, be likely to drop out of the schooling system.

I argue that, most of the time, teachers have to plan and to organise fundraising events that the learners and their families have to support financially, so that the daily operations of the school can continue. Such basic costs as the school telephone account and the cost of transport of the learners to school events must be paid by the schools themselves. Often, learners must support the school by paying for such basic essentials as toilet paper and copy paper, so that the school can operate on a daily basis. Having the teachers organising fundraising events for the school is inappropriate, as I have found that teachers use the tuition time of the learners to do so.

Many learners become frustrated, due to them needing their teachers' help and guidance in the classrooms, as they are left without supervision while the teachers are busy with fundraising events. In addition, teachers are also frustrated, because they are overworked due to having to cope with the tuition of their learners, as well as with the fundraising events of the school. Such a burden gives rise to raised stress levels for the educators concerned, leading to teachers staying away from school more often than they should.

According to Brint (1998:225 in Mills & Gale, 2010:60), "lower-class and minority learners typically receive less instructional time, less demanding and lower-quality educational materials and less imaginative teaching than other learners." Attributed with these disadvantages, these learners are often held to much lower standards than others. Brint further states that those who are "disadvantaged by virtue of their circumstances can be expected to fall still further behind."

3.3.5.2 The Reason for the “No Fee Schools” Policy Fitting into Policy Analysis

I have found that cost is one of the main obstacles to completing a secondary education, as I have argued above. Fifty per cent of all reasons for non-attendance relate to the cost of schooling, or to the need to work, either in a job outside the home, or in the home. This suggests that a combination of fee waivers and of income support for learners over 14 years could reduce by up to half the number of all teenagers who quit school. UNESCO (2007a) reports that poverty, in particular, serves as a significant obstacle to learners' education. In addition, UNESCO reports that, of 132 countries reviewed, about 87% of a cohort of learners who had access to primary education was found to reach their final grade in 2003. In sub-Saharan Africa, under two-thirds of the learners reached their final grade in most of the countries concerned. School retention rates are also low in several South and West Asian countries (UNESCO, 2007a:12 in the Ministerial Report, 2007:69).

Pritchett (2004 in Wöbmann in Lomborg, 2004:244) stresses that the problem of dropping out of school is much more important than is the problem of never enrolling at school. Wöbmann (in Lomborg, 2004:244) argues that both problems are probably mainly due to similar reasons (high costs, relative to household income), and are susceptible to similar policy remedies. Thus, if the main constraint to remaining at school is the high school fees, then this will probably lead some households to decide that they cannot afford to enrol (some of) their children at all, whereas, simultaneously, it might lead other households to decide that they can afford to enrol (some of) their children for a period of, say, three years, after which they will have to drop out of school.

I have observed that, in very poor families, it is more valuable for young people of school-going age to work or to beg than it is for them to attend school. This might be due to there being no system in place to enforce school attendance, or to administer penalties. The school funding policy and the legislative framework need to be reviewed as a whole to ensure that the policy achieves the objective of equitable access to quality education. My argument is that non-financial ways of addressing education quality in South Africa should be considered.

3.3.5.3 The Reason for Learners Dropping out from the Schooling System

A Ministerial Committee was appointed by the Minister of Education, GNM Pandor, MP, in October 2007 to investigate the extent of retention and dropout in the South African schooling system. The following directives were of significance:

- to review the relevant data, the information, and the research on learner retention in South African schools;
- to investigate the extent of retention and dropout amongst learners in Grades 9 to 12; and
- to investigate any anomalies in learner retention among Grade 1 learner (Progress Report to the Minister of Education, GNM Pandor, MP, Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling System 2007:1).

Among the main findings of the Committee in relation to the three directives were the following:

- There is a problem with learner retention, which is more pronounced after Grade 9.
- The dropout rate below Grade 9 is insignificant, but increases from Grades 10 to 12.
- Grade repetition was identified as the single most powerful predictor of dropping out of school. Studies have shown that learners who have repeated a grade in their schooling careers are most likely to drop out of school. Learners became disillusioned, and generally tend to disengage from school activities.

Dropping out is preceded by indicators of withdrawal, or by unsuccessful school experiences. Preventive measures should be taken at the earliest indicators of withdrawal. The risk of dropping out is very high for learners who are older than the median age when they enter secondary education, independent of their achievement scores. Weber (2006:199) warns that the cycle of previous failure might either impact on these learners, or they might have more mature goals than do their younger classmates, with the goals concerned not being school-related, such as those of obtaining an occupation, or of raising a family.

Grade repetition is ineffective as an intervention mechanism; learners who repeat grades should have access to special programmes that do not mean that they have to repeat the material and the content covered in the first year that they spent in the grade. There is a need to improve access to early childhood development. Smaller class sizes, personalised settings, and individualised learning plans are required. Staff development programmes are aimed at improving skills to identify students with difficulties (Clarke, 2008:16).

It is not surprising that the above-mentioned report recommends that interventions should be developed to focus on the early indicators of low self-esteem and on aggressive behaviour, as such indicators are closely linked to dropping out later from school. Certainly, a positive classroom climate should be actively created, and schools should be urged to cultivate supportive personal relationships with struggling learners. Most importantly, learners are less likely to drop out of high school where the relationships between teachers and learners are positive (Arrow *et al.*, 2007:99).

In the light of the above, preventing dropping out from school poses a significant challenge for schools and for educational communities.

3.3.6 Policy on Learner Attendance

How problematic the levels of learner absenteeism in disadvantaged schools are, and what factors contribute to increased levels of absenteeism need to be explored. The Policy on Learner Attendance has had an impact on schools, including on the phenomenon of dropping out from school. A report on learner absenteeism was commissioned by the DoE in 2006 to focus on the incidence of learner attendance, and on the reasons for learner absenteeism.

The national policy determines the national norms, and the standards, for learner attendance of public schools. The aims of the DoE (2006) research were:

- to provide information on the incidence of learner absenteeism in the country;
- to investigate the reasons why learners absent themselves from schools; and
- to provide an analysis towards monitoring and reducing learner absenteeism.

Among the main findings of the Committee were that there is a lack of common understanding of, or of a policy approach to, the recording, the monitoring, and the

addressing of dropouts. A continuum of behaviour exists from partial absences, through full-day absences and grade repetition, to dropping out. I have also found that learner absenteeism is experienced as a problem for the majority of disadvantaged school learners.

I align myself with Connell, who argues that teachers are often expected to implement policies, but not to make them. They can regard themselves as the “objects of policy interventions rather than as the authors of social change” (Connell, 1994:133 in Mills & Gale, 2010:70).

The Policy on Learner Attendance stipulates that it is the responsibility of the parent to ensure that the learner attends school daily. SASA provides for action to be taken if a student of compulsory school attendance age does not attend school without explanation. However, schools do not generally receive feedback from the district offices when they report cases of truancy, and the schools do not receive support or resources relating to learner absenteeism.

My argument is that there is a lack of interdepartmental cooperation in regards to monitoring and dealing with learner absenteeism. Disadvantaged schools do not have additional teachers, as the previously “whites only” schools tend to have to monitor and deal with learner absenteeism. The recommendations of the Committee include that schools should develop attendance policies. Clarke (2008:7) warns that there is a need for a holistic approach to be adopted towards the management of absenteeism, to take into account the broader factors that contribute to the problem. Drawing on such a view, I argue that: parental and SGB involvement should be increased; security at schools should be increased; nutrition schemes should be extended; and learner transport systems should be implemented.

My argument is that the Policy on Learner Attendance presents its own challenges. Non-compliance or non-implementation is not an option, according to the Minister concerned. All public servants are required to observe the policy that has been determined by the Minister; however, according to me, there are no consequences that the Education Department imposes when learners are absent from school for some time. The policy further stipulates that it is the responsibility of the parent to ensure that their children attend school regularly.

Although SASA provides for action to be taken if a learner of compulsory school attendance age does not attend school without explanation, no action is taken against parents whose children do not attend school. The policy makes it quite clear that it only addresses matters pertaining to the daily attendance of learners who are already enrolled in schools. This leads to my concern about what happens to those children who never enrol in school.

The policy also states that the class teacher must inform the principal when a learner is absent without explanation for three consecutive school days. The teacher must also draw the principal's attention to cases of repeated absence, so that the matter may be followed up with the parent in an appropriate manner. I am of the opinion that the school principal has too much administrative work to have each learner's absenteeism record brought to their attention. My observation is that the absenteeism phenomenon in disadvantaged schools is so overwhelming that it is not possible for the principal to handle the state of affairs involved.

Also, the Policy on Learner Attendance may specify disciplinary actions that will be taken against learners who are not punctual in attending school without valid reason for such behaviour. Most of the time, when they have not attended school, learners must submit a letter from their parents, stating why they were absent. However, I have found that some learners do not submit such letters, or they do not have valid reasons for being absent. This is despite both them and their parents knowing what the school's code of conduct is in relation to school absenteeism. Normally, the last option entails the parents concerned coming to the class teacher to explain the reason(s) for the learner's absence.

In cases of learner absenteeism, the class teacher is supposed to contact the parents by means of a letter or a telephone call. However, the limited amount of time that some working-class parents have at their disposal makes it difficult to intervene in their children's schooling. These parents see education as a discrete process that takes place on the school grounds, under the direction of a teacher. This, according to Connell (1993 in Mills & Gale, 2010:67), makes parents' participation in disadvantaged schools via conventional channels difficult.

Connell (1993 in Mills & Gale, 2010:66) notes that, in disadvantaged schools in particular, forging strong relationships between the school and its surrounding

communities can be extremely difficult. To add to these difficulties, according to Briggs and Potter (1990 in Mills & Gale, 2010:68), some teachers have negative attitudes about parents, and about parent participation, and claim that parents are apathetic and that they come to school only to criticise. This, they argue, can result in the significant adults and institutions in learners' lives pulling in opposite directions.

I agree with Whitaker and Moses (1990 in Mills & Gale, 2010:70), who emphasise that teachers should be centrally involved, and that they need to become full partners in their own profession. When those who will be responsible for implementing the stated policies are involved in the decision-making process, it appears to impact on their motivation to act upon, and commit to, the intended outcomes.

My observation is that the human resources at disadvantaged schools are limited, due to financial restrictions; therefore, disadvantaged schools cannot financially afford additional educators, with the result that many of the learners who are frequently absent, do eventually become dropouts.

3.4 SUMMARY

This chapter dealt with the analysis of education policies that speaks to everyday school policies that address school dropouts. In terms of SASA, the Education Department must investigate the circumstances behind learners' absence from schools, and take the necessary steps to remedy the situation. What is evident from this analysis of education policies is that there is no one correct policy, as each of the education policies discussed has certain advantages.

I align myself with Power (1982:334), who argues that what cannot be taken for granted is that the school can directly, and almost immediately, remake society, and revise existing social attitudes, biases, and prejudices. Educational policy should, therefore, be fully supportive of social integration, and should take an assertive position on its side (Power, 1982:334).

I argue that, if schools and societies are to function effectively together, it is tempting to believe that they must have some common bond. I am of the opinion that reviews of the national education policy are capable of justifying a complete and comprehensive

understanding of the nature of dropping out from school, and its reality. According to Power (1982:264), we need a backbone with which the various parts of knowledge may be associated, and around which they may be integrated. Commentators have noted the danger of regarding without a core, a common body of knowledge, to which all parts of knowledge may be joined. This theory extends our grasp of the reality of dropouts, which, without such a core, is almost certain to be defective.

Lomborg (2004:636) argues that, if money is to be used for educational improvement, it might be that the way to motivate exposure to the educational system in poor countries is to pay families the opportunity cost of keeping their children in school until they finish their schooling. Doing so would alleviate their poverty, by tying payments for school attendance to the wage alternatives that pressure families to take their children out of school early. Instead of engaging in welfare transfers to help the poor, investing in their schooling in this way could provide them with the tools with which they could extricate themselves, or at least the next generation, from poverty.

I need to establish whether these educational policies will be effective in addressing the phenomenon of dropping out of school, and, if not, how taking action on the matter can help to achieve the outcomes set for schools. My argument is that one cannot separate policy from implementation. The dropout rate clearly indicates how effective these policies are, as I am of the opinion that the implementation of such policies should prevent learners from dropping out of school. Studies have shown that a number of key policy issues invite further consideration, reflection and research on the phenomenon of school dropouts.

CHAPTER 4

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this research, I was as interested in how people narrated their lived experiences as in what their stories were about as dropouts. I was also interested in how the narrators made sense of their personal experiences in relation to different discourses that related to high school dropouts. Therefore, I made use of narrative, semi-structured interviews, enabling self-disclosure, wherein participants “told their stories” in their own words, and recounted their subjective experiences and feelings. My argument is that my doing so gave the participants, who, in this study, were school dropouts, a “voice”, whereas otherwise they would either not have been heard, or listened to. For me, the participants also had a platform from which to express their lived experiences as dropouts.

The research purpose was to develop an understanding of high school dropouts within the context of describing their lived experiences as such. The seven role players in the study whom I interviewed revealed a variety of reasons for having dropped out of school as teenagers. Chief among these reasons were the influences of friends in the community both in and out of school, financial constraints, poverty, drug abuse, leisure boredom, and teenage pregnancy. I did this research as I wanted to make sense and meaning of the individual lives, and group of lives. The purpose in doing this research was to explore the lived experiences of school dropouts in a disadvantaged community.

I am under the impression that it is the aim of education, as held by the teacher, and which is expressed tacitly, if not explicitly, by the school community, that determines the quality of the learning experiences and which gives it such coherence. However, schools are subject to the pressures and to the demands of parents, of society in general, and, currently, of learners themselves: these are demands for tangible achievements, and for the acquiring of knowledge that is relevant to society. Further, I find that society itself might, due to its multicultural basis, need, as never before, to be concerned with the development of a sense of rational judgment and moral awareness in its citizens.

It is in this area that the demands of society would seem to link up with those of the individual, based on a sound understanding of what is involved in acting responsibly and independently. Thus, the individual's demand for rational autonomy would seem to have something in common with society's demand for citizens who are capable of rational judgment and moral awareness. It is, thus, important to note that the concept of education that is suggested here implies that education is pursued for what is valuable in it, that is, for its intrinsic worth (Lloyd, 1976:50).

In this chapter, I also analyse the data obtained by using interpretive analysis, through the replies that were obtained in the interviews. The product of analysis is, thus, a creation that speaks to the heart of what was learned. These analyses were conducted for one cohort: youth who were aged from 18 to 25 years old at the time of the survey.

I also focus on the relationship between the participants' life stories, and the quality of their life experiences. I wanted to emphasise what the dropouts' stories were about, in terms of their plots, their characters, and their content. Chase cited D. Jean Clandinin and Jerry Rosiek (2007 in Denzin *et al.*, 2011:421) as noting that, in literature, narrative is employed so as to signify that researchers should listen to people's stories about their everyday experience "with an eye to identifying new possibilities within that experience".

Therefore, my fieldwork explored the subjects' lived realities within the discernible contexts of their social interaction, regarding their years in school, how they anticipated their future working lives, and their primary concerns as to finding a place for themselves in the world of work. The study highlighted the participants' perspectives of the daily challenges that they faced as school dropouts in a disadvantaged society. I wanted to gain a true understanding of what was happening; therefore, I studied the participants in their natural environment, in their homes, and in their community.

4.2 INTERVIEWS

The research process commenced with a formal written request to the principal of the community learning centre in the demarcated area described by the study. The consent form described the details of the investigation. The participants were initially contacted by the Principal and then introduced to me, and I secured an appointment with them. Official letters were handed to the participants, requesting an interview with them. The

Research Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Education, Stellenbosch University, approved the study.

For the purpose of using semi-structured interviews I avoided seeing the participants as manipulable, and the data as external to the individuals, and chose rather to regard the knowledge involved as having been generated between humans, by means of conversation (Kvale, 1996:11). Kvale (1996:14 in Cohen, 2011:409) remarks on the interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, seeing the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasising research data. The semi-structured nature of the interview rendered it different from an everyday conversation; therefore, I was obliged to abide by the rules that had to be in place for interviewing the participants. Semi-structured interviews are neither entirely pre-structured with respect to content, formulation, sequence, and answers, nor are they left entirely open (Baeije, 2010:62). I, therefore, used pseudonyms (i.e. fictional names) for the interviewees, showing that the study population consisted of young adults.

I interviewed seven high school dropouts from the community in which the study was conducted. We wanted to keep the sample and gender representative. The participants were linked to the same community, in order to gain a clear understanding of the impact of school dropouts in a disadvantaged community. The study population was defined as young adults, who were between the ages of 18 and 25 years old. The researcher interviewed three male and four female volunteers from among the population of school dropouts in the community. The interviewees were all studying for their Grade 12 (senior certificate) through the adult basic education system.

Using the above-mentioned method assured me that there would be enough diversity in terms of gender in the study, as there might have been a significant difference in the reasons for male and female learners dropping out of school. As it was possible that some of the participants would experience some discomfort when answering the questions asked, the interviews were held in private, to make sure that the participants were made as comfortable as possible during the interview. A counsellor was also available to assist any participant who required assistance during, or after, the interviews. According to me, the presence of the counsellor was important for counselling the participants to show them that, instead of being victims of the school dropout phenomenon, they could become victors in their schooling.

I devised the following questions that were addressed to the participants in order to capture the data that I needed to collect for the study:

1. In which year and grade did you leave school?
2. Did your family structure have an influence on you leaving school?
3. What is the highest education qualification in your immediate family?
4. Did you consult with anyone before dropping out of school?
5. Did you feel important and valued as a learner at school?
6. Do you think that the education system was adequate enough to help you make a success of your studies?
7. Describe the teachers' attitudes toward you.
8. Did your peer group have any major influence on you?
9. What part has the community played in shaping your life and career?
10. Why did you drop out of school?
11. How has your life been since dropping out from school?
12. What would your advice be to pupils who consider dropping out of school?

The study explored the authentic voices of the seven participants who had dropped out of school regarding their concerns about, and their planning and aspirations for, the future.

From an analysis of the participants' responses to these questions, the following themes emerged as the participants discussed their experiences and feelings both in and out of school (the participants' answers are given in italics below.)

4.3 THEMES

My coming to understand the participants' experiences as school dropouts followed a process that was similar to that which was suggested by Hycner (1999 in Storz, 2008:246). It involved identifying particular insights, and clustering those insights together to form themes, after extensive summarising for reporting purposes. My analysis involved reviewing the interview transcripts, and reflecting on them, so that I could identify themes that seemed to illuminate the various aspects of the research questions.

The most dominant themes were identified in the study by means of the data analysis as those factors that had led the learners to drop out of high school. Therefore, I use the language of the participants below, rather than abstract theoretical language. I also move beyond merely summarising the content involved (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2009:323).

The themes covered in the interviews were the following:

- the barriers caused by poverty;
- behaviours;
- background;
- communities;
- families;
- schools;
- educational performance; and
- attitudes.

Each theme covered is discussed below, along with examples from the interviews. The quotations are given verbatim. Clarification of the concepts used is given in brackets. References from the literature are used to explain, to support, and to extend the theory generated by the research. Doing so has provided me with a basic understanding of the research problem, and of the evidence that the study conducted was appropriately based on the current knowledge of the problem (Burns & Grove, 1995:108). The literature control thus reflects the existing knowledge of the problem and of the barriers that impact on high school dropouts in the context of a formerly disadvantaged community.

Participants who volunteered for this study were assigned pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity and confidentiality. Their responses were audiotaped, and the semi-structured interviews concerned lasted for from 60 to 90 minutes each.

4.3.1 Barriers Caused by Poverty

Christie (2008:169) argues that home backgrounds influence learner achievement. A theory that is still in use today is that the poor live in a “culture of poverty”. The logic behind this theory is that a culture of poverty traps the poor into cycles of low achievement and low expectations, which are passed on from generation to generation. An explanation such as this implies that the poor have themselves to blame for their

circumstances. It further suggests that the reasons for poverty are to be found in the attitudes and in the behaviour of the poor themselves, who are seen as deficient, or lacking in capacity. Poverty is portrayed as a problem that is experienced by individuals, to which they and their families contribute.

The above-mentioned theory is not surprising, given that, in South Africa, it is estimated that approximately 75% of the children live in conditions of poverty (Wilson, Giese, Meintjies, Croke and Chamberlain, 2002 in Flisher *et al.*, 2010:251).

When I asked Devena why she left school, she remarked,

I was in Grade 12 when I left school. My mother told me to go back to school. I felt at that time that I did not have a choice. Both my parents were unemployed. Financially, circumstances were very bad at home. I am the eldest of three children. When I was in Grade 10, I already felt inclined to leave school, because of my financial problems at home. There was never any money available. My parents were drinking alcohol excessively. There were many times when I slept on my own at night, with my two little brothers. Many times my parents did not sleep at home, because of their alcohol abuse.

Devena was, at the time of the current study, a Grade 12 candidate for the matriculation certificate. Being the eldest of three children, she had felt obliged to go out to work to care financially for the household, and for her two younger brothers. Both her parents were unemployed at the time. Circumstances at home were not conducive for any of the children. Her parents were drinking excessively, and often she had to care for her two younger brothers by herself. It was clear to me that Devena, in common with many other learners in disadvantaged communities, was burdened with having to cope with many social problems. Mortimore and Blackstone (1982:28) confirm that unemployment can have devastating effects on the community, as well on individuals and their families.

When I asked Sammy the same question, she replied,

Circumstances at home forced me to leave school. Financial problems. I had to go out and work ... I had to go and work to maintain me and my child. My baby's dad did not pay any maintenance. We did not have any contact with each other. [The learner wept at this stage in the interview.]

Through the emotions shown by the participants, one had to come to understand the challenges that these dropouts have gone through. I have realised, through the research, that poverty is more of an issue than is education in relatively poor communities. I have also come to realise that these challenges do not end in class. However, dropouts also create dreams and visions for themselves, despite them living in a culture of survival. The participants interviewed felt constrained by their circumstances, and appeared to express feelings or a disposition that reproduced the constraints experienced.

Sammy's poor circumstances at home gave her no alternative but to leave school in Grade 10. She was a teenager with a child, who had no financial aid for her baby. The financial circumstances at home were poor. Soudien (2007:16) confirms that approximately one-third of all young South Africans live in households with an income of under R750 per month. Clearly, my argument is that, with only a small income, life has no guarantees for these participants.

I also realised that the social relationships experienced by the participants were important in terms of their material conditions. They were also important in terms of the networks that the participants were able to link into, and in terms of the opportunities that were, and that were not, available to them. I also align myself with Christie (2008:102), who argues that the unemployed experience continuing disadvantage, and have few opportunities for improving their circumstances. Although redistribution takes place in the form of pensions and grants, and through such social services as education, the growth path is not marked by pro-poor sentiment. The poor, particularly the rural poor, are marginalised, and their voices are largely ignored (Christie, 2008:102).

4.3.2 Behaviours

The study identified a wide range of behaviours that was practised both in and out of school that predicted either dropping out or graduation. Deviant behaviour has a direct impact on the high school dropout rate. Deviant behaviours are often expressed as disruptive school behaviours, and as frequently displayed delinquent behaviours, which increase the risk of dropping out of school for many learners (Farmer & Payne, 1992; Gruskin *et al.*, 1987; Reyes, 1989; Tindall, 1988). In the current study, suspension from school was considered to be symptomatic of deviant behaviours. I found that male

learners were more likely to misbehave in high school, and that delinquent behaviour outside of high school was also significantly associated with the dropout rates experienced.

Male participant, Cameron, who was an unemployed 21-year-old at the time of the study, had left school in Grade 10. He recalled,

My parents wanted me to continue my schooling at the time, but I was not serious enough about my education. I loved school, and the educators also loved me. They reprimanded me on a daily basis. I was in school every day, but for the wrong reasons. I was naughty. I could not ignore women. My friends at school were the same as me. Schoolwork was not important to us at the time. Our behaviour was often disruptive. I did not worry ... the result was that I failed Grade 10.

In addition, drug or alcohol use during high school is associated with relatively high dropout rates. Drug addiction and alcohol use are the forms of counterculture that have been found to be the most prevalent. Police statistics indicate that dropouts are six to ten times more likely to be involved in crime than are those who complete their schooling. The Educator's Voice (2010:16) describes substance abuse amongst teens, especially in the form of the abuse of alcohol and tik, as leading to the most vulnerable among them dropping out of school.

I then asked Shannon why she had dropped out of school, to which she responded,

I did wrong things. My friends were doing drugs, and, later on, I was also dependant on drugs. I had so much trouble in my mind. It was impossible to focus in the classroom any more. When I was in the classroom, I could only think of my next "fix", how I was going to smoke the next drugs. The reason why I left school was because I totally lost my focus in doing my schoolwork. I lost my concentration about my schoolwork. At that stage, I could not concentrate any more. At the time, I smoked "dagga", and I used various kinds of drugs. I stayed in the same community as my friends.

Flisher *et al.* (2010:239) confirm the impact of early school leaving and substance use among adolescents in a working-class community in Cape Town. Their study found that

dropouts had higher rates of current cigarette use, lifetime cannabis use, and current and heavy alcohol use compared with those still attending school.

Shannon revealed the following disturbing behaviour, as a result of her drug abuse while she was attending school,

I had decided already in my mind that I was going to leave school. I could not focus on my schoolwork anymore. I was occupied with my own mindset. I felt sick. At that stage, I concentrated on making an ending to my own life, to commit suicide. I talked to a nursing sister at the local clinic. The nursing sister referred me to Lentegour, an institution for psychiatric patients. I was frustrated at the time. I had feelings of suicide, and I was aggressive. I felt that I wanted to be on my own at the time.

A number of theoretical frameworks have explained the relationships between substance use and dropout. These include the social control theory, which proposes that, when the moral bond between people is broken (as can occur with dropouts), social control mechanisms become less effectual, resulting in substance use (Fagan & Pabon, 1990). The strain theory postulates that school failure causes frustration and, hence, alienation from school, and that learners experiencing frustration seek out alternative self-defining behaviours that are deviant in nature, such as substance use (Aloise-Young & Chavez, 2002). Problem behaviour theory understands substance use and dropping out of school as constituting two covarying problem behaviours (Obot & Anthony, 1999). Social learning theory proposes the learning processes that lead to substance use in association with peers, claiming that such processes are most potent in the face of weak social bonds (Flisher *et al.*, 2010:239).

When I asked Cameron whether his peer group had any impact on him dropping out of school, he responded as follows,

My peer group had a negative influence on me. My friends were the same as I. We did not worry about our schoolwork. Schoolwork was important for us only when it suited us. We really did not worry about our schoolwork.

Cameron was smiling when he responded to the question, which gave me the impression that he felt good that he and his friends had been caught while they were selling cigarettes in the school toilets. The other impression that I also had was that the only punishment

that had been imposed for selling cigarettes on the school premises was detention. To me, his reaction was disappointing, as he was suspended from school for a week. Lee and Miu-ling (2003:107 in Masitsa, 2006:179) state that most learners drop out of school due to their peers' encouragement that they do so. Lagana (2004:213 in Masitsa, 2006:179) confirms that peers are extremely important during adolescence, and that teenagers spend their school days interacting with them. Having friends who engage in criminal behaviour, or having friends who have dropped out of school, also tends to increase the odds of dropping out.

Sammy reacted as follows when I asked her whether her peer group had had any major influence on her,

Yes, in a positive way. My peers encouraged me to go back to evening classes [ABET] to obtain my matriculation senior certificate. In a negative way, my peers introduced me to drugs in Grade 9, but I have decided to stop using them.

Shannon's peer group had a major influence on her, she explained,

Children will always do anything to be part of a group, to fit into the group. I could not smoke, but to be part of the group I had to smoke. I saw my friends smoke, so I also started smoking. Do you know what? Your friends can tell you to smoke, but when you do it, it is your decision, because people make their own decisions. Each day people make their own choices. It is a wrong choice that I took. Whenever you make wrong choices, you open yourself up for any possibility without you knowing it. My friends could have had an influence on me, but the day I decided to smoke, the choice was mine.

Devena noted that her peer group had no major influence on her. However, she felt pressured at school by her friends for doing her schoolwork. She stated,

Actually not. Only at school, yes. My friends in school used to tell me to stop doing my schoolwork, while we were supposed to do our schoolwork. My friends did not have a major influence on me.

While policymakers and the media often cite pregnancy and marriage as being the primary drivers for female adolescents leaving school prematurely (i.e. before the

completion of secondary school) in sub-Saharan Africa, the circumstances that predispose young women to have premarital sex, or to marry early, such as poverty and poor school performance, might, themselves, lead learners to drop out (Ball & Melhado, 2008:147). My argument is that teenage parenting and childbearing increase the tendency to drop out of school.

Terry replied as follows when I asked her why she had left school,

I fell pregnant. My parents told me to leave the house. Although I could have attended school while I was pregnant, I did not feel like going to school any more. I went to stay with my baby's dad.

Further research also reveals that dropping out of school is often due to economic barriers and to poor school performance. Growing up in communities where poverty is deep-rooted, and where parents are physically or emotionally unavailable, contributes to the occurrence of early pregnancy, as described (The Teacher, 2010:10).

The decision that was made by another learner, Cameron, to drop out of school was mainly determined by him impregnating his girlfriend, who was also at the same school that he attended at the time. He said,

I left school because I impregnated my girlfriend. I wanted to be a father and a provider for the baby at that time.

Teese and Polesel (in Christie, 2008:176) argue that schools that are attended by learners from working-class and poor communities have few advantages when facing the demands of the curriculum. They are, in contrast, exposed sites in terms of the academic curriculum. Teese and Polesel further argue that multiple disadvantages are pooled at these sites, with such disadvantages consisting of: poor language skills; fragmented family lives; poverty; low levels of parental education; lack of facilities; and leisure opportunities that distract from, rather than are supportive of, attending school.

Effective learning largely depends on the capacity of teachers to make up for the gap between what the academic curriculum assumes about learners, and who the learners really are (Teese & Polesel, 2003:123 in Christie, 2008:177). Teese and Polesel (2003:123 in Christie, 2008:177) argue further that, where there are concentrations of disadvantage, the tensions that are experienced by the teaching staff and by the learners as

they grapple with the curriculum might weaken any cohesion and shared sense of purpose. They might also depress expectations, and lead to the development of persistent behavioural problems.

Lingard *et al.* (2003:131 in Mills & Gale, 2010:38) confirm that, in schools servicing disadvantaged communities, low expectations and low aspirations for learner achievements are often features of the school culture.

When I asked Richard and Terry if they felt important and valued as learners at school, they both responded positively.

Richard responded,

Yes. School was okay.

Terry responded,

Yes. All the teachers were very fond of me at school. I was an A candidate at school. I attended a Model C school from Grade 8 to Grade 9. I only attended a state school in Grade 10. The reason for me attending the state school was because of the convenience of me walking to school. I could walk to school, as, with the Model C school, I had to wake up earlier, and arrived later at home from school.

Richard describes the teachers' attitudes toward him as very good:

The teachers' attitudes towards me were very good. Yes, they were very good.

Sammy, however, did not feel important and valued as a learner at school, and had not yet come to terms with a number of issues that she had had to deal with at her school. She was starting to realise some realities that had faced her having the baby at the time. The following conversation reflects much of the conversation around this theme:

The teachers had a negative attitude towards me, because of me having the baby at the time. I was not allowed to take part in any school activity. I was not allowed to attend any school function, not even the school's talent show. I was not allowed to attend the matric farewell function of the school. My mother contacted the Western Cape Education Department, but they said

that if it was the policy of the school, then they could not do anything about the school's decision.

4.3.3 Background

A number of learner background characteristics – including demographics and past experiences – are linked to whether learners drop out or graduate from school. As Munsaka (2003:65) argues, Rumberger (1983) investigated the influence of race, sex and family background on the phenomenon of dropping out of school. Rumberger found family background to be a strong indicator of the phenomenon. Orr (in Suh, Suh & Houston, 2007:196) points out that educational and socio-economic backgrounds, in combination, are the strongest determinants of whether or not a learner will drop out of school.

Devena revealed her decisions for leaving school in the following way:

I felt like leaving school in Grade 10 already, due to my poor circumstances. There was never any money. My parents were drinking a lot. I had to look after my two brothers in the evening. My parents did not even come home sometimes at night. At that time I met my boyfriend. He even brought us food in the evening. At the end of the day, I ended up pregnant. I could have gone back to school, but I could not cope with the baby. I was 18 at the time, with nothing. [At this stage, the learner cried, so that I had to stop the interview. The interview continued after she had consulted the counsellor.]

I have concluded that the expression of emotions is a natural reaction to a stressful situation. Feelings of extreme sadness might have indicated that the participants were depressed, as they were all struggling to deal with their own personal emotions. I have also noted that dealing with dropping out of school is stressful and difficult for all the participants concerned. (See Sammy's response to this in subsection 4.3.1 above.)

Richard described how his life had been since he dropped out from school:

I was at home. After a while, I worked. I left the work again. I am not working at the moment. I am unemployed.

Drawing on current research, I argue that, frequently, the absence of learners from school also make them more likely to drop out from school. Some learners stated that they did not feel as though they fitted in, or they might have felt unsafe. At this time in a learner's life, school is the most awkward place to be. The learners would have stayed away from school if they could have helped it. They would use any tactic for avoiding school, including dropping out. Also, rebellion has been found to be a major cause of learners dropping out of school.

I asked Richard whether he had consulted with anyone before he dropped out of school. His response was,

No. I just decided on my own to leave school.

Xavier had had no reason for dropping out of school:

I did not have any reason. I just felt that I wanted to leave school at the time.

Terry also did not consult anyone before she dropped out of school:

Nobody, no I did not consult anybody before I left school. I was pregnant at the time.

Shannon, a 21-year-old participant, clearly reflected the above-mentioned issues when she emphatically stated:

Do you know what, when you do a lot of wrong things, then you get a lot of wrong friends? When you do not want to get into trouble, it is best to stay in the house. In the community where I stay, everybody is busy with wrong things. If people are not busy drinking, then the other one is busy doing drugs – "tik". So, it is best to stay indoors.

I also noticed that the participants showed signs of withdrawal from normal activities in their community. Shannon revealed an important element in her lifestyle, when she stated that it was best to stay indoors to protect herself from being tempted to use drugs and other illegal substances to excess.

When I asked Terry how her life has been since she dropped out from school, she revealed the following:

Disgusting. I used drugs. I came to my senses when my parents came to fetch me from the baby's dad's house. I realised that I could not go on like that, because for my baby's sake.

4.3.4 Communities

Through the research, I found that communities play a crucial role, along with families, schools, and peers, in learner development. Population characteristics of communities are associated with dropping out. Consistently, Townsend et al. (2008:22) argue that living in a neighbourhood that is characterised by high levels of poverty is not necessarily detrimental to completing high school. Rather, living in an affluent neighbourhood is beneficial to school success.

Terry responded as follows,

I think the community does have an influence on you. I think that if I were staying in a more upmarket, better community, I would have completed my schooling career up to Grade 12. Here, where I am staying is a bit rough, meaning that the community is earmarked by drug and alcohol abuse, and gang violence.

In addition, when I asked Richard what part the community played in shaping his life and career, he responded as follows:

The neighbours and the people in the community ask me why I left school.

The above indicated to me that the population characteristics of communities are associated with the phenomenon of dropping out of school. Terry revealed that the community where she stayed had had a negative influence on her. However, Richard revealed that the community had been disappointed in him for him leaving school early. His neighbours and other community members had urged him to return to school to complete his schooling up to Grade 12. The community probably saw in Richard that he could be an asset to the community if he were to matriculate.

4.3.5 Families

I also noted the following three aspects of families that can predict whether learners drop out or graduate: (1) family structure; (2) family resources; and (3) family practices. Learners living with both parents tend to have lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates, compared to learners living in *other* types of family arrangements. More importantly, I have experienced changes in family structure, along with potentially stressful events, such as the death of a parent, that tend to increase the odds of dropping out.

My argument is that a number of parenting practices have been shown to reduce the odds of dropping out of school, including parents: having high educational aspirations for their children; monitoring their children's school progress; communicating with the school; and knowing the parents of their children's friends. (See Terry's response in this regard under subsection 4.3.3 above.)

I sensed that some of the participants had experienced the loss of a safe structure that they once had had in their school and in their family. However, there was also the factor of rebellion. (See Richard's response regarding the above under subsection 4.3.5 above.)

Drawing on current research, I argue that the education of the parents might encourage the schooling of their children. In such regard, the parents' own schooling experience might give the parents a "taste" for education, which might then motivate their children. The parents might impart cognitive skills that they had developed out of school to their children, which might help them to perform well at school. If uneducated parents are less successful in these matters, educational deprivation can be transmitted from one generation to another.

A similar theme was encountered by Devena, Sammy and Cameron, in an interview that they held about the highest education qualification that members of their immediate family had. The highest education qualification in Terry's immediate family was Grade 10, which was attained by her whole family, including herself and both her parents.

Devena had the highest education qualification in her immediate family. She replied to my question in this regard as follows:

I am the eldest in the house. My highest qualification is Grade 11.

Sammy's mother had the highest education qualification in her immediate family. Sammy stated,

My mother left school in Grade 11. She was a well-known Boland athlete. She is also qualified in first aid.

The highest education qualification attained in Cameron's immediate family was that of his mother and his brother, who both qualified for their senior certificates.

My mother and my brother completed their matric, and my father completed Grade 11.

I found that almost none of the parents of participants in the current study had a senior certificate qualification. This indicated to me that perhaps the parents did not motivate their children enough to complete their schooling up to Grade 12. Furthermore, Knight *et al.* (2009:311) argue that a low level of education in the community – whether among the adults or among the children – can set a social norm for education in the community, which can deter individual investment beyond the social norm.

4.3.6 Schools

While effective schooling promotes the valuing of the voices and the experiences that learners bring to the classroom, it also calls for appreciation and respect for individual learners, evidenced in teacher–learner relationships, and characterised by feelings of active trust and mutual respect. At the classroom level, such schooling requires teachers to create opportunities to come to know their learners, and for learners to come to know themselves, as well as to come to know and to get on with the others, on the basis of who they are (Gale & Densmore, 2000 in Mills & Gale, 2010:65).

I asked Devena if she thought that the education system was adequate to help her make a success of her studies, to which she responded,

Yes. I had a chance to attend school while I was pregnant. Nobody discriminated against me at school while I was pregnant. I have another chance now to further my studies at night school by means of Adult Basic Education.

Sammy thought that the education system had not adequately helped her to make a success of her studies at school:

I felt the education system failed me, because of myself. I felt the Lord had punished me already, by letting me have the baby. Who is the school to punish me, too? It touches on my human dignity. [For Sammy's response to whether she felt important and valued as a learner at school, see subsection 4.3.2 above.]

4.3.7 Educational performance

The following aspects of educational performance have been identified in the research literature as being strong predictors of dropping out or graduating: test scores and grades in high school; academic achievement in both primary and high school; non-promotional school changes during primary and high school; and retention (being held back one or more grades) in primary and high school. Battin-Pearson *et al.* (2000 in Suh, Suh & Houston, 2007:196) agree that poor academic achievement is the strongest predictor of school dropout. Orr's statement posits that, along with low SES, poor academic achievement is one of the strongest predictors in the aetiology of dropping out.

Cameron told me that he was not interested in doing schoolwork while he was at school. The fact that he had had to repeat Grade 10 was also a factor contributing to him deciding to drop out of school. (See subsection 4.3.2 above for his answer to this question.)

Shannon claimed that she had experienced the following emotions after leaving school:

After I left school, I felt free. I felt I did not have any worries about doing any schoolwork or homework, but I knew I wanted to complete my schooling up to Grade 12. I am attending the community learning centre, where I am busy to preparing myself to complete my Grade 12 schooling qualification.

I noticed that one of the most important challenges for the dropouts in my study was learner engagement, which included their active involvement in academic work (e.g. coming to class, and doing homework) and the social aspects of school (e.g. participating in sports, or other extracurricular activities) (Rumberger & Ah Lim, 2008:1, 2, 3).

4.3.8 Attitudes

The academic literature suggests that holding high expectations of learners and engaging in “visible” pedagogical practices that are characterised by “high intellectual demandingness” might be some of the keys to making a difference for disadvantaged learners (Mills & Gale, 2010:60). It should come as no surprise that educational expectations have found that higher levels of educational expectations are associated with lower dropout rates.

As Xavier explains,

I did not have any courage to attend school any more. I did not have a valid reason not to attend school any more. I did not have the courage to get up in the morning to go to school.

When he was asked whether he thought that the education system had been adequate to help him to make a success of his studies, he replied,

Yes. I decided on my own that I was going to leave school.

All the participants in the current study were adamant that learners should finish their schooling career up to Grade 12. They clearly saw the importance of having a senior certificate as an assurance of a prosperous and a successful life.

Richard’s advice to learners who are considering dropping out of school was,

It is not worth it to leave school before Grade 12. Without education, everything is just not worth anything.

Terry noted that, as she had not completed her schooling up to Grade 12, she was placed under great pressure for being without a career and being unemployed:

Don’t, don’t leave school before completing Grade 12. You will regret your decision. I could have completed my school career already. I could have completed my college career already. My parents had big plans for me. They planned financially to further my studies. I am unemployed at the moment.

Cameron observed the kinds of challenges that learners face without a senior certificate:

Do not leave school; complete your matric, even if you fail a grade. Without matric, you are a nothing. It is even worse when you are looking for work without a matric qualification. Go and complete your matric certificate. Then your chances will be better to get a proper job..

According to Sammy, school dropouts must realise the full implications of how they will live their lives as such:

You will never achieve anything. You will come nowhere in life. Wherever you come, people are looking for a matric certificate. You will be a nobody. Do your matric, because you need it. Often you might feel that you do not need it now, but, at the end of the day, you need your senior certificate. It is for yourself.

Shannon pointed out the dire consequences for learners who do not complete their schooling. A sense of self-blame rises as they try to make sense of what is happening around them:

If you do not complete your schooling up to Grade 12, you have to prepare yourself to be a maid for somebody, to work in shops for long hours, or to work in a subordinate position. Our modern lifestyle requires that you must at least be qualified up to Grade 12.

She further wished to advise such learners:

My advice to learners would be to complete their schooling, so that they do not have any regrets in their life, due to not completing their matric.

In this research, I found that the participants were confronted with their lack of schooling qualifications. They were labelled as high school dropouts, which scared them. Clearly, they realised that they had to attain their high school qualifications up to Grade 12 if they wanted to earn a decent living.

4.4 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESULTS

This chapter has laid the theoretical basis for the exploration of my semi-structured interviews. It identifies interviews and narratives as being the research methods that complement interpretive analysis. This chapter dealt with the data analysis, and with the

interpretation of the individual interviews undertaken with the school dropouts. The aim was to explore and to describe their experiences as school dropouts, in terms of what they had encountered.

The analysis of the research data examined all the factors under study, from individual factors to institutional factors in families, in the school, and in the disadvantaged communities. I have argued that no single factor can completely account for a learner's decision to continue in school until Grade 12. Just as the participants themselves reported a variety of reasons for quitting school, the research data also identified a number of factors that had appeared to influence their decision to drop out of school.

The lessons that can be learned from these lived experiences include my experience that the female participants in the study expressed an outcry for help. The participants acknowledged, through their emotions, the sense of restlessness that they felt regarding their current status as high school dropouts. I sensed that they felt as though they were losers and failures, due to them having not completed their senior certificate. I also sensed that they felt depressed and disappointed with themselves.

We know what will happen to those learners who have dropped out of school. Most will face monumental hurdles in society. They will be likely to encounter barriers to finding a decent job, to being able to support a family, and to being a part of the community. They will be likely to earn low pay, to experience poor working conditions, and to be subject to periods of unemployment. In addition, Mortimore and Blackstone (1982:40) argue that dropouts will often live in poor housing conditions, have an insufficiently nutritious diet, and be prone to ill health.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This interpretive study is set against the backdrop of high school dropouts in a disadvantaged community in South Africa. My research shows how these learners are positioned in, and by, their lived experiences as high school dropouts. The study provides an analysis of the basis upon which the participants set about living the experiences of high school dropouts. The findings were presented in a narrative format, after devising the different categories and themes, using narrative analysis. The analysis presented in this research assignment is based on semi-structured interviews that were conducted with a sample of seven participants.

This chapter also focuses on the findings of the literature review, and of the interviews with regard to high school dropouts. The objective of the study was to investigate why the learners had left school before completing their high school education. The most essential findings of the literature study, and the interpretations of the results, are also indicated. The chapter concludes with findings and recommendations for further research, a description of the limitations of the study, and the conclusion regarding the lived experiences of high school dropouts.

5.2 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In the light of the literature review and the responses to the interviews, the following findings were made. These findings are interpreted in accordance with the identified aims that I addressed. In this research, I wished to raise the question of what the main causes of dropping out of school were, and secondly, I also wanted to explore the lived experiences of high school dropouts in a disadvantaged community, through listening to their authentic voices.

This study has shown that, for some reason, a number of learners are alienated from school by the time that they are halfway through their secondary education. What is taught at school either fails to interest them, or they see little point in learning, or they are

unable to meet the school's and society's criteria for success (Mortimore & Blackstone, 1982:74).

Also, Prinsloo (2004:158) challenges us to face the challenges with which education in disadvantaged communities in South Africa is hampered, due to: a lack of order in community structures; vandalism; negative peer group influences; living in an environment without intellectual stimulation; having a poor disposition towards the school and learning; and the existence of conflict between the values of the school and the values of the home. The outcome among the country's learners is a negative academic self-concept, low levels of motivation, and cumulative academic disadvantage. These factors, in particular, contribute to failure at school and, ultimately, to the dropping out of learners. Poor and uncertain prospects for employment also contribute to a continuing cycle of poverty and disadvantage (Prinsloo, 2004:158).

The failure to access not only fiscal and material resources, but also social resources, in the form of supportive relationships in families, schools, and communities, is also detrimental to learners completing their high school education. I argue that the main causes of the tendency to drop out of high school are: poverty; teenage pregnancy; substance abuse; home and school stability; school experiences; social behaviour; and rebellion. According to me, personal problems affecting learners seem to be the main cause for learners dropping out of high school.

The research data have identified a number of factors within families, within schools, and within communities that affect whether learners are likely to drop out, or to graduate, from high school.

- **Poverty** is portrayed as a key problem that is experienced by individuals from relatively poor families, who were found to be more likely to drop out of school than were their counterparts, who came from families with sound financial backgrounds to which they and their families contributed (Munsaka, 2003:65). The study found that poverty is, indeed, an obstacle to completing school (Knight *et al.*, 2009:320). I argue that the educational system is often not adapted to meet the needs of poor learners, resulting in a significant number of such learners dropping out of school.

The research revealed that South Africa has high levels of poverty, and that there is evidence that poverty impacts on education, which sometimes leads to learners dropping out of school. Mortimore and Blackstone (1982:52) confirm the argument that poverty increases the possibility of family stress, and that it might put pressure on learners to take part-time jobs while they are still at school, or to leave school as soon as possible.

- The data analysis revealed that **almost all the parents of the participants did not complete their schooling**. I, therefore, argue that parental education is an indirect indicator of household poverty. Knight *et al.* (2009:323) argues further that the years of education of both parents have a significant effect on their children. A case study (2000), looking at the age group 15 to 35 years, found high levels of unemployment amongst the youth.

Soudien (2007:16), interestingly, confirms that 69% of his case sample of unemployed youth lacked a Grade 12 qualification. Fleisch (2008:60) also confirms that one of the single strongest predictors of underachievement is parents' educational attainment. Studies have consistently found strong positive associations between the duration of parents' school careers and their children's success at school. Also, the evidence is supported by the view that the working-class child is disadvantaged at school largely due to his parents' lack of interest in his educational progress (Mortimore & Blackstone, 1982:41).

- **Teenage pregnancy** seems to be the main personal problem facing learners who drop out of their schooling. The analysis of the data revealed that close to half of the participants dropped out due to teenage pregnancy. The analysis also revealed the difficulty that these participants experienced when they had children. They had to find someone to look after their children if they wanted to return to school. They had to pay people to look after their children, with the result being that they all dropped out of school due to teenage pregnancy.

The data analysis also revealed the facts that dropping out of school is often due to economic barriers and poor performance, and that growing up in communities where poverty is deep-rooted, and where parents are physically or emotionally unavailable, contributes to the occurrence of early pregnancy. Young girls, who

struggle to make ends meet, are vulnerable to the temptation of exchanging sexual favours for economic gain. In relationships where there is a power imbalance, forced or coerced sex might take place, and the girls involved might not realise that they have the right to resist. Also, as the Metro North Education District School Social Workers describe (2010:10) in the article “Preventing teenage pregnancy”, the following influences were highlighted by the National DoE in 2008: the lack of open communication between parents and children about sex; user-unfriendly family planning services; and the stigmatisation of teenage sexuality, which further discourage teens from seeking protection against pregnancy (WCED News, 2010:10).

- This research has shown that **substance abuse** is a serious challenge, and that it has major side-effects on learners. This serious problem causes many learners to drop out of school. Almost half of the participants associated dropping out with illegal drug usage. Drug abuse as a factor that is related to dropping out of school has a direct influence on poverty. Drug abuse is a deep underlying symptom of poverty. I found that there was definite interplay between the community and drug abuse, as a result of the poor circumstances of the community. Studies have shown that there is a consistent relationship between the phenomenon of dropping out of school and the use of tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs (Flisher, 2010:238).
- I also found that the lack of **home and school stability** is another cause for learners to drop out of high school. Stability allows the learner to feel comfortable enough to try to work at school, and allows them to concentrate on staying in school.

The more stable a situation is, the more comfortable the learner becomes with the surroundings. The better their relationships are with teachers and other learners, the easier it is for them to fit in, and to work hard at school. Most participants felt valued at school, except for one participant, who felt that the teachers used her as an example for the other learners not to fall pregnant. The findings suggest that learners require supervision and moral support from their parents, and a stable home (Masitsa, 2006:175).

- **Social behaviour** is another cause for learners dropping out of high school. The participants in the study stated that they could not keep up with their schoolwork, or that they did not have sound relationships with their educators and/or other learners. They might have experienced disciplinary problems. A large portion of learners who drop out of school were suspended at one time or another. Hence, Mortimore and Blackstone (1982:95) argue that teachers of disadvantaged learners need to be aware of the intellectual factors that might bias their judgment of pupils, their expectations for them, and their treatment of them.
- Through this research, I found that **rebellion** is a major cause of learners dropping out of school. To some learners, school is a place to which their parents force them to go every weekday. This is where the factor of rebellion comes into play. Learners do not wish to be asked to repeat something, but rather to listen, to think, and to express their thoughts, feelings and views. The learners who participated in this study rebelled, as they felt that they had no choice. Amano (in Cummings & McGinn, 1997:369) notes that learners who dislike school tend to be absent from school more than are learners who like school, and that there is a spreading anti-school learner culture. The amount of bullying and violence in schools is increasing, which leads to an increase in the number of dropouts that are experienced every year in high school. This indicates to me that dropouts are a serious problem.
- In a study that was conducted in Botswana, Makwinja-Morara (2007) found **peer pressure** to be one of the factors that influenced learners to drop out of school (Munsaka, 2003:66). Clearly, the influence of peers extends beyond encouragement towards delinquency, and some learners, especially during their teens, are subjected to pressures from their peers that are more powerful than the pressures that they encounter from their families, or from school. I argue that, during this period, friendships intensify, and that there is more confiding in their own age group. Having friends who engage in criminal behaviour, or having friends who have dropped out, also increases the odds of dropping out.
- There is a sense that **caring** is related to the quality of the learner–teacher relationship, to the quality of teaching and learning, and to the learner’s level of care for their own education. However, I found that there was a perception, on the

part of some of the learners, that a number of educators did not share the same level of care for their learners, and that this lack of care affected the quality of their education. The presence of caring adults has also been shown to promote positive outcomes for learners in high risk of dropping out (Lagina, 2004:213 in Masitsa, 2006:184).

The lack of home and school stability, bad school experiences, antisocial behaviour, and rebellion all have one main effect: an increase in the national dropout rate of high school learners. Like Lloyd (1976:11), I argue that, if parents and educators work together at the task of educating a child, the education concerned is likely to be more successful than it might otherwise be. You will find that this kind of cooperation is particularly important where the conditions in the home militate against a learner's doing well at school.

Only one of the dropouts was married, although he was unemployed and still staying at his parent's house with his wife and child. The reasons that were given for leaving school by four participants were pregnancy-related. All of the participants still lived with their parents. Only two of the participants had dropped out of school due to rebellion. The employment status of the dropouts was reported as follows: employed, 3; unemployed and not attempting to find employment, 3; and unemployed, but attempting to find employment, 1.

These findings are related to the factors that hinder the lived experiences of school dropouts in a disadvantaged community, which were conveyed in the participant's authentic voices. In each of these interviews with the participants, the space was provided for the participants to think about, and to share their perspectives, on their lived experiences of dropping out of high school. The opportunity to voice their perceptions allowed them to articulate the struggles that they encountered as they tried to make sense of their education, particularly when, from their perspective, they did not appear to be faring well as school dropouts. The research revealed that all of the participants involved knew that they wanted to obtain their senior certificate, although they had dropped out of school. They knew the importance of completing their high school education, and the challenges that they would have to face in life without completing their high school education. I also found that, for many of the dropouts, the conditions that had led to their dropping out were a part of their lives long before they started high school.

I felt that the female participants in the study were more open to their emotions than were the male participants, due to the fact that they were branded as dropouts in the community. The female participants were more verbal during the interviews than the male participants were. However, I found that the female participants became highly emotional when I asked them why they had left school, whereas the male participants became quiet and less responsive during the interviews. A counsellor was, therefore, made available during and after the interviews with the participants.

I would not have been aware of the participants' perceptions if I had not provided them with an arena in which they could voice their perspectives on, and their beliefs about, their education. Listening to what the participants had to say provided new insights into what they were thinking and feeling. Such insights tend to provide educators with a new lens, and a different perspective, through which to reflect on the education that we are providing for our children at all levels. This brought me, as a teacher, to the realisation that we, as educationalists, have to be more reflective on our educational practices.

The research assignment also closely explored the policies that address the phenomenon of school dropouts. Through my research, I also experienced a gap between school dropouts and the existing policy, and between policy intention and the implementation of the policies. This research assignment was intended to highlight the implementation of policies that address school dropouts. In the light of the research, we need to ask ourselves whether the Education Department is implementing the policies that are in place. The answer is no. Through this research, I have found that the policies are not being implemented in the schools. I have also found that there are no proactive measures or remedying strategies in place to curb the phenomenon of school dropouts. Consequently, the Education Department needs to focus more on implementing, and on acting according to, these policies.

Also, I align myself with Elmore (in Cummings & McGinn, 1997:301), who confirms that it is well established in the research literature that the disconnection between policy and practice, and the failure of policymakers to invest in longer term solutions that address fundamental problems of teaching and learning, carries a price. The price comes in the form of undermining the legitimacy of public policy, public schools, and, ultimately, the state, as a source of authoritative guidance for schools.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Leisure boredom has not previously been investigated in relation to school dropouts. However, there is evidence that the levels of such boredom among South African adolescents are high (Wegner, 2008:423). Through my research, I am convinced that there is a need for prospective research designs to promote better prediction and understanding of the phenomenon of school dropout in the developing world. This is particularly so for South Africa, where there is a high rate of such dropout, as well as relatively high levels of leisure boredom, among high school learners (Wegner *et al.* 2006 in Wegner, 2008:423). However, there has been one study locally that has investigated leisure boredom in relation to school dropout.

Tentative implications for practice at this point are that schools have a responsibility to implement strategies for addressing leisure boredom at high schools, as part of the response to school dropout. For those learners with high levels of leisure boredom, the aim should be to reduce the boredom through using strategies that encourage exploration and participation in leisure, sport, and recreational activities, both during and after school. This is especially important in schools where after-school sport and leisure activities are limited or non-existent. Wegner (2008:429) confirms that this is often the case for schools that are situated in relatively poor communities.

I argue that learners should be motivated to see the value of education for their future, and that learners in disadvantaged communities should be monitored on an ongoing basis to see whether intervention changes their behaviour towards school and education. Schools should motivate learners by increasing their interest in, and commitment to schooling. It is in this light that learners can look forward to a decent human life that is filled with human dignity.

Also, there is a need for further research that stresses the relationship between dropout and substance use in South Africa. Further research might also be conducted that examines what the effect of the awareness of school dropouts has on the achievement of disadvantaged learners.

My argument is that we should continue to uplift and to educate school dropouts, so that we can change the world for the better. I want to inspire the youth to complete their

schooling up to Grade 12, thereby setting a firm basis for their future career path. The overall goal of this research was to empower the community so that it could take charge of its own destiny through education.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the latest available research data, this study does have certain limitations. First, the participants were limited to young school dropouts (between 18 and 25 years old), living in a disadvantaged community in Cape Town.

The participants were school dropouts who were attending ABET classes to obtain their senior certificate. First, I do have limited knowledge of the extent to which the results of the study are generalisable to the youth, and not to the other age groups that live in other parts of the country. Second, the participants were in the process of obtaining their senior certificate, thus they voiced their lived experiences as school dropouts from the premise that they were in the process of improving their academic skills through ABET.

Third, although I had pre-information sessions with the participants, at which I explained the interview sessions in detail to them, I had to stop the actual interviews, as the participants became very emotional during them. The counsellor had to assist the participants who required assistance both during and after the interviews. This took up a great deal of my time, as well as of the time of the participants and the counsellor concerned. However, I found that the female participants were more in touch with their emotions, whereas the male participants became less responsive during the interviews. However, these findings, through this research, can be of value to disadvantaged communities with similar profiles to that of the sample community, as well as to the Education Department.

5.5 CONCLUSION

What is clear in this research is the extent to which learners are able to truly understand the source and the consequences of dropping out of school, and that such understanding affects them in significant ways, not only in terms of their aspirations, but also in terms of the emotional and psychological toll that dropping out has had on their life. I was strongly influenced by the participants' reactions when I asked them what their advice would be to

pupils who consider dropping out from school. Samples of their expressions are: “prepare yourself to be a maid for somebody”, “you will be a nobody”, “it is just not worth it, to leave school before Grade 12”, “complete your matric, even if you fail to describe their lived experiences”.

The voices of the disadvantaged school dropouts presented here provide a glimpse into how learners perceive their lived experiences as school dropouts. Listening to the participants offers educators and the Education Department the means of responding to learners in a way that could empower both the educators and the learners to make sense of, and to address, the dropout phenomenon that exists in their schools and communities. This research privileges students’ voices, by providing a profound, first-hand account of the educational experiences of disadvantaged learners. The challenge for me, as noted by Quiroz (2001:327 in Storz, 2008:264), is that learners’ voices “must be heard, not simply spoken”, if they are to be empowering.

This brings me to consider how we are empowering our disadvantaged learners, and assisting them in processing their perspectives on school dropouts. This is a challenging process, notes Storz (2008:264), both cognitively and affectively. As I perceived in the voices of the participants whom I interviewed, lack of empowerment results in frustration, disbelief, anger, and trauma. As a result, I had to interrupt my interviewing more than once with the participants, as they became too emotional to face their circumstances as school dropouts. They claimed that it was the first time that they had faced reality, in discussing and acknowledging the fact that they had not completed their schooling up to Grade 12. Interviewing the participants gave me a good indication of the lived experiences of the high school dropout in their communities. I also found that the phenomenon of them being a high school dropout had had a profoundly negative influence on their families and on their communities.

It is in this light that I argue for opportunities that need to be created for teachers and teacher candidates, as well as for administrators, that provide for critical reflection on practice, particularly with a focus on the issues relating to such school dropouts as those that were identified by the participants in their interviews. According to me, educating our learners and their parents on the relevance of dropping out of school is important. This research should help them to make connections between what is happening at school and their future. My argument is that, through this research, dropouts will have a better

chance of enhancing their lives, of living their lives with dignity, and of becoming the person whom they are destined to be.

5.6 WHAT MAKES THIS RESEARCH IMPORTANT?

With this investigation, I wanted to highlight the phenomenon of high school dropouts that the Education Department needs to address in order to improve schooling in disadvantaged communities. The potential benefit of this study lies in the understanding and interpretation of the complex array of factors that might contribute to school dropout rates amongst learners in their community. I believe that this study is important in the light of the various causes that have been offered for dropping out of school, including the barriers caused by poverty, behaviours, the background, communities, families, schools, educational performance, and attitudes.

In terms of the potential benefit that this study offers to the academic field, I found that these findings are important, as most of the participants did not consult with anyone before they left school. Learners did not have the courage to consult with their parents regarding the making of a life-changing decision. This kind of behaviour gave me the impression that disadvantaged learners are demotivated to finish their schooling up to Grade 12. My argument is that they are not motivated to finish high school. I also felt that school dropouts have no vision, and are uninspired in regard to their needs and their future. I argue that when our learners drop out of school, it affects the overall functioning, or non-functioning, of our community. However, the participants accepted the importance of obtaining a senior certificate (matriculation) as a means of opening up opportunities for themselves, in terms of obtaining meaningful work, as well as in terms of improving their intellectual, personal, and social life. Obtaining such a qualification, they realised, would also offer them much more potential for having decent relationships, and for forming a society in which they, and others, would wish to live than they might otherwise have possibilities of attaining. I urge us all not to lose sight of the value of education up to Grade 12 for learners, so as to expand the capacity of our youth to engage with their world. Therefore, the contribution of my study is that it expresses the authentic voices of the interviewees involved.

I found that bad school experiences are also a major contributor to the school dropout rate. A large majority of learners who drop out of school try only to satisfy the bare

minimum general high school requirements, due to no one pushing them to try harder at school. This lack of extrinsic motivation makes learners feel that school is not important enough for them to try hard at it. The learners who were interviewed for this study also acknowledged that they did not have much attention given to them in regard to their schoolwork. This made the learners feel as though they were not as competent as the other learners, so that they need not even bother to complete their studies. This resulted in the learners having low motivation and self-esteem, and feeling powerless, with no possibility of influencing their school situation (Masitsa, 2006:178).

According to me, frequently the absence of learners from the classroom without due cause also makes them more likely to drop out. I am also of the view that poverty plays an important role in some learners' failure to attend school. Some learners did not feel as though they fitted in, so that they would opt for staying away from school, if they could help it. My experience is that they will use any tactics, including dropping out of school, to avoid having to attend school.

One implication of this review is that there are various leverage points for addressing the problem of high dropout rates. My argument is that educators have an important mission, which is to build a nation with educated and skilled citizens. My view with regard to school dropouts is that society should insist that the government addresses the dropout problem seriously and unreservedly, giving it priority attention.

5.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has focused on the findings from my semi-structured interviews. The interviews and narratives were the research methods used to complement my interpretive analysis. This chapter has dealt with the data analysis, and with the interpretation of the individual interviews that were undertaken with school dropouts. The aim was to explore and to describe the experiences of school dropouts, and what they had encountered.

The following themes that were extracted from the research were discussed: the barriers caused by poverty, behaviours, the background, communities, families, schools, educational performance, and attitudes. These themes were relevant to the research, as they gave a structure to the discussion of the subsequent topics.

This study also found that learners who drop out often have multiple risk factors influencing their decision to do so. Also, this study identified the different predictors that are associated with dropping out of school. By knowing these predictors, school counsellors can gear drop-out prevention programmes more effectively for their learners than they have been able to do in the past. My argument is that, when learners are aware that dropping out of school is unacceptable in their society, they will not easily opt for such an alternative. Masitsa (2006:186) contends that the repercussions of high dropout rates include large-scale unemployment, which he stresses are a precursor of poverty, a high crime rate, and, ultimately, a life of hopelessness. I align myself with Masitsa (2006:186) that the most effective strategy is to shift our focus from preventing dropping out towards promoting the completion of school education. This is a comprehensive problem that needs to be brought higher on the agenda than it previously has been. Doing so would help to minimise the possibility of dropping out, and it would encourage learners to pursue their studies with diligence.

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APPENDICES

1. WCED permission letter to do research



WESTERN CAPE Education Department

Provincial Government of the Western Cape

RESEARCH

awyngaar@pgwc.gov.za
tel: +27 021 476 9272 fax: 0865902282
Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000
wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 20110510-0007

ENQUIRIES: Dr A T Wyngaard

Mrs Jacoba Snyders
25 February Way
Helderzicht
Somerset-West
7130

Dear Mrs Jacoba Snyders

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL DROP-OUTS IN THE CONTEXT OF A FORMER DISADVANTAGED 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 **1 May 2011 till 30 September 2012**
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 A.T Wyngaard 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 forwarded 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: Audrey T Wyngaard
for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**
DATE: 10 May 2011

2. Stellenbosch University Ethics clearance letter

Approval Notice

New Application

22-Nov-2011

SNYDERS, Jacoba Sylvia

Dear Mrs Jacoba SNYDERS,

The **New Application** received on **18-Jul-2011**, was reviewed by Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities) via Committee Review procedures on **28-Jul-2011** and has been approved.

Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Present Committee Members:

Fouche, Magdalena MG

Van Wyk, Berte B

De Villiers, Mare MRH

Hattingh, Johannes JP

Theron, Carl CC

Somhlaba, Ncebazakhe NZ

Viviers, Suzette S

Bitzer, Elias EM

Engelbrecht, Sidney SF

Van Zyl, Gerhard Mkhonto

Van der Walt, Nicolene N

Standard provisions

1. The researcher will remain within the procedures and protocols indicated in the proposal, particularly in terms of any undertakings made in terms of the confidentiality of the information gathered.
 2. The research will again be submitted for ethical clearance if there is any substantial departure from the existing proposal.
 3. The researcher will remain within the parameters of any applicable national legislation, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of research.
 4. The researcher will consider and implement the foregoing suggestions to lower the ethical risk associated with the research. You may commence with your research with strict adherence to the abovementioned provisions and stipulations.
- Please remember to use your **protocol number (HS584/2011)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research protocol.
- Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

After Ethical Review:

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required.

The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) number REC-050411-032.

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki, the South African Medical Research Council

Guidelines as well as the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health).

Protocol #: HS584/2011

Title: An interpretive study of high school drop-outs in a former disadvantaged community

Protocol Approval Period: **28-Jul-2011 -27-Jul-2012**

Provincial and City of Cape Town Approval

Please note that for research at a primary or secondary healthcare facility permission must be obtained from the relevant authorities (Western Cape Department of

Health and/or City Health) to conduct the research as stated in the protocol. Contact persons are Ms Claudette Abrahams at Western Cape Department of Health

(healthres@pgwc.gov.za Tel: +27 21 483 9907) and Dr Helene Visser at City Health (Helene.Visser@capetown.gov.za Tel: +27 21 400 3981). Research that will

be conducted at any tertiary academic institution requires approval from the relevant parties. For approvals from the Western Cape Education Department, contact

Dr AT Wyngaard (awynjaar@pgwc.gov.za, Tel: 0214769272, Fax: 0865902282, <http://wced.wcape.gov.za>).

Institutional permission from academic institutions for students, staff & alumni. This institutional permission should be obtained before submitting an application for ethics clearance to the REC.

Please note that informed consent from participants can only be obtained after ethics approval has been granted. It is your responsibility as researcher to keep

signed informed consent forms for inspection for the duration of the research.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 0218089183.

Sincerely,

Sidney Engelbrecht

REC Coordinator

Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

Included Documents:

Letter of permission Macassar HS584/2011

Application Form HS584/2011

Letter of approval WCED HS584/2011

Consent Form HS584/2011

Research Proposal HS584/2011

Interview Schedule HS584/2011

Investigator Responsibilities

Protection of Human Research Participants

Some of the responsibilities investigators have when conducting research involving human participants are listed below:

1. Conducting the Research. You are responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC approved research protocol. You are also responsible for the actions of all your co-investigators and research staff involved with this research. You must also ensure that the research is conducted within the standards of your field of research.
2. Participant Enrollment. You may not recruit or enroll participants prior to the REC approval date or after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials for any form of media must be approved by the REC prior to their use. If you need to recruit more participants than was noted in your REC approval letter, you must submit an amendment requesting an increase in the number of participants.
3. Informed Consent. You are responsible for obtaining and documenting effective informed consent using **only** the REC-approved consent documents, and for ensuring that no human participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their informed consent. Please give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents. Keep the originals in your secured research files for at least five (5) years.
4. Continuing Review. The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research protocols at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is **no grace period**. Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, **it is your responsibility to submit the continuing review report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur**. If REC approval of your research lapses, you must stop new participant enrollment, and contact the REC office immediately.
5. Amendments and Changes. If you wish to amend or change any aspect of your research (such as research design, interventions or procedures, number of participants, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material), you must submit the amendment to the REC for review using the current Amendment Form. You **may not initiate** any amendments or changes to your research without first obtaining written REC review and approval. The **only exception** is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.
6. Adverse or Unanticipated Events. Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to Malene Fouch within **five (5) days** of discovery of the incident. You must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the REC's requirements for protecting human research participants. The only exception to this policy is that the death of a research participant must be reported in accordance with the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee Standard Operating Procedures. All reportable events should be submitted to the REC using the Serious Adverse Event Report Form.
7. Research Record Keeping. You must keep the following research related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research protocol and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence from the REC
8. Reports to Sponsor. When you submit the required reports to your sponsor, you **must** provide a copy of that report to the REC. You may submit the report at the time of continuing REC review.
9. Provision of Counselling or emergency support. When a dedicated counsellor or psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated

in the progress report or final report.

10. Final reports. When you have completed (no further participant enrollment, interactions, interventions or data analysis) or stopped work on your research, you must submit a Final Report to the REC.

11. On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits. If you are notified that your research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, you must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEWS

PARTICIPANT 1

RICHARD, a 23 year, unemployed–male

1. *In which year and grade did you leave school?*

I left school in grade 10 in 2008.

2. *Did your family structure have an influence on you leaving school?*

No.

3. *What is the highest education qualification of your immediate family?*

My sister passes Matric. She is currently a nurse, and my father work as a clerk at the Provincial Hospital. My mother worked as a cleaner at the hospital, but due to injuries with her back, she is unemployed at the moment.

4. *Have you consulted with anyone before dropping out of school?*

No. I just decide on my own to leave school.

5. *Did you feel important and valued as a learner at school?*

Yes. School was ok.

6. *Do you think that the education system was adequate to help you make a success of your studies?*

Yes. I decided on my own that I was going to leave school.

7. *Describe the teacher's attitudes toward you.*

The teacher's attitudes towards me were very good. Yes it was very good.

8. *Did your peer group have any major influence on you?*

No.

9. *What part did the community play in shaping your life and career?*

The neighbours and the people in the community ask me why I left school.

10. *Why did you drop out of school?*

I did not have any reason. I just felt to leave school at the time.

11. *How has your life been since dropping out from school?*

I was at home. After a while I worked. I left the work again. I am not working at the moment I am unemployed.

12. *What would your advice be to pupils who consider dropping out from school?*

It is not worth to leave school before grade 12. Without education everything is just not worth anything.

Participant 2

TERRY– a 20 year old, unemployed–female

1. *In which year and grade did you leave school?*

I left school in 2007 when I was in grade 10.

2. *Did your family structure have an influence on you leaving school?*

No, my family structure did not have any influence on me leaving school.

3. *What is the highest education qualification of your immediate family?*

My whole family, I, my mother and my father left school at grade 10.

4. *Have you consulted with anyone before dropping out of school?*

Nobody, no I did not consult anybody before I left school. I was pregnant at the time.

5. *Did you feel important and valued as a learner at school?*

Yes. All the teachers were very fond of me at school. I was an A candidate at school. I attend a former Model C school from Grade 8 to Grade 9. I only attended a state school in Grade 10. The reason for me attending the state school was because of the convenience of walking to school. I could walk to school as with the former Model C school I had to wake up earlier, go to school and back by taxi and arrived later at home from school.

6. *Do you think that the education system was adequate to help you make a success of your studies?*

Yes. I am sure if I furthered my studies, I would have made a success of my schooling career.

7. *Describe the teacher's attitudes toward you.*

All the teachers were very helpful towards me. All the teachers use to inspire me a lot. They use to talk to me a lot.

8. *Did your peer group have any major influence on you?*

No. I was very independent. My schoolwork and my studies were very important to me. I did not have a lot of friends.

9. *What part did the community play in shaping your life and career?*

I think the community does have an influence on you. I think if I was staying in a more upmarket, better community, I would have completed my schooling career. Here where I am staying is a bit rough. (Meaning gangsters roaming the streets, in search of making quick money)

10. *Why did you drop out of school?*

I fell pregnant. My parents told me to leave the house. Although I could have attended school while I was pregnant, I did not felt like going to school. I went to stay with my baby's dad.

11. *How has your life been since dropping out from school?*

Disgusting. I used drugs. I came to my senses when my parents came to fetch me at the Baby'sdad's house. I realised that I could not go on like that because of my baby's sake.

12. *What would your advice be to pupils who consider dropping out from school?*

Don't; don't leave school before completing grade twelve. You will regret your decision. I could have completed my school career already. I could have completed my College career already. My parents had big plans for me. They planned financially to further my studies. I am the only child. I am a foster child. When I left school they renovate the

house with the money that they had saved for me to further my studies. I am unemployed at the moment.

Participant 3

DEVENA – a 20 year old coffee shop assistant for the past three months –female

1. *In which year and grade did you leave school?*

I left school in 2010 when I was in Grade twelve.

2. *Did your family structure have an influence on you leaving school?*

Yes. My mother told me to go back to school, but I did not have a choice at that moment. Financially things went very bad at that moment at home.

3. *What is the highest education qualification of your immediate family?*

I am the eldest in the house. My highest qualification is grade eleven.

4. *Have you consulted with anyone before dropping out of school?*

Yes. I talked to my mother, but my mother motivates me to go back to school. I tried to go back to school for a few days, but the circumstances were just not good. I did not have anybody to look after the baby.

5. *Did you feel important and valued as a learner at school?*

Yes miss. I felt like getting up every morning to go to school.

6. *Do you think that the education system was adequate to help you make a success of your studies?*

Yes. I had a chance to attend school while I was pregnant. Nobody discriminate against me at school, while I was pregnant. I have another chance now to further my studies at night (ABET) school.

7. *Describe the teacher's attitudes toward you.*

The teachers always motivate me to do my schoolwork. It was because of my bad circumstances at home that I studied at my friend's house.

8. *Did your peer group have any major influence on you?*

Actually not. Only at school yes. My friends in school use to tell me to stop doing my schoolwork, while we were supposed to do our schoolwork. My friends did not have a major influence on me.

9. *What part did the community play in shaping your life and career?*

I think the community believes in me. People always say I am a beautiful girl. Actually I know what I want in life. I know I must just strive towards my goals. I am going to complete matric and then I am going to further my studies.

10. *Why did you drop out of school?*

I felt like leaving school in grade 10 already due to my poor circumstances. There were never money; my parents were drinking a lot. I had to look after my two brothers in the evening. My parents did not even come home sometimes at night. At that time I met my boyfriend. He even brought us food in the evening. At the end of the day I end up pregnant. I could've gone back to school, but I could not cope. I was eighteen at the moment with nothing (emotion of crying and tears set in at this stage of the interview).

11. *How has your life been since dropping out from school?*

My circumstances were very difficult. I never had money, nothing. I was moving around, I stayed around. It was confusing; I was confused at the time. I did not know what I really wanted. My baby changed my whole life. I felt I have a responsibility towards my baby. On the other hand I felt someone love me in the form of my baby. He always had ways to make me laughed. (Emotions of crying and tears set in again)

12. *What would your advice be to pupils who consider dropping out from school?*

I want to say it is not worth it to leave school, because I am regretting not going back to school at the time. A person should not let his or her circumstances stands in his or her way. If you want to achieve your goal, you have to achieve your goal. I had nobody at that time to look after my baby. I did have the opportunity to go back to school, but I also had nobody to look after the baby.

Participant 4

SAMMY- a 19 year old shop assistant– female

1. *In which year and grade did you leave school?*

I left school in 2009 when I was in Grade eleven.

2. *Did your family structure have an influence on you leaving school?*

I made my own choice, but my baby and my parents played a role and the school self, because I was not allowed to go to the school's Matric Farewell Function. It was also a negative for me.

3. *What is the highest education qualification of your immediate family?*

My mother left school in grade eleven. She was a well-known Boland athlete. She is also qualified in First Aid at the moment.

4. *Have you consulted with anyone before dropping out of school?*

I talked to my mother. She told me if this was my decision, then she cannot stop me. At that time I felt that I was not through wing my life away, because I had it in mind to further my studies at Boland FET College. At the end of the day I did not attend Boland College because it was too expensive. One of the criteria was also that I had to do a three year course to obtain my Matric Certificate. I felt it was a waste of time, because I already had my grade ten qualification.

5. *Did you feel important and valued as a learner at school?*

No. The teachers had a negative attitude towards me, because of me having the baby at the time. I was not allowed to take part in any school activities. I was not allowed to attend any school function, not even the schools talent show. I was not allowed to attend the Matric Farewell Function of the school. My mother contacts the Western Cape Education Department, but they said if it was the policy of the school, then they cannot do anything about the schools decision.

6. *Do you think that the education system was adequate to help you make a success of your studies?*

I felt the Education System failed me, because of myself. I felt the Lord had punished me already, who am the school to punish me too. It touches on my human dignity.

7. *Describe the teacher's attitudes toward you.*

The teacher's attitude towards me was positive. They made a lot of negative remarks against me. Many a times the teachers used me as an example to reprimand the other learners, by telling them not to do what "this child had done", meaning I fell pregnant whilst at school. I never make any commends back at the teachers, because I was afraid that they might dispel me from school.

8. *Did your peer group have any major influence on you?*

Yes, in a positive way my peers encourage me to go back to evening classes to obtain my Matric Certificate. In a negative way, my peers introduce me to drugs in grade nine, but I have decided to stop using it.

9. *What part did the community play in shaping your life and career?*

I feel the community failed me in shaping my life in a positive way. I feel the governing body of the school took the decision not to allow any learner who was pregnant or who had a baby to attend any school activities. What was negative for me was that it was the Governing body's decision; they were supposed to represent me. I was not allowed to attend any athletic meeting. How can somebody tell me not to attend something if you wanted to be there, if you're interested in the activity.

10. *Why did you drop out of school?*

Circumstances at home force me to leave school. Financial problems. I had to go and work. My child self, financially I had to go and work to maintain me and my child. My baby's dad did not pay any maintenance. We do not have any contact with each other. (Emotions of tears set in)

11. *How has your life been since dropping out from school?*

Not good. I do not have matric. Until now life is bad. I do not have matric. Money wise it is better, but still I do not have matric. It is still bad without matric.

12. *What would your advice be to pupils who consider dropping out from school?*
Simone

You will never achieve anything. You will come no where in life. Where ever you come, people are looking for a matric certificate. You will be a nobody. Do your matric, because you need it. Many a times you feel that you do not need it now, but at the end of the day you need your matric certificate. It is for you.

Participant 5

XAVIER – a 19 year old, unemployed – male

1. *In which year and grade did you leave school?*

I left school in 2008 when I was in grade 10.

2. *Did your family structure have an influence on you leaving school?*

Not at all. It was my own decision to leave school. No family structure influences me to leave school.

3. *What is the highest education qualification of your immediate family?*

The highest education qualification of my immediate family is my uncle. He completed his schooling career until grade twelve. He also had further education. My uncle is a qualified firefighter.

4. *Have you consulted with anyone before dropping out of school?*

No, I did not consult with anyone before I left school. It was my own decision to leave school. There was no reason why I left school.

5. *Did you feel important and valued as a learner at school?*

Yes, I felt important and valued as a learner at school. I had a good relationship with my educators. The educators always took my work as examples to show to the other learners. I felt good at school. When I had to get up in the morning it was not good.

6. *Do you think that the education system was adequate to help you make a success of your studies?*

It was my own decision to leave school. I would say the evening classes, the Adult Basic Education classes are happening too quick in the evening. Mathematics in one hour's time will never be effective.

7. *Describe the teacher's attitudes toward you.*

The teacher's attitude towards me was good. I had a good relationship with my educators.

8. *Did your peer group have any major influence on you?*

No, my peer group did not have any major influence on me. All my friends completed their schooling up to matric. It is only me who did not complete my schooling career until grade twelve. It is only me who did not want to attend school anymore.

9. *What part did the community play in shaping your life and career?*

The community, there are no negative things that I can think of in the community that shaped my life. My family still spoils me.

10. *Why did you dropout from school?*

I did not have any courage to attend school anymore. I did not have a valid reason not to attend school anymore. I did not have the courage to get up in the morning to go to school.

11. *How has your life been since dropping out from school?*

When I attended school, it was different. Ever since I left school my family lost their respect for me. My grandparents do not give the same attention to me as they used to be.

12. *What would your advice be to pupils who consider dropping out from school?*

I did not think of my life out of school yet. At the moment my parents still give me anything that I want. I really do not know how my life will turn out.

Participant 6

CAMERON – a 21 year old, unemployed– male

1. *In which year and grade did you leave school?*

I left school in 2008 when I was in grade 10.

2. *Did your family structure had an influence on you leaving school?*

No, my family wanted me to go on with my school education, but I could not. It was my own decision to leave school. I left school, because my girlfriend felt pregnant at that time with my baby.

3. *What is the highest education qualification of your immediate family?*

My mother and my brother completed their matric, and my father completed grade eleven.

4. *Have you consulted with anyone before dropping out of school?*

I talked to my girlfriend at that time, and I consulted with my whole family.

5. *Did you feel important and valued as a learner at school?*

Yes. I loved school. I was in school everyday. It was a pleasure for me to attend school. The teachers guided me on the right path at school.

6. *Do you think that the education system was adequate to help you make a success of your studies?*

Yes, the teachers kept and guided me on the right path. I was the one that was unruly at school. Women, I could not leave them. I had lots of girlfriends at school.

7. *Describe the teacher's attitudes toward you.*

The teachers loved me whilst I was at school.

8. *Did your peer group have any major influence on you?*

My peer group had a negative influence on me. My friends were the same as I. We did not worry about our school work. Schoolwork was important for us, when it suited us. We really did not worry about our schoolwork.

9. *What part did the community play in shaping your life and career?*

The community did not play a major part in shaping my life. I was at home most of the time and at the neighbours, whilst I was still at school.

10. *Why did you drop out of school?*

I left school because I impregnated my girlfriend. I wanted to be a father and a provider for the baby.

11. *How has your life been since dropping out from school?*

At the moment I am happy, my life could have been better, much better.

12. *What would your advice be to pupils who consider dropping out from school?*

Do not leave school; complete your matric, even if you fail a grade. Without matric you are a nothing. It is even worst when you are looking for work without a matric qualification. Go and complete your matric certificate. Then your chances are better to get a proper work. My wife went back to school after the baby. She is also busy with her matric exam at the moment. She is always inspiring me to complete my matric certificate.

Participant 7

SHANNON– a 20 year old shop assistant – female

1. *In which year and grade did you leave school?*

I left school in 2009, when I was in grade eleven.

2. *Did your family structure have an influence on you leaving school?*

No, I just told my mother that I was going to leave school.

3. *What is the highest education qualification of your immediate family?*

One of my uncles' is a school principal. He is also very active in politics.

4. *Have you consulted with anyone before dropping out of school?*

No. I have decided already in my mind that I was going to leave school. I could not focus on my schoolwork anymore. I was occupied in my own mindset. I felt sick. At that stage I concentrated to make an ending to my own life to commit suicide. I talked to a nursing sister at the local clinic. The nursing sister referred me to Lentegeur, an institution for psychiatric patients. I was frustrated at the time. I had suicide feelings, and I was aggressive. I felt to be on my own at the time.

5. *Did you feel important and valued as a learner at school?*

Yes. My teachers were asking about my whereabouts, whenever I was absent from school for three days or more. I could see my class teacher care a lot for me. My teachers were strict but if they are not strict with the learners the learners think that they can do as they want.

6. *Do you think that the education system was adequate to help you make a success of your studies?*

Do you know what, the teachers were honest with me. The teachers went the extra mile to help me, but I was stubborn. The teachers then shift their attention to somebody else.

7. *Describe the teacher's attitudes toward you.*

The teachers were caring towards me. They always ask how you are. Maybe they could have asked the reasons why I was that much out of school. No one could tell whenever something was wrong with me. I always had a smile on my face.

8. *Did your peer group have any major influence on you?*

Children will always do anything to be part of a group, to fit into the group. I could not smoke, but to be part of the group I had to smoke. I saw my friends smoke so I also started smoking. Do you know what, your friends can tell you to smoke, but when you do it, it is your decision, because people make their own decisions. Each day people make their own choices. It is a wrong choice that I took. Whenever you make wrong choices you open yourself for any possibility without you knowing it. My friends could have had an influence on me, but the day I decided to smoke, the choice was on me.

9. *What part did the community play in shaping your life and career?*

Do you know what, when you do a lot of wrong things, then you get a lot of wrong friends. When you do not want to get into trouble it is best to stay in the house. In the community where I stay everybody is busy with wrong things. If people are not busy drinking, then the other one is busy doing drugs "tik". So, it is best to stay indoors.

10. *Why did you drop out of school?*

I did wrong things. My friends were doing drugs and later on I was also dependant on drugs. I had so much trouble in my mind. It was impossible to focus in the classroom anymore. When I was in the classroom I could only think of my next "fix", how I am going to smoke the next drugs. The reason why I left school was because I totally lost my focus in doing my schoolwork. I lost my concentration about my schoolwork. At that stage I could not concentrate anymore. At the time I smoke "dagga" and I use various kinds of drugs. I stayed in the same community as my friends.

11. *How has your life been since dropping out from school?*

After I left school, I felt free. I felt I did not have any worries of doing any schoolwork or homework, but I knew I wanted to complete my schooling up to grade twelve. I do not do drugs anymore. I was willing to stop using drugs. I am currently working as a shop assistant. I am attending the Community Learning Centre where I am busy to prepare myself to complete my grade twelve schooling qualification. I am working so I have the money to pay for the school fees at the Community Learning Centre.

12. What would your advice be to pupils who consider dropping out from school?

My advice to learners who consider dropping out of school would be that they must not do it. They will regret their decision. At the time of leaving school, it felt like a good idea, because you can go on with your wrong doings, but without completing your schooling up to grade twelve you will become nothing and nowhere in life. If you do not complete your schooling up to grade twelve you have to prepare yourself to be a maid for somebody, to work in shops or to work in a subordinate position. Our modern lifestyle requires that you must at least be qualified up to grade twelve. I think many learners are privileged today. Many schools and colleges avail bursaries for learners to further their studies. I am struggling to complete my grade twelve qualification between my work, because I have to stand on my feet the whole day. If pupils are busy with wrong things like drugs, they should stop it. The drugs will eventually overpower them, and then they will have huge sorrows.

I want to become a social worker. I want to advise people who are struggling with social problems. I felt I learned a lot through my experience in life and I felt more mature in all the experience that I gained this far in my life. There are people who make mistakes in their lives but they do not learn through their mistakes. My advice to learners would be to complete their schooling, so that they do not have any regrets in their life due to not completing their matric.