

# **Youths' predispositions to learning: Case studies within a place of safety (Western Cape, South Africa)**

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## Declaration

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "HJ de Waal", on a light-colored, textured background.

HJ de Waal

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## **Abstract**

Learning in young adulthood, especially in communities where there may be substantial barriers to learning and exclusion from formal education, needs further investigation. This study provides an in-depth investigation of six youths' predispositions to learning while awaiting trial in a place of safety. This study focused on an in-depth investigation of youths' predispositions to learning in the particular context of the place of safety (Western Cape, South Africa).

I have been working with awaiting trial male youths for over four years as principal at the place of safety. The place of safety is a residential facility for boys and youths between the ages of 10 and 16 years who broke the law and who were at risk. The court placed these youths at the place of safety for the duration of their pending court cases, which may take up to two years in extreme cases like rape and murder. They typically come from communities where they had been exposed to violence, substance abuse and crime, both at home and at school. All of the youths at the place of safety broke the law and were awaiting trial; and they had all dropped out of school or had never attended school. The six respondents used in my study either were abusing drugs themselves or witnessed drug abuse. During their stay at the place of safety, the learners undergo various therapeutic programmes. They also attend school, where the curriculum is adapted to the individual needs of the learners.

While working with these youths at the school, I became deeply concerned about the limited prospects they seemed to have. I was curious why most of them demonstrated little or no ambition or eagerness to learn, given that they all had literacy levels below the average for their age group and that most of them had dropped out of school or had never attended school. Popular media reports as well as official documents indicate that youths in South Africa – and the Western Cape in particular – are exposed to drug abuse, violence and crime, which may influence the escalating number of school dropouts. An understanding of the predispositions to learning among awaiting trial youths may contribute to a better understanding of the sense of disempowerment within these communities.

This research project focused on qualitative case studies where I tried to discover and understand youths' predispositions to learning. I followed an interpretive approach to provide insights into the life stories of the six respondents between the ages of 14 and 16 years and how they interpret and make meaning of their personal realities. This marginalised group of people had the opportunity to narrate their individual life stories with relation to their experienced learning processes. I conducted this study, collected, and interpreted data over a period of approximately two-and-a-half

years. I collected data from their official files and by conducting in-depth individual interviews. I video-recorded the six personal interviews and used the footage to assist me in the process of data analysis.

The thesis presents the life stories of the six respondents as a foundation for a discussion on how we as educators define and practice adult education in the context of marginalised youth.

## Opsomming

Die leerprosesse van jeugdiges in gemeenskappe waar akute leerstoornisse en gebreke ten opsigte van formele onderrig heers, behoort nagevors en ondersoek te word. Hierdie studie het gepoog om ondersoek in te stel na die ontvanklikheid of predisposisie van ses jeugdiges teenoor leer terwyl hulle verhoorafwagtend is en in 'n plek van veiligheid aangehou word. Die studie het op 'n grondige ondersoek na die ontvanklikheid of predisposisies vir leer by jeugdiges teen die agtergrond van die plek van veiligheid (Wes-Kaap, Suid-Afrika) gefokus.

Ek werk reeds langer as vier jaar by die plek van veiligheid as skoolhoof. Seuns en jeugdiges van 10 tot 16 jaar oud wat die wet oortree het en sorg nodig het, gaan daar tuis nadat die hof hulle daar geplaas het vir die duur van hulle hofsake. In sommige ernstige sake, soos moord en verkragting, kan dit selfs twee jaar neem vir die sake om afgehandel te word. Hulle kom gewoonlik van gemeenskappe waar hulle tuis en by die skool blootgestel was aan geweld, dwelmmisbruik en misdaad. Die ses respondente in my studie het self dwelms misbruik of was blootgestel aan dwelmmisbruik. Alle leerders by die plek van veiligheid het die wet oortree en is verhoorafwagtend. Hulle het die skool op 'n voortydige ouderdom verlaat of het nooit voorheen skoolgegaan nie. Terwyl hulle by die plek van veiligheid bly, ondergaan hulle verskillende terapeutiese programme. Hulle woon ook skool by. Die leerplan is aangepas na aanleiding van die individuele behoeftes van die leerders.

Terwyl ek met hierdie seuns en jeugdiges by die skool gewerk het, het ek besorg geraak oor die beperkte verwagtinge wat hulle klaarblyklik gehad het. Ek het gewonder waarom die meeste van hulle min of geen ambisie toon en klaarblyklik min of geen gretigheid het om te leer nie, veral as in ag geneem word dat hulle vlakke van geletterdheid benede die gemiddelde vlakke van hul ouderdomgroepe is en dat die meeste van hulle die skool voortydig verlaat het of selfs nooit skool bygewoon het nie. Algemene beriggewing en amptelike dokumente dui aan dat jeugdiges in Suid-Afrika – en veral in die Wes-Kaap – toenemend aan dwelmmisbruik, geweld en misdaad blootgestel word. Dit kan 'n invloed hê op die groeiende aantal skoolverlaters. 'n Beter begrip van verhoorafwagtende jeugdiges se ontvanklikheid of predisposisies vir leer kan lei tot 'n beter begrip van die graad van ontmagtigings wat in hierdie gemeenskappe ervaar word.

Hierdie navorsingstudie het op kwalitatiewe gevallestudies gefokus waartydens ek gepoog het om jeugdiges se ontvanklikheid of predisposisies vir leer te ondersoek en te verstaan. 'n Vertolkende of interpretatiewe benadering is gevolg om insigte te bekom ten opsigte van die lewensverhale van

die ses respondente en die wyse waarop hulle hul persoonlike werklikhede interpreteer en verstaan. Hierdie gemarginaliseerde groep mense het die geleentheid gekry om hul persoonlike lewensverhale met betrekking tot hul beleefde leerervaringe te verbaliseer. Ek het hierdie studie oor 'n tydperk van ongeveer twee-en-'n-halwe jaar uitgevoer, met in agneming van dataversameling en –verwerking. Ek het data versamel deur middel van inligting in amptelike dokumente, asook deur die voer van persoonlike onderhoude. Die indringende onderhoude wat ek met ses respondente gevoer het, is op video vasgelê. Ek het hierdie data gebruik in die proses van dataverwerking.

Die tesis bied 'n blik op die lewensverhale van die ses respondente. Dit kan dien as grondslag vir 'n diskoers oor hoe die beoefening van volwasse onderrig en leer teen die agtergrond van gemarginaliseerde jeugdiges gedefinieer en toegepas word.

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# CHAPTER 1 – ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on a qualitative case study where I tried to discover and understand youths' predispositions to learning. The contexts of the six respondents and the way they interpret and make meaning of their personal realities formed the point of departure for the study. In constructing my research project, I adhered to Andrews's (2003) proposed stages for creating, refining, applying and answering the research question in my thesis. First, I chose a topic in which I was interested and which stemmed from my experience. I will discuss this in the paragraphs to follow. I then developed the topic into possible research questions. I refined these questions into one answerable research question, which encapsulates all the initial sub-questions (see Section 1.3). I will answer these sub-questions in applying the research process, which is a qualitative case study. In Chapter 3, I elaborate on the methodology followed. In Chapter 4 I report on and interpret the in-depth personal interviews I conducted with the respondents as well as the data found in the respondents' official files (Place of Safety, 2008a; Place of Safety, 2008b; Place of Safety, 2008c; Place of Safety, 2008d; Place of Safety, 2008e; Place of Safety, 2008f). In Chapter 5, I will reach some conclusions and make recommendations for policy, practice and possible further research.

I conducted the study, collected, and analysed data over a period of approximately two-and-a-half years. My interest in the research topic stemmed from my daily work as principal at the place of safety where I conducted the study. I have been serving in this position for over four years. The place of safety is a residential secure care facility for boys and male youths between the ages of 10 and 16 years who have been in conflict with the law and who are at risk. The court placed them at the place of safety by for the duration of their court cases, which may take up to two years in extreme cases like rape and murder. It therefore sometimes happens that some youths at the place of safety may be older than 16 years. All of the inmates have been in conflict with the law and all of them either abused drugs themselves, or witnessed drug abuse. During their stay at the place of safety, the inmates undergo various therapeutic programmes. They also attend school, where the curriculum is adapted to the individual needs of the learners.

The rest of Chapter 1 will give some background to the study (see Section 1.2), after which I will explain the research question (see Section 1.3). In Section 1.4, I will clarify the research aim. In Section 1.5, will provide definitions of key concepts used in the research report.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In this section, I will provide some factual background to the study, which will refer to the respondents' unique contexts. I will also address the relevance of and motivation for this particular research project within a broader context. It is important to note that this study is not about providing a clinical or educational psychological perspective on the respondents; I rather tried to find reasons for and evidence of the phenomenon discussed in this study by learning from relevant literature. In Chapter 2, I will look at legislation and policies with regard to learning (see Section 2.3), as well as on the concept of youth in relation to formal learning (see Section 2.2). Section 2.4 will present different perspectives on an individual's status as an adult or child. In Section 2.5, I will relate to the literature in discussing the influences on the individual learning process, which in its turn may shape the individual's predisposition to learning. These factors include personal agency (see Section 2.5.1), resilience (see Section 2.5.2), intellectual capacity and emotional well-being (see Section 2.5.2.1), significant others (see Section 2.5.2.2), risk (see Section 2.5.3), delinquency, crime and violence (see Section 2.5.3.1), and environmental deprivation (see Section 2.5.3.2), drug abuse (see Section 2.5.3.3) and gangsterism see Section 2.5.3.4. In Chapter 4, I will report in detail on the six respondents in this study.

First, I provide general background information on the kind of environments in which boys and youths like the respondents in this study grew up before the court placed them at the place of safety. The boys and youths detained at the place of safety mostly come from Western Cape communities where they were exposed to drug abuse; crime and violence. The circumstances in which they live and grow up may have an effect on different aspects of their lives, including education and learning. These learners often drop out of formal schooling and even get into conflict with the law. According to a report by Fleisch, Shindler and Perry (in Pendlebury, Lake & Smith 2009:42), just over 408 000 children aged seven to 15 years (4.6%) in South Africa were not attending school, while less than 1% of all children between the ages of seven and 15 years have never been to school. Pendlebury (in Pendlebury et al. 2009:27) describes the importance of schools:

“At their best, schools are safe places where children can develop emotionally and socially as well as intellectually, and where they learn – through example and experience, as much as through instruction – of their own and other's rights and responsibilities. At their worst, schools are places where children are vulnerable to abuse, rape, bullying, humiliation, and inadequate support for learning – all of which may impede meaningful access. Unrecognised learning disabilities or poor concentration due to hunger, disease or trauma can also result in children's silent exclusion and eventual drop-out.”

Unfortunately, schools are not always safe places. Rudolph (in Pendlebury et al. 2009:51) reports that children bring weapons, including guns, to school. In addition, learners who have been in conflict with the law frequently have difficulty returning to school, as they are labelled as

troublemakers. Furthermore, Gould (2007) holds that, because of the occurrence of crime, violence and gangsterism within some of the communities, school holidays pose an even bigger threat to some children. The little protection some children have while being at school will then not be available. Insufficient recreational facilities in some communities may lead to boredom and the youth from these communities may fall prey to criminal activities, like drug abuse. On 18 March 2010, the Western Cape Minister of Education condemned the senseless killing of a grade 10 learner from Delft the previous day (Grant 2010). He explained:

“It has now become apparent that this incident was gang-related and that there had been previous violent altercations between the two learners. Various interventions by the school, their parents and the WCED had been made to resolve the ongoing conflict, and it was believed that progress had been made when the two learners had agreed to move on. It is a sad indictment of our society when children as young as sixteen years of age believe that violence is the only answer.”

To contextualize the respondents in this study, I will now sketch a picture of some typical cases other than the respondents, at the place of safety. A while ago, a fourteen-year-old boy was admitted to the place of safety. He could not even write his name. When I asked him why he had never attended school before, he replied in a child-like manner that his mother never took him to school, but that she promised that she would. The police arrested him for alleged rape. Another fourteen-year-old boy could read and write at approximately Grade 3 level. The police arrested him for alleged theft. He told me that he was not attending school and that he had to look after and feed his two little brothers aged one and four years respectively while his mother was working in town and his father as a labourer on the farm where they were staying. His mother sometimes paid him R20.00. He used the money to buy tik<sup>1</sup>. While under the influence of tik, he would go to the farmer's house, cover his hands with a black plastic bag, climb through the bedroom window and steal jewellery, which he then would trade for tik. A seventeen-year-old youth dropped out of school because of drug abuse and gangster involvement. He was in Grade 8 at the time and had already fathered a baby. He seemed very proud of his status. The police arrested him for attempted murder. There are many more such examples, which emphasize the necessity of appropriate research in order to address the seemingly desperate state of affairs within deprived and marginalized communities.

The environments and circumstances in which children and youths like the respondents grow up are sometimes appalling. Early 2006, I had the opportunity to visit a dwelling typical to that of the inmates at the place of safety. I was gathering video footage for an educational film on drug abuse

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<sup>1</sup> Tik as a colloquial term for crystal methamphetamine will be used throughout this thesis. Tik is a powerfully addictive stimulant that affects many areas of the central nervous system (Plüddemann, Myers & Parry 2007; Plüddemann in Henderson 2007).

at the time. The filming took place inside different houses and even inside a shebeen and a “tik-huis” (a venue where drugs like tik, or methamphetamine, and dagga<sup>2</sup>, or cannabis, are sold and used). I filmed people of different ages. They told their individual stories on how drug abuse had affected their lives. I was surprised when one man smoked dagga in front of me and on camera. I was even more surprised when another young man demonstrated how to use a “tik-lollie” (a glass pipe with crystal methamphetamine or tik). While this was happening, small children would come and go as if it was the most normal thing to do. I even noticed how a toddler took a drag from a dagga cigarette. Although this visit was not part of this study, it awarded me the opportunity to observe the typical background from where many of the inmates at the place of safety came. The houses I observed were very small and some were without electricity. Up to nine people would live in a house with two rooms. Because the houses were so small, the children would loiter outside and mingle with the drug and alcohol abusing youth and adults. There was no desk or room for a child to write or do homework and I never saw any books. The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (2009:45) explains the dangers of living in overcrowded conditions:

“In addition to limiting privacy and making it difficult for children to find space to do homework and to play, overcrowded living conditions are associated with a whole range of risks for children, including sexual abuse and the transmission of disease.”

In the afternoons, I noticed how young children picked up wood for hours. I remember wondering how those young children could go to school and learn with any success while living in such an environment. It is against this backdrop that the rest of my discussion must be understood.

The inmates at the place of safety typically came from deprived and broken families who lived in different degrees of poverty. South Africa has very high rates of child poverty. According to Meintjes and Hall (in Pendlebury et al. 2009:72), in 2007, 68% of all children in South Africa lived in households with a per capita income below R350.00. Interestingly, Dieltiens (in Pendlebury et al. 2009:46) explains that, despite the burden of poverty on many South African households, the vast majority of children stay in school, as schools offer poor households additional resources in the form of child care. Dieltiens concludes that absolute poverty may prolong a child’s journey through school because of repeating grades. Seemingly, incompetent parents who did not succeed in instilling in their children the inclination to better their lives through education raised the inmates at the place of safety. In many cases, the parents were divorced or have never been married. In addition, in many cases, one or both parents were unemployed and the occurrence of parental substance abuse was high. It was apparent that the inmates at the place of safety were lacking positive interventions by significant others in their lives, which hampered their development in general. I realised that the general attitude of the boys and youths at the place of safety was not

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<sup>2</sup> Dagga as a colloquial term for cannabis or marijuana will be used throughout this thesis.

arrogant; it was merely their point of reference: that was how they experienced life and how they expected it to be.

When I started working with awaiting-trial youth at the place of safety, I was startled and upset. They did not want to come to school. It became apparent that these learners seemed to feel inferior with regard to their levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy and that they regarded school as a threatening environment. Since, I have made a conscious effort of changing the learning culture in the school. (I will not elaborate on this, as it does not form part of the scope of this study.) A common trait amongst the inmates at the place of safety, was that most of them performed academically much lower than what was regarded appropriate for their age group. Most of them had dropped out of school or had never attended school at all. Even those who were still attending school when the police arrested them were not on par with their peers. Seemingly, most of them had barriers to learning, which teachers and other role-players had not addressed.

The youth awaiting trial at the place of safety tend to be aggressive, especially towards each other. Once provoked, they hardly ever succeed in refusing to resort to violence, whether physical or verbal. The manner in which they respond violently is extreme. They will swear in such a manner that it will always lead to retaliation and more swearing or fighting. When they fight, it is extremer than fighting among other boys of their age. Most of these fights end up in open wounds. Any given situation can lead to violence. Most of the boys at the place of safety were expelled from normal schools because of fighting and assault. I also noticed that when the smaller boys found themselves in confrontation with other, bigger boys, even the slightest hit or kick would result in the smaller boy crying fiercely, as if he was badly hurt. This proves how severely these children have been hurt in the past and points to their evident lack of emotional wellness. Many of the boys and youths at the place of safety flaunt gang-related tattoos and they know the related language codes. Those who do not know it, quickly learn it from their awaiting-trial peers and soon carry a self-made “chappie” (tattoo) affiliating them to a particular gang. These tendencies led me to search for answers in literature from local and international scholars on the topic of youth and crime and violence regarding the reasons for people to be so violent and criminal.

Reports in the popular media indicate that youth in South Africa – and the Western Cape in particular – have to deal with drug abuse, which may influence the escalating number of school dropouts. Since I have started to work at the place of safety, I rarely found inmates that have not experimented with or abused drugs. Weilbach (2008) reported that children and youth are using substances drugs like cocaine, heroin, dagga, alcohol and tik. The article referred to reports by the South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (Sanca), which indicated increased treatment of substance addiction. It also referred to police reports, which claimed that

addicted youth drop out of school to join criminal gangs in order to support their habits by committing crimes like robbery. According to Serrao (2008), the age of first-time drug users had dropped in six years from 19 to 10 years.

Dirks (2000) points out that the dynamic unconscious plays a powerful role in shaping our thoughts, feelings, and actions on a day-to-day basis. Learning evokes in the individual an unconscious urge to address specific situational needs experienced. According to Maslow's well-known Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow 1954; 1996; 1998), the most basic human need is physiological well-being (the need for food, water, shelter and clothing). This is followed by the need for safety and security (in a family and a society that protects against hunger and violence), the need for love and belonging (to receive and give love, appreciation, friendship), the need for esteem (to be an unique individual with self-respect and to enjoy general esteem from others), and the need to actualise the self (to experience purpose, meaning and realising all inner potentials). Learning, creativity, fairness, responsibility, and justice come naturally to people according to Maslow's theories. The question then arises why some people seemingly do not display these traits. What are the barriers that prohibit someone to reach the level of self-actualisation? For the purpose of this study, I had to direct my research towards the target group on which I am reporting, namely awaiting-trial male youths detained in a place of safety and the influence of experiences on their current predispositions to learning.

Lastly, throughout the thesis I will argue that, although they still presented with child-like behaviour, I regard inmates like the respondents to be adult learners because of their apparent adult learning needs as well as the development stages they find themselves in. I will do so by referring to scholars like Lindeman (1926), Erikson (1963; 1968; 1980), Bergevin (1967), Knowles (1970; 1978; 1979), Perry (1970), Kohlberg and Turiel (1971), Loevinger (1976), Levinson (1979), Knowles and Associates (1984), Cranton (1994), Cross (1981), Merriam and Clark (1991), Brendtro and Du Toit (2005) and Rossiter and Clark (2007).

It is thus obvious that youth under discussion are being exposed to violence, drug abuse and crime both at home and at school. Learning in young adulthood, especially in communities where there may be substantial barriers to learning and formal education, clearly needs further investigation. This study did not try to determine a causal relationship between the various socio-economic factors, but rather focussed on an in-depth investigation of youths' predispositions to learning in the particular context of the place of safety.

### 1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

According to Andrews (2003), the research question is context-related and must have the potential for being answered in the project to be undertaken. The power to control the research rests with the questioner.

In the following section, I will clarify my research question. The concepts *predisposition*, *learning* and *young adult* are being defined in Section 1.5. For the purpose of this study, I will explain my reasoning with regard to the research question. I will reflect on my career in education to find the triggers that made me formulate the research question under discussion.

When my son was put through an IQ test at the age of six years, I had the opportunity to observe the process unobtrusively. The question I wanted to find answers for was this: how do parents and the environment within which a child is raised influence his or her intelligence and predisposition to learning. This question became an interest and I started to read about it out of curiosity and to equip myself better for parenting my own children and teaching other children. Over the years, as educator of children and adults over a wide spectrum, the diverse ways in which people react to learning struck me. I would observe adults in a conference room and note that some of them would listen attentively, while others are obviously not paying attention. Amongst school-going children, such behaviour is even more evident. The same principle applies to pre-schoolers. One could assume that pre-schoolers are still eager to learn and that they enjoy learning. However, even amongst them there are disparities. It therefore became clear to me that learners from different ages and backgrounds enter the learning situation with different predispositions to and attitudes towards learning. Before learning takes place, individuals are being influenced and stimulated in various ways. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) argue that the world within which the learner lives, affects him or her. These authors also explain that more affluent and better-educated adults with resources (like home computers) are being better informed than those who do not have access to such resources. In this study, I focused on marginalized youths who do not have access to resources and who perform poorly with regard to formal education.

Stroobants' (2005:56) explanation that the research question often grows out of the researcher's personal interest or learning need, therefore applies to this study. Within the context of working with awaiting trial youths at the place of safety, I became deeply concerned about the limited prospects they seemed to have. I was curious why most of them demonstrated little or no ambition or eagerness to learn, given that most of them evidently had literacy levels below the average for their age groups and that most of them had dropped out of school, while some had never even attended school.

As mentioned before, the inmates at the place of safety are boys and youths between the ages of 10 and 16 years. It seemed that some of these youths of 14 years and older were confused about their status as either children or adults. When they were with their peers, they would present themselves as adults who would enforce their status, but when alone with a teacher or working quietly in class, they would act like children who needed direction and who wanted acknowledgement. I started wondering how these youths would have developed had they grown up in different circumstances. How were their attitudes towards learning affected by their circumstances? I thought of the basic needs they seemingly experienced. How could they acquire skills like basic literacy and numeracy when the need for survival was stronger than that of self-fulfilment (Maslow 1954; 1996; 1998)? If a person grows up on the streets or in a house where his or her parents do not value education and who do not model noble morals and values, how could such a person become an educated and responsible citizen? These youths were clearly victims of social injustices. They were the disempowered products of marginalised communities because of the lifestyle these communities had sustained over the years. Their choices in life seemed to be limited and they seemed to be unable to break the cycle within which they were stuck. It was as if they were being cut off from the fast developing world, which Merriam and Caffarella (1999) refer to, where economic factors and the globalisation of economies worldwide create changes in the configuration of the labour force and consequently the educational expectations society holds for adults of all ages. For example, the youths at the place of safety would typically know how to use a cell phone and that jewellery and computers are valuable, but they would steal it and then trade it for drugs at a value far below that of the particular item. It thus became clear to me that these youths had unique needs and realities. They had different motives for learning and each of them had different factors influencing their lives.

I therefore undertook to understand the predispositions to learning of six awaiting trial youths better. In doing so, Stroobants (2005:57) reminded me that the research story is not about the researcher, but about the investigated theme. I therefore focused on informing the scientific community about the results of the research.

Although I have raised many questions, I refined my research question to the following: *What is the predisposition to learning of youth in a place of safety?* I will try to answer this question by letting six respondents narrate their own life stories and by referring to data found in their personal files and official documents. In the next section, the aim and the scope of the research will be delimited.

## **1.4 RESEARCH AIM**

This study does not claim to be more than an inquiry into the predisposition of youth to learning. I confined the research study to six individuals who come from communities where crime, violence and drug abuse are rife. To choose the respondents (sample) was very simple: they were awaiting-trial males of 14 years of age and older who had been in conflict with the law and detained at the place of safety where I work. At the time when my research started, they were the only candidates who were 14 years and older. Age was my only criterion for sampling. The study cannot be generalised in any broader sense. The main aim of this study is to carry forward the stories told and the experiences and views shared by the respondents in order to create an understanding of the predispositions to learning of a particular group of marginalised youth.

Max-Neef (1991) explains that one cannot understand something of which one is not a part. He compares this to understanding love, and says that one first has to fall in love in order to understand it. In my quest to understand and interpret the respondents' experiences and feelings, I decided to use personal interviews as main vehicle to collect authentic research data, as it would give me the opportunity to get close to each respondent and in doing so, be given the opportunity to metaphorically walk in their shoes. It has to be noted that the self-reported nature of the evidence provided by the respondents could be regarded limiting, as each of the respondents only had one opportunity (interview) to reflect and report on their life stories. I therefore referred to their official documents and personal files (Place of Safety, 2008a; Place of Safety, 2008b; Place of Safety, 2008c; Place of Safety, 2008d; Place of Safety, 2008e; Place of Safety, 2008f) in order to triangulate the data. In Chapter 3, I will address ethical issues, as well as trustworthiness and validity. In Chapter 3, I will also elaborate on the research methodology employed, as well as the methods for data collection and analysis.

I trust that my contribution, as advocated by Freire (2000), will give voice to these people who have been marginalised by society because of existing social inequalities and injustices, through letting them narrate their life stories (Bodgan & Biklen 2007).

## **1.5 DEFINING THE KEY CONCEPTS**

I will now define the key concepts that I use throughout the thesis as viewed within this particular context.

### 1.5.1 Predisposition

A *predisposition* is “[t]he condition of being predisposed or inclined beforehand (*to* something or *to do* something; a precious inclination or favourable state of mind. Also, a tendency in a person to respond or react in a certain way” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989 s.v. ‘predisposition’).

I agree with Mezirow and Associates (1990) who are of the opinion that our habits of expectation influence what we perceive and fail to perceive, and what we think and fail to think. These habits and perceptions make up our frame of reference. Our frame of reference influences our predisposition to learning, as it structures the way we interpret our experiences. For the purposes of this study, I define *predisposition* as a mindset that both external and internal factors influence.

### 1.5.2 Learning

*Learning* is “[t]he action of receiving instruction or acquiring knowledge; a process which leads to the modification of behaviour or the acquisition of new abilities or responses, and which is additional to natural development by growth or maturation” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989 s.v. ‘learning’).

Learning is therefore something an individual does to become more knowledgeable and skilful. Cranton (1994) summarises learning as a process of construing meaning and transforming understanding. Rogers (1951) defines *learning* as the assimilation of experience within the structure of the self. Rogers (1983:18, 19) compares learning to the “... insatiable curiosity that drives the adolescent boy to absorb everything he can see or hear or read about gasoline engines in order to improve the efficiency and speed of his cruiser.” Jarvis (1987a; 1987b) agrees with Kolb (1976; 1984), that learning involves the transformation of experience into knowledge and that not all experience leads to learning. Mezirow and Associates (1990:1) define learning as “the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action.” Through transformative learning, the adult learner re-assesses the presuppositions, which form the basis of his or her beliefs and acts on insights derived from the transformed meaning perspective that results from such re-assessments. The result of this process may involve correcting distorted assumptions from prior learning. Mezirow and Associates (1990) also explain that learning from experience leads to the transformation of one’s perspective, which is the process of maturing.

In this study, I will investigate the importance of learning from experience and how the youths’ life experiences affected their motivation for learning. As well as how the construction of meaning by learners is influenced (Cranton 1994). The work of Knowles (1970; 1978; 1979) on the preferences

and needs adults exhibit in relation to the learning process (see Section 2.4), played an integral part in my study.

## **1.6 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I gave an introduction to and broad overview of the thesis. I explained the relevance of the study and explained the research question. I provided the research aim and scope of the research and defined the key concepts, which I will use in the thesis. In the next chapter, I will report on literature studied with relevance to the different aspects of the research.

## CHAPTER 2 – OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to find answers to my research question (*What is the predisposition to learning of youth in a place of safety?*), I tried to find evidence in literature of existing research relevant to my study. This literature study does not intend to be an all-encompassing overview of learning processes, but rather focuses on the relevant theories pertaining to the case studies reported in Chapter 4.

In this chapter I will first refer to national legislation and policies with regards to how youth is being conceptualised in the sense of when a person is regarded a child or an adult (see Section 2.2). In Section 2.3, I will try to explain the role of policies in one's predisposition to and focus of learning. After defining "child" and "adult", the different life stages of a person from childhood to adulthood is explored (see Section 2.4.1), focussing on the learning process from childhood to adulthood (see Section 2.4.2). In Section 2.5, I will explore the possible factors that could influence the individual learning process that could apply to the respondents in this study. These factors are categorized as agency (see Section 2.5.1); resilience (see Section 2.5.2); intellectual capacity and emotional well-being (see Section 2.5.2.1); significant others (see Section 2.5.2.2); risk (see Section 2.5.3); environmental deprivation (see Section 2.5.3.1); delinquency, crime and violence (see Section 2.5.3.2); substance abuse (see Section 2.5.3.3) and gangsterism (see Section 2.5.3.4). I will present a conceptual framework in graphical format (see Figure 2.1) for the research report on page 72. Figure 2.2 (page 74) will provide a visualisation of the interpretive and conceptual lens I used in this study. In Section 2.6, I will summarize the main points, which I will carry over to the discussion of the results in Chapter 4.

### 2.2 CONCEPTS OF YOUTH WITH REGARDS TO LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

Firstly, in order to understand the position of individuals like the respondents in terms of education, I refer to the following legislative documents:

- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) holds that everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education and to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.
- The Correctional Services Act (1998) states that every inmate who is a child and is subject to compulsory education must attend and have access to such educational programmes and that, where practicable, all children who are inmates not subject to compulsory education must be allowed access to educational programmes.
- The Child Justice Bill (2002) concludes that a child lacking family support or educational or employment opportunities must have equal access to available services.

It is therefore clear that the respondents like any other person in South Africa are entitled to basic education.

Secondly, as mentioned in the previous chapter, I will argue from a lifelong learning perspective in this study focusing on theories pertaining to adult learning, even though the respondents in this study may legally still be regarded as children. I consulted different South African acts, bills and policies to determine what is being regarded as “legal” definitions of “child” and “adult.” According to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), “child” means a person under the age of 18 years. The Child Justice Bill (2002) defines “child” as any person under the age of 18 and “adult” a person who is 18 years or older. The Child Care Act (1983), Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997), Correctional Services Act (1998), as well as the Children’s Act (2005) support this notion. The Child Justice Bill (2002) further directs that the court of law may not prosecute a child who commits an offence while under the age of 10 years. Considering the above, it is thus fair to conclude that youth between the ages of 14 and 17 years are children and not adults. However, this matter is not that simple. According to the Child Justice Bill (2002), in certain circumstances a child of 14 years or older who is charged with a serious offence may be detained in prison. Furthermore, according to the Child Care Act (1983), any person over the age of 14 years shall be competent to consent, without the assistance of his parent or guardian, to the performance of any medical treatment of himself or his child. It becomes apparent that certain “adult” responsibilities are given to children under the age of 18 by the court of law.

In order to clarify the respondents’ entitlement to formal education, I studied the South African Schools Act (1996). This act explains that compulsory school attendance applies from the first school day of the year in which a learner reaches the age of seven years until the last school day of the year in which a learner reaches the age of 15 years or the ninth grade, whichever occurs first. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997) finds that no person may employ a child who is under 15 years of age or who is under the minimum school-leaving age in terms of any law, if this person is 15 years or older. According to the Adult Basic Education and Training Act (2000), an “adult learner” is a person who is 16 years and older. These acts seem to indicate a transitory period between the ages of 15 to 16 years of age. Allowing for individual differences within the chronological age span, the respondents in this study therefore fall within and beyond this implied transitory period.

Furthermore, the Marriage Act (1961) regards a minor as a person under the age of 21 years who has not been married before. If a minor wants to get married, both parents must give written consent to the marriage (where both parents are alive, and neither of the parents has sole

guardianship of the minor). Boys under the age of 18 years and girls under the age of 15 years, in addition to the consent of the parents or guardian, as the case may be, also require the consent of the Minister of Home Affairs to get married. This act therefore makes allowance for adult responsibilities such as marriage within the age group of the respondents in this study.

Even though legislation reasons that youths like the respondents in this study are children, these laws make allowance for the transition into adulthood that marks this developmental phase relatively early in the lives of people such as trial awaiting youth. The data discussed in Chapter 4 will provide evidence to support this notion. I will therefore argue that – in terms of predispositions to learning – a broader view may be necessary than the chronological ages stipulated in legislation.

### **2.3 THE ROLE OF POLICY IN LEARNING**

If one considers the power of state policy, one can argue that state action, in part, actively constructs personal dispositions, and the social conditions of choice are complicit with relations to power. Policy has produced particular kinds of education and training markets, constituting different circuits of provision that are hierarchically ordered and thus constructing the context within which “choices” are made (Ball et al. 2000). In other words, policy works to construct the market conditions and structure of preferences that constitutes hierarchies of categories of learners. As the social and economic conditions of communities change, it is logical that social capital transforms and has an impact on the individual in the long term (Ecclestone 2007). Whilst enterprises need specific skills, individuals need knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the workplace – regardless whether they have employment or are preparing for future employment. Individuals also need knowledge and skills that enable them to live in their whole world. This means that learning for work needs to go beyond work, and that learning spans across multiple sites and involves multiple processes of re-contextualization. Pedagogy (see Section 2.4.2) therefore needs to take account of individuals’ life experiences, how these experiences have shaped them, their desires and aspirations (Ecclestone 2007). Unfortunately, there are individuals who find it impossible to meet the expectations of others and themselves within the social and economic conditions of the community and whose powerful force of their ascribed identities as non-capable learners during their schooling blocks the possibility of them creating an alternative image of themselves as capable, competent learners (Maclachlan 2007).

Understanding the relational interplay between the individual and society should result in policy and pedagogy that does not reduce the needs of the learner to the needs of workplace: instead, it should identify and respond to the different needs of both (Ecclestone 2007).

## 2.4 CHILD OR ADULT

Since some grey areas seem apparent with regard to the differences between a “child” and an “adult” (see Section 2.2), it is necessary to look at the different stages humans go through from birth to maturity.

### 2.4.1 From childhood to adulthood

According to Merriam and Clark (1991), adults differ from children because of their life situations and the social roles characteristic of adult status. Children and adults also differ in terms of life experience and its potential as a learning resource. According to Knowles (1978), children identify themselves mainly in terms of external markers: who their parents and siblings are, where they live, and according to their school and church affiliation. Children’s experiences therefore become resources for learning, and define who they are, as they grow older and mature. According to Knowles (1978), persons psychologically become adults when they achieve a self-concept of essential self-direction and develop a deep psychological need, which others receive as self-directed. Furthermore, Merriam and Clark (1991) explain that adults are more than grown-up learners, and children not just little adult learners. As the child becomes an adult, it is important to keep in mind the influence of past life and learning experiences on the young adult learner (see Section 2.5). Cranton (1994) notes that, by the time individuals reach adulthood, they have acquired a set of values and have an established worldviews and interpretations of experiences.

Knowles (1970) and Cranton (1994) refer to the different phases of the life cycle and the influences thereof, as well as learning abilities, on the changing patterns of interests and unique learning needs of the adult learners. Life-cycle phases are phases and stages, which people pass through from birth to death. Levinson (1979) and Cross (1981) use chronological age to describe the life-cycle phases. It is a sequence of eras, each lasting about 25 years. The beginning and ending of adjacent eras overlap: one era flows into the next with a few years, which the two eras share. Levinson (1979) named the eras as follows:

- childhood and adolescence (0–22 years);
- early adulthood (17–45 years);
- middle adulthood (40–65 years); and
- late adulthood (60 + years).

The six respondents in my study fall in the age group 14 to 17 years. They could be grouped as adolescents or early adults, a stage which Levinson (1979) calls pre-adulthood, followed by the early adult transition (17–22 years). Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:49) stress that a heightened desire

for autonomy is the biggest developmental change as children move into adolescence. The demands placed on children in this phase differ according to their contexts, but it is similar in that these children need to take up more adult-like responsibilities and choices. Cross (1981) describes the age group 18–22 years as the stage where youth (in the ideal world) are supposed to start leaving the home (biological family or an equivalent social unit that provides protection, socialisation and support of growth) and establishing new living arrangements, enter college, start a first full-time job and select a partner. This is a crucial part in the life cycle, and Levinson (1979) regards this stage as the most dramatic of all eras. The person moves away from his early adult self and at the same time starts to form his first adult self. During this stage of making his entry into the adult world, the individual is vulnerable and immature. According to Loevinger (1976), life-cycle phases are not necessarily part of a continuous flow toward growth and maturity. In order to grow toward maturity, one needs to go through different developmental stages, which are more concerned with personality and ego development. Loevinger (1976) describes the development of the ego as a creation of a central frame of reference through which individuals view themselves and their relationships with others. People who are at the lower-level stages of ego development regard education as something obtained at school. Moving into early adulthood, people tend to realise that education is necessary in order to get a job, but they do not yet have the insight into the higher purposes of education, for instance the usefulness of education to society and education for the purposes of self-actualisation. Erikson (1963; 1968; 1980) explains that, while children depend on others for their welfare, adults are responsible, independent and self-sufficient in managing their own lives. Perry (1970) claims that immature persons perceive the world in terms of either/or, good/bad, permitted/not permitted. They seek authority outside the self, for instance in a parent or teacher. According to Kohlberg and Turiel (1971), a person who is at the lowest level of moral development, does not understand rules and cannot judge good or bad in terms of rules and authority, but reacts to egocentric needs. Moral development then grows through phases towards a stage where the individual reacts to universal principles of justice and out of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons. Erikson (1963; 1968; 1980) proposes that the psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood lies in the difference between identity and role confusion. This means that the young adult develops a sense of self and can start the process of finding an occupation, is ready for intimacy and develops the capacity to commit to a significant partner. Bergevin (1967) and Perry (1970) describe maturity as the continual growth and development of individuals from a point of mere survival towards wholeness and the discovery of themselves both as persons and as responsible members of the social order. Maturity entails achieving constructive spiritual, vocational, physical, political, and cultural goals (Bergevin 1967). I would like to propose that youth like the respondents have not yet reached a level of responsible maturity and that this may be an attributing factor concerning their apparent tendency towards delinquency and their supposedly negative predispositions to learning.

Knowles (1978) states that children's biological development, as well as the academic pressure they experience, influence their readiness to learn. Adults' evolving social roles and the developmental tasks required for performing these roles, determine their readiness to learn. Adults most often engage in learning activities in response to the changing demands and expectations inherent in being an adult (Merriam & Clark 1991). Children are conditioned towards a subject-centred orientation to most learning (Knowles 1978). Others, who have decided what children need to know to become responsible members of society, determine what children learn at school and at home (Knowles 1978). Younger students are keener on and engaged in school than are their older counterparts (Johnson, Crosnoe & Elder 2001). Knowles (1978) adds that adults have a problem-centred orientation to learning. Adults expect to apply learning immediately and not in the future, as children do. According to Mezirow and Associates (1990), adults are motivated to understand the meaning of their experience better. Adults transform their perspectives by becoming critically aware of how and why their presupposing has come to constrain the way they perceive and understand their world, and how they feel about it. Merriam and Clark (1991) refer to the work by Freud (1961) and Erikson (1963; 1968; 1980) that a mature person defines him- or herself in terms of work (a teacher, a police officer) and love (a parent, a child of a parent, a friend).

Mezirow and Associates (1990) further add that during childhood, the learner acquires meaning perspectives in an uncritical manner through the process of socialisation. The more emotional the context of learning becomes and the more reinforcement of learning takes place, the deeper the habits of expectation that form the child's meaning perspectives become. Experience strengthens, extends and refines our expectations about how things are supposed to be. These expectations influence the child's learning and then become part of the predisposition of the young adult to learning. Cross (1981) warns that adult learners who have dispositional barriers to learning, cannot be compelled to participate in adult learning programmes, as these learners first need to acquire a taste for learning by seeing that learning can be a positive experience.

Scholars seem to agree that many factors influence an individual's status as a child or an adult. Regardless the individual's status as an adult or a child, the learning needs of such an individual cannot necessarily be limited to a particular life cycle. It is important to note that life cycle phases overlap and are thus not limited to a particular chronological age (Levinson 1979; Cross 1981). It is thus clear that, apart from mere physical development, moving from childhood to adulthood involves different learning processes. Galbraith (1990) adds that learning is a dynamic process of change, dependent on the self-efficacy of the learner to take responsibility for his or her own learning. The levels of learning that take place at different stages of a person's life may influence his or her predisposition to learning.

Considering all of the opinions held by the scholars mentioned in the foregoing sections, I will refer to the respondents as neither children nor adults, but will use the term “youth” when referring to them in the remainder of the thesis.

#### **2.4.2 Learning processes from childhood to adulthood**

Once a child (of any age) becomes an adult, it becomes essential to understand the motivation for and the processes involved in adult learning. Adults’ unique learning needs and possible barriers to learning must be accommodated. According to Cross (1981), adult learners have stronger abilities towards the integration, interpretation and application of knowledge than children, whose learning strengths lie in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, which serve as the foundation for most school learning.

Lindeman (1926), Knowles (1970; 1978; 1979; 1984), Lynch and Chickering (1989 in Merriam & Clark 1991:20) and Rossiter and Clark (2007) agree that adult learners can be distinguished by means of a list of characteristics, learning needs and common traits, which include the following:

- adults have a greater need to cope with transitions and with existential issues of competence, emotions, autonomy, identity, relationships, purpose, and integrity;
- they have multiple demands and responsibilities in terms of time, energy, emotions, and life roles;
- adults have already accumulated knowledge and skills and have varied past experiences, which is the richest resource for their learning;
- they possess a rich array of ongoing experiences and responsibilities;
- they have a deep need to be self-directed;
- their orientation to learning is life-centred;
- they are motivated to learn when they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy;
- they tend to prefer practical application to pure theory; and
- adults display greater self-determination and acceptance for responsibility.

Although Cranton (1994:3) makes it clear that the phenomenon of adult learning is complex and difficult to capture in any one definition, she summarises it as:

“... a process of being freed from the oppression of being illiterate, a means of gaining knowledge and skills, a way to satisfy learner needs, and a process of critical self-reflection that can lead to transformation.”

According to Bergevin (1967), Rose and Gallup (2000), and Cohen (2006), adult education is intended to assist adults to develop into free, creative, responsible, productive and maturing citizens and that the main objective is to teach the individual how to live a full and fruitful life in which well-being and the ability to make a living is important. Equally important is the knowledge of what to do culturally and spiritually with our lives and talents. As such, adults can contribute to society that will in turn present them with continuing opportunities to fulfil their life purpose. Michelli and Keiser (2005) add to this the importance of developing the qualities of a democratic society, including respect for others, collaboration with others, regard for fairness and justice, concern for the commonwealth, as well as voluntary, active participation in society. Freire (1987) puts strong emphasis on social empowerment through adult education and advocates the individual's responsibility to contribute to the transformation, liberation and development of society as a whole.

Keeping in mind that emancipatory and transformative learning are the critical goals of adult education (Mezirow 1991; Mezirow & Associates 1990; Cranton 1994), it is important to understand, within context, the learning needs and preferences of adult learners and the barriers to learning that they experience. Bergevin (1967) suggests that adults learn best when offered an opportunity to solve a problem in a way suited to their adult learning nature, at a level they can handle, and in a manner that helps them to know more about working with others and themselves. Merriam and Clark (1991) support this notion and elaborate by saying that adult learning is characterised by its usefulness for immediate application to the duties and responsibilities of the particular individual. The needs and interests inherent in an adult's life situations often motivate the individual to learn during adulthood. Adults see learning as a catalyst for the development of the capacity to work and to love (Freud 1961; Erikson 1963; 1968; 1980). Such learning is an ongoing process.

Davenport and Davenport (1986) hold that if one wants to address individual learners' needs, it is important to understand how adults and children learn differently and to note the differences between the education of children (pedagogy) and adults (andragogy) (see Table 2.1). Although people in Europe used the term andragogy since 1921, it did not appear in a dictionary until 1981. In addition, in the United States there have been many publications on andragogy dating from the late 1960's (Grabowski 1970; Seaman 1969; Knowles 1977; 1980; 1984). Knowles (1977) developed the paradigm of andragogy, as we know it today.

According to Conner (2004), pedagogy literally means the art and science of educating children and often is a synonym for teaching. More accurately, pedagogy embodies teacher-focused education (not only of children). In the pedagogic model, teachers assume responsibility for making decisions about what the learner will learn; how the learner will learn it and when the learner will learn it. Andragogy, initially defined by Knowles (1980:43) as "the art and science of helping adults learn," currently defines an alternative to pedagogy and refers to learner-focused education for people of all ages (not only adults), where the learner is given autonomy over the learning process (Conner 2004). Knowles (1978; 1979; 1984) adds that andragogy means more than just helping *adults* learn; it rather means helping *human beings* learn. He emphasises that the pedagogical way of learning do not necessarily exclude adult learners and that children can benefit from the andragogical way of learning. Andragogy and pedagogy provide two ends of a spectrum (see Table 2.1).

**TABLE 2.1: Pedagogy and andragogy: two ends of a spectrum**

<b>PEDAGOGICAL MODEL</b>	<b>ANDRAGOGICAL MODEL</b>
<b>1. The need to know:</b>  Learners only need to know that they must learn what the teacher teaches if they want to pass.	<b>1. The need to know:</b>  Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it.
<b>2. The learner's self-concept:</b>  The learner's self-concept is that of a dependent personality.	<b>2. The learner's self-concept:</b>  Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions and lives.
<b>3. The role of experience:</b>  The experience that counts is that of the teacher and not that of the learner.	<b>3. The role of experience:</b>  Adults come into an educational activity with a great volume of experience.
<b>4. Readiness to learn:</b>  Learners become ready to learn what the teacher tells them they have to learn if they want to pass.	<b>4. Readiness to learn:</b>  Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations.
<b>5. Orientation to learning:</b>  Learners have a subject-centred orientation to learning.	<b>5. Orientation to learning:</b>  Adults have a life-, task- and problem-centred orientation to learning.
<b>6. Motivation:</b>  Learners are motivated to learn by external motivators such as grades.	<b>6. Motivation:</b>  Adults are responsive to some external motivators like getting a job, but the most potent motivators are internal pressures like job satisfaction.

(Adapted from Knowles, Holton & Swanson 2005:64–69)

Lawson (1998) describes Knowles' work as pivotal in terms of a shift in the educational paradigm. In his first principle of andragogy, Knowles (1977) claims that superior andragogical learning conditions should motivate the learners to feel a need to learn. Because adults regard education as a lifetime activity, they are able to learn more effectively in a self-directed environment. Reed

(1993) indicates that adults should be motivated through internal rather than external means. In support of an andragogical model, students should be dynamically involved in planning their learning processes (Cervero & Wilson 2001). Knowles' (1977) second principle claims that adult learners can be a resource for their own learning and the learning of others. Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993) and Cell (1984) agree that the andragogical model allows learners to rely on themselves as resources of learning. Galbraith (1990) and Patterson and Pegg (1999) add that collaboration is a key ingredient of successful adult learning methodologies. The third principle in Knowles' (1977) andragogical model focuses on the learners' developmental goals. The andragogy paradigm requires that educators choose strategies that will enable adults to achieve their learning goals, as society requires a citizenry that is able to change. Lawson (1998) supports the importance of andragogy in helping adult learners make life and career transitions. The last principle of andragogy according to Knowles (1977) is the need for immediate application of theory to practice and the related focus on problems as opposed to content. Patterson and Pegg (1999) remark that learning strategies should be less involved with theory, but should rather emphasize practical applications of knowledge relevant to the real world. Similarly, Galbraith (1990) claims that successful education will relate theory to practice.

According to Knowles (1978), pedagogical methods do not acknowledge the maturing individual's rapid development towards self-direction. The child who becomes a young adult, therefore experiences tension. This may have a negative influence on his/her attitude towards learning. Some pedagogical assumptions are realistic for adults in some situations and some andragogical assumptions are realistic for children in other situations. Youth may therefore benefit from both andragogical and pedagogical perspectives, depending on their current learning needs.

## **2.5 INFLUENCES ON THE INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PROCESS**

Apart from the processes of growing up and going through different developmental and life stages, there are numerous other factors one must keep in mind when the uniqueness of the individual learning process is considered. The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (2009:37) stresses the importance of a healthy environment:

"It is also important for children to grow up in an environment that will influence their characters in a positive manner. These would be communities who promote and protect acceptable moral standards. Negative influences such as gangsterism, drug abuse, family violence and other social ills should be avoided at all costs."

Bergevin (1967), as well as Merriam and Caffarella (1999), view the living environment and learners' relation to it as a strong influence on the development of individuals. The individual is a member of society and the composition of society is an important factor in the provision of learning

opportunities for learners of all ages. Maclachlan (2007:4) agrees that learning is essentially a social activity. These include past learning experiences and the mediating effect of family influences upon them, as well as the norms and values of the social networks that individuals belong to. Kennedy (in Mezirow & Associates 1990) emphasizes the role the particular social group plays in the individual's development of a self-identity and self-interest. The social group also shapes the way a particular person views the world and all social relationships. The filters through which one perceives the world are products of personal and group history (Kennedy in Mezirow & Associates 1990). As Bergevin (1967) explains, there are always influences that limit the growth and progress of individuals and society. People also often struggle to release themselves from their external as well as self-imposed limitations and restrictions. Chappel, Rhodes, Solomon, Tennant and Yates (2003:127) mention a few factors which could cause youth to be "at risk", including poor academic ability, unemployment, homelessness, dysfunctional family life, ethnicity, and poverty.

In order to explain and understand individuals' ability and eagerness to learn, I will look at the importance of human agency (see Section 2.5.1), the relevance of positive supportive factors such as resilience (see Section 2.5.2); intellectual capacity and emotional well-being (see Section 2.5.2.1) and significant others (see Section 2.5.2.2). I will also address life experiences in relation with risk factors (see Section 2.5.3), such as environmental deprivation (see Section 2.5.3.1); delinquency, crime and violence (see Section 2.5.3.2); substance abuse (see Section 2.5.3.3); and gangsterism (see Section 2.5.3.4).

### **2.5.1 Agency**

From a life course perspective, Small and Memmo (2004), Biesta and Tedder (2007) and Ecclestone (2007), see agency as the ability to exert control over and give direction to one's life by making decisions and through enacting them on the world. Agency is also seen as the ways in which individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance (Ecclestone 2007:8). Agency is the capacity for autonomous social action, the individual's ability to operate independently of determining constraints of social structure and to make his/her own free choices while engaging with the social structure. Brookes (2004) and Ecclestone (2007:8) view agency as requiring self-direction, self-efficacy and opportunities to exercise autonomy, as well as a desire to shape a specific field or context, by drawing from various cultural recourses. Emirbayer and Mische (1998:963) explain:

"Agency should be understood as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and 'acted out' in the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects with the contingencies of the moment.)"

Ecclestone (2007) draws on Bourdieu's notion of habitus in explaining that adults bring to the learning process particular dispositions that both create and reinforce expectations and activities in a new habitus. Bourdieu's notion of habitus is explained by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2004:22) as "...what is done in a particular place, and what is hardened into relative permanence; a practice in the sense of habitual way of acting." According to Brookes (2004), learners' relationships with their parents, siblings, teachers and peers will affect the types of support received as new learning challenges are encountered during life transition stages.

According to Biesta and Tedder (2007), agency is not individual capacity that people have, but something that a person has to achieve in and through engagement with particular temporal-relational contexts for-action; it is thus something that people do. Agency is rooted in achievements, understandings and patterns of action and is therefore not something that people possess as an attribute but something they do in different contexts. Warren and Webb (2007) stress that agency is not simply a voluntary act, but the making and taking of an identity ("...the ways in which the self is represented and understood in dynamic, multidimensional and evolving ways.", Ecclestone 2007:5) which is shaped while individuals negotiate their 'learning careers' in circumstances not of their own making. Biesta and Tedder (2007) further explain that, by regarding agency achievement, it is possible to understand why an individual can achieve agency in one situation but not in another (e.g. to survive on the streets but not coping in normal society). Biesta and Tedder (2007) reiterate that agency builds upon achievements, understandings and patterns of action. Although agency is involved with the past, it has a projective element with the intention to bring about a future that is different from the present and the past in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations (Biesta & Tedder 2007).

There are structural factors (such as social class, economic and occupational conditions, religion, gender, ethnicity, subculture, etc.) which seem to limit or influence the interplay of individual efforts and available resources as they present opportunities that individuals have to achieve agency (Small & Memmo 2004; Biesta & Tedder 2007). Young offenders have a limited perception of the possible self, and membership of a tight network of similar persons limit the possibilities of escaping the conditions of social exclusion. Their horizons are constrained, opportunities are limited, personal choice reduced to fate and agency is restricted (Boeck, Fleming & Kemshall 2006). Biesta and Tedder (2007) hold that the ability to change the composition of our agentic orientations may help us to engage more effectively or satisfactorily with events in our lives in such a way that we are able to influence the diverse contexts in which we act and alter our own structuring relationship to the contexts of action. Ecclestone (2007:9) concludes that agency cannot be divorced from structural factors since key social divisions shape opportunities for access

to economic, social and symbolic forms of capital, thereby framing possibilities and restricting social mobility.

According to Kumpfer and Bluth (2004:682), there is a limited type of human agency, where individuals can choose and influence the types of environmental stimuli to have an effect on them. Adolescents who develop early autonomy and choose to live outside the realm of adult authority are capable of making rational choices in their lives (Tyler, Tyler, Tommasello & Connolly 1992: 208, 209). Kumpfer and Bluth (2004: 682, 683) report that some youth have been found to exercise self-agency by escaping rejecting, violent, or chaotic homes and finding more positive surroundings.

### **2.5.2 Resilience**

Du Toit (2005:49) and Bottrell (2007:602) hold that resilient youth in marginalized circumstances who have not benefited from close adult guidance, demonstrate skills and persistence in maintaining a sense of agency by countering negative labels and limiting prospects given to them by others during their developing years. They actually become very self-reliant because they have had to learn to depend on themselves. Kumpfer and Bluth (2004: 682, 683) conclude that some resilient youth are not just susceptible pawns of negative, delinquent, or drug-using peers, but also choose to associate with others who will affect them in positive ways. Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:49) explain that resilient youth develop personal autonomy and they believe they can make things better, even if life is difficult. As an example, Venter (2001) and Kumpfer and Bluth (2004:685) refer to some children of alcoholic parents who seemingly do not manifest negative tendencies like other children of alcoholic parents, because some children are resilient and have the ability to adapt well to their circumstances and to grow into and through adolescence quite well. These children succeed in accepting their parents' problems, while at the same time distancing themselves from addiction and substance abusing family members.

Arrington and Wilson (2000:225) define resilience as follows:

“The lack of developmental impairment, or adaptation, despite exposure to risk, maintenance of adjustment despite the effects of negative life events, and achievement beyond expectations given the amount of stress experienced. More often than not, resilience is viewed simply as adaptation despite risk.”

According to Arrington and Wilson (2000), Brooks and Goldstein (2003) and Bottrell (2007), resilience is the capacity to deal successfully with the obstacles in the roads that confront us while

maintaining a straight and true path towards life's goals by displaying developmental competencies in achieving positive life outcomes in spite of risk and the existence of inhibiting environments.

Scholars like Moffit (1993), Wachs (2000), Werner (2000), Small and Memmo (2004), Werner and Johnson (2004) and Kitano and Lewis (2005) describe resilient people as follows: Resilient young children show signs of early coping strategies, planning how to manage what happens to them. Even young children may protect themselves by withdrawing from a dysfunctional family situation and finding outside support. Older resilient children actively plan how to cope with events and continue to develop a sense of greater control, impulse control, and independence. Peers and adults are fond of resilient children who tend to be sociable and assertive, and who exhibit good communication and problem-solving skills. They flexibly use a range of coping strategies and reach out for support from teachers and peers. Resilient adolescents and adults possess an internal locus of control, a more positive self-concept, and greater social maturity, nurturance, empathy, sense of responsibility, and independence. They have the ability to analyze specific factors in a stressful situation and make effective choices. These characteristics often are associated with an individual's innate abilities, unique temperament, or the result of an individual's developmental history.

Although resilience does not mean invulnerability, resilient persons are aware of their strengths and limitations and have empathy for others (Hippe 2004:240). Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:41) reflect that resilience not only involves inner strength in the young person, but support from those in the environment. Youth's relationship with others, such as the family, is an important part of resilience (Richmond & Beardslee 1988 in Arrington & Wilson 2000:225; Godsall, Jurkovic, Emshoff, Anderson & Stanwyck 2004:790). According to Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:44), resilience develops naturally, as children are able to meet growth needs. Kumpfer and Bluth (2004:674) stress that youth will more easily become resilient survivors in times of severe adversity when they can create meaning for life through goals, dreams and a desire to use their talents to make their world a better place.

On the other hand, overwhelming stressors such as homelessness and abuse wear down even the most resilient children over time (Kumpfer & Bluth 2004:686; Small & Memmo 2004:4). Children and youth generally are able to withstand the stress of one or two family problems in their lives; however, when family problems continually bombard them, their probability of becoming substance users increases (Kumpfer & Bluth 2004:676). Children cannot make themselves enduringly resilient, remaining robust despite relentless onslaughts from the environment (Luthar 2003:532). Small and Memmo (2004:7) add that although the likelihood of problem behaviour steadily decreases as the number of assets an individual possesses increase, the presence of even one

risk factor can double or triple the occurrence of problem behaviour, even among youth who report many assets. Small and Memmo (2004) concludes that although efforts can be made to develop resilient characteristics in children and youth, our capacity to intervene sometimes is limited. Characteristics that have strong genetic basis or that result from a long developmental history may be less amendable to intervention.

Recognizing resilience in marginal youth requires appreciation of relative context, cultural options and understanding from alternative centres. Such shifts may help to identify youth potential rather than transgression, and point to the kinds of interventions which may strengthen rather than correct participation in a range of learning communities and contexts (Bottrell 2007:611). Brendtro, Brokenleg and Bodkem (2002:27) look with fresh eyes at resilience in troublesome youth: "The child of the streets has not yet given up, only chosen to assert his independence." They continue that street children have chosen liberty and freedom on the streets above enslavement in a pseudo-home and misery. Referring to troublesome youth, Arrington and Wilson (2000:222) emphasize that they do exhibit competency in a wide variety of behavioural and mental health outcomes in spite of the negative circumstances in which they develop (e.g. poverty, socio economic status). Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:40) report on research studies following high-risk children into adulthood. According to these studies, 60% of these children eventually made positive adjustments. Benard (1997) supports this notion. Even children exposed to severe trauma can turn their lives around if they can find supportive persons (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005:40).

It seems clear to me that, in order for a person to achieve human agency and thus be able to act upon positive personal choices, resiliency attributes have to be instilled and nurtured. In the following paragraphs I will report on literature on the following aspects which may, if developed, assist youth from marginalised circumstances to become more resilient: their intellectual capacity and emotional well-being and the level of positive interaction with significant others.

### **2.5.2.1 Intellectual capacity and emotional well-being**

For marginalized youth, school is problematic in a variety of ways that are educational, relational and social. In the context of barriers to academic success, these children may use 'school is boring' as euphemism for the pressures, expectations of failure and inability to change the situation (Bottrell 2007:604). Considering to the important role that social and emotional support play in the shaping of an individual's point of reference and level of achievement, I deemed it necessary to investigate different forms of intelligence(s), which may be relevant to my study. I will briefly refer to different views on intelligence by scholars from the previous and current century, steering my argument towards my research question. It is important to note that this study is not about measuring intelligence or about providing a clinical or educational psychological view on the respondents. What I am trying to establish, is the relevance of intellectual capacity and emotional well-being with regard to the shaping of an individual's predisposition to learning.

Throughout the literature it is recognized that children's and adolescents' functioning in school is inextricably linked with their sense of belonging and connection to the school environment and their relationships with peers and teachers within this environment (Schonert-Reichl 2000:9). Corcoran and Nichols-Casebolt (2004:219) emphasize that in most studies of at-risk children, the importance of children's perception of being safe at school and having supportive teachers, those who convey caring and regard for their students with high expectations for children's scholastic ability, is being confirmed. The protective effect of school relationships may persist well beyond elementary school, with early child-teacher relationships predicting long-term outcomes (Corcoran & Nichols-Casebolt 2004:219). Research has shown that engaging in out-of-school activities and availability of community supports has positive outcomes for children in terms of educational attainment and health status (Corcoran & Nichols-Casebolt 2004:219). Furthermore, youth need opportunities to learn to make decisions and to experience personal power, for they hate boredom and naturally seek challenging, goal-directed activity (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005: 29, 30). The quest to become competent is a central motivation behind much human behaviour (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005:47).

According to Kitano and Lewis (2005), average to above average intelligence contributes to positive outcomes among high-risk children and youth, though alone it is insufficient. Intelligence (IQ) is a protective factor, producing higher school performance despite life stress and more effective problem solving in peer social situations. Conversely, low IQ is a central risk factor for anti-social behaviour, over and above socio-economic status and race (Wachs 2000). Wachs (2000) cites evidence that the average juvenile offender has an IQ an average of one-half standard deviation lower than youth without a criminal history. Moreover, youth with IQ one standard deviation lower than normal are at triple the risk for the development of conduct disorders. Werner (in Kitano & Lewis 2005) adds that most longitudinal studies of resilient children and youth report

that intelligence (especially communication and problem solving skills) and scholastic competence (especially reading skills) are associated positively with the ability to overcome adversity. Ungar (2001), Kitano and Lewis (2005) and Werner (in Kitano & Lewis 2005) conclude that adolescents with high risk who possess higher intelligence may be better able to cope with adverse life events than their peers with lower intelligence and that successful academic experiences that lead to identification with school can operate as a deterrent to delinquent interests.

Since Binet developed the concept of “intelligence quotient” (IQ), (a value obtained by dividing the child’s mental age by the actual age of the child, and multiplying the result by 100), researchers have tried to find answers to questions concerning the role played by heredity (genotype) in intelligence, and the parts of the brain that are involved in cognitive processes. Researchers use actual behavioural measurements to understand the structure of human abilities (Cattell 1987). Gardner (1999), like many other scholars before him, asks the question whether the environment predominantly shapes intelligence (or intelligences), or whether it is inherited. Olson (in Sternberg & Spear-Swirling 1999) addresses the notion that intelligence is adopted by children from their parents; also that reading disability often tends to run in families, due to both genetic factors and shared family environments. Children acquire knowledge and skills, like language, from their surroundings. Mezirow (1991) explains that the ways in which and the culture within which the individual grows up, as well as ways in which the individual is being taught, form his or her learning. Cranton (1994:27) further elaborates that it may be difficult for people to move out of their meaning perspectives, which are the products of previous learning, the ways in which they grew up, as well as the ways in which individuals view themselves.

Luthar (2003:531) reports that the quality of a child’s early environment is a better predictor of school competence, than his or her IQ. Werner and Johnson (2004:714) claim that better educated parents have healthier children with fewer handicaps and absences from school and who have better problem-solving and reading skills. Cross (1981) holds that the environment within which and the social background against which individuals are raised influence their attitudes towards learning and that positive attitudes towards education seem contagious and individuals become interested in learning if others around them are engaging in learning activities. The more formal education people have, the more they are likely to continue their learning. The opposite is also true, resulting in individuals who seem to be uninterested in learning when surrounded by people who are not interested in learning.

Private education in the United Kingdom is an example of how important educational environment is. According to France (2007:89), it is still mainly the upper middle class who pay for their children

to attend some of the best schools in the country and they are willing to pay for advantage if it is necessary. France (2007:89) continues that evidence shows this is a major form of social reproduction for the middle class. Not only does it lead to access to the best universities and job opportunities, but it also schools young people in middle-class values while also giving them social networks that will benefit them in future (France 2007:89). Negative and punishing learning experiences during childhood influence the attitude of youth towards education (Cross 1981). According to Moffitt (1993), parents and children resemble each other in their cognitive ability. Therefore, children with cognitive and temperamental disadvantages are unfortunately not generally born into supportive environments, nor are such children assigned to environments that are conducive to learning. Children who are most in need of remedial cognitive stimulation most probably have parents who may be least able to provide such stimulation. Moreover, families whose members have below-average cognitive capacities will often be least able financially to obtain professional intervention or optimal remedial schooling for their at-risk children (Moffitt 1993).

People are dependent on their acquired knowledge, skills and values to be successful in a particular society. Max-Neef (1991) holds that language is not only the expression of culture, but it also generates culture. If language is poor, culture is poor. Cattell (1987) adds that it is inhumane to develop a complicated society and then to imprison individuals with lower levels of capacity to learn to a feeling of inadequacy, and a status of unemployment which may lead to delinquency.

Hynd, Clinton and Hiemenz (1999:60-79) refer to the reputable work of Sternberg, *Perspectives on learning disabilities: Biological, cognitive, contextual* (1999) in pointing out that environmental factors may affect the normal scope and sequence of brain development in persons with learning disabilities. Siegel (1999:227-249) refers to the reputable work of Sternberg, *Perspectives on learning disabilities: Biological, cognitive, contextual* (1999) and emphasizes that people with learning disabilities often have trouble with self-esteem and self-concept. As they proceed in school, these people experience more and more failure, resulting in psychological problems and even antisocial behaviour. According to Cicchetti and Toth (1995), structural-organizational perspectives of child development maintain that there is general coherence in the unfolding of competence over time, such that early success sets the stage for subsequent success or failure as future challenges arise. This continuity is strongly evident in the academic domain: dropouts and low-achieving high-school students typically have histories of poor academic performance (Cairns, Cairns and Neckerman 1989; Simner & Barnes 1991). Looking at socio-economic factors, France (2007:88) argues that working-class young people are more likely to leave education at the minimum age than their middle-class counterparts; working-class young people are also more

likely to be streamed into poor schools, to be in lower streams within schools, and to 'choose' a vocational route, both at school and after school.

South Africa clearly faces huge challenges concerning the dire state of affairs in public schools. The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (2009:79) reports that 12.6% of children aged 7-13 years were not in the appropriate grades for their age in 2004. Moreover, the highest dropout rate in 2003 was found in grade 1, where 10% of all grade one learners in South Africa had dropped out of school. Dropout rates for the other grades at the primary stage of education varied between 1.7% for grade 2 and 4.9% for grade 7 in 2003. After grade 9, one in five learners dropped out at grades 10 and 11. Even more alarmingly, in 2006 an estimated 446,568 children in South Africa between the ages of 7 and 17 were not enrolled in any educational facility (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa 2009:83).

According to Cairns, et al. (1989), being more than one year older than the modal age for grade has been established as a robust index of risk for dropout. Lynam, Moffit & Stouthamer-Loeber (1993), and Luthar and Blatt (1995) agree that there is no evidence that intelligence is an independent factor in dropout and academic outcomes, but that previous academic performance is the strongest predictor of later performance and that school achievement appears to mediate the role of intelligence in positive school-based outcomes. Lispchitz-Elhawi and Izthaky (2005:339) mention that self-esteem relates to academic adjustment and that low self-esteem leads to the use of maladaptive achievement strategies. Scholars seem to agree on the importance of intelligence (IQ) and scholastic achievement within an environment that is conducive to learning, in shaping an individual's experience of, and predisposition to learning. A person with lower intelligence, who has a history of poor academic results and who does not get the necessary support, is more at risk of dropping out of school, which in turn leaves the person at higher risk of delinquency.

Gardner (1999; 2006) looks at human development from a new perspective, and challenges the existing definitions of intelligence. He shifts the focus on intelligence from something that can be seen or counted, to a view that intelligences are potentials that will or will not be activated, depending upon the values of a particular culture, and the personal decisions made by individuals, as well as the influence of significant others on the individual's life. He then proposes the existence of seven separate human intelligences. Gardner's theory implies that all people are equipped with all of these intellectual potentials, which can be mobilised and developed according to the individual's own inclinations and the preferences of the particular cultures within which the individual functions. The relevance of Gardner's *multiple intelligences* with regard to the youth in my study lies in the question whether or not these young people have had the opportunity to

develop their individual different intelligences in order to reach their individual learning potential. It also brings to light the importance of educators and therapists to focus on learners' individual strengths and, by doing so, to assist in the development of the learners' self-esteem and attitude towards learning. Like Gardner, Goleman (1995) also challenges the sole importance of mere cognitive intelligence or IQ in the performance level of individuals. He introduces *emotional intelligence* as a distinguishing factor, which implies that without emotional soundness, a person will have difficulty to succeed in most aspects of life. The relevance of Goleman's theory with regard to the youth in my study lies in the question whether or not their acquired levels of emotional intelligence or emotional soundness influenced the predispositions to learning of these young people. Brendtro et al. (2002:63) elaborate by claiming that when some children and youth are frustrated in their attempts to achieve, they may seek to prove their competence in distorted ways, such as skill in delinquent activity. Others have learned to retreat from difficult challenges by giving up in futility.

Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:23-27) underline the importance of experiences in a person's development. Children who are treated with love and respect in an environment of beauty come to believe that they are of value, but those who feel unwanted and rejected respect neither themselves nor others. Goleman (2006:61) refers to Darwin who in 1872 saw every emotion as a predisposition to act; to feel any emotion stirs the related urge to act: fear, to freeze or flee; anger, to fight; joy, to embrace. Goleman explains that individuals who lack self-control struggle to control their impulses or emotions. A person who lacks this ability has no or little self-restraint or compassion. Anxious, angry, or depressed students struggle to learn and intelligence cannot be realised when emotions rule. Goleman (1995) says that emotional skills like self-control, zeal, persistence, as well as the ability to motivate oneself, can be taught to children, giving them a better chance to put to use whatever intellectual potential they have inherited genetically. Goleman (1995; 2006) also points out that without the emotional skills mentioned above there is no or little empathy and ability to sense the needs or despair of others. Such an individual lacks the capacity to care and the capacity to respond compassionately to another's distress. He also stresses that empathy is the prime inhibitor of human cruelty. During the first three years, the human brain grows to about two thirds its full size and evolves in complexity at a greater rate than it ever will again. Key types of learning take place, with emotional learning foremost among them. Childhood and adolescence are critical life stages for learning emotional and social lessons at home and at school. Therefore, people in a child's life have an opportunity to leave imprints on such child's neural circuitry, as the shaping of the frontal cortex of the human brain, which deals with emotions, continues to being moulded anatomically into early adulthood. When parents act with empathy and are responsive to a child's needs, they build a basic sense of security. Children struggle with feelings of despair when they are being emotionally neglected. The ways in which youth experience a sense of hope versus hopelessness, as well as an attitude of optimism versus

pessimism, may affect their level of hope and optimism negatively or positively. Goleman (1995; 2006) concludes that one can learn optimism and hope, as well as helplessness and despair.

According to Brendtro, et al. (2002:52-121), discouraged children show their conflict and despair in obvious ways. Moffitt (1993) points out that parents and children resemble each other in terms of temperament and personality. Thus, parents of children who are difficult to manage often lack the necessary psychological and physical resources to cope constructively with a difficult child. According to Goleman (1995), the risks are greatest for those children whose parents are grossly inept: immature, abusing drugs, depressed or chronically angry, or simply aimless and living chaotic lives. As emotionally neglected children go through life, they are more likely to have cognitive difficulties in learning, more likely to be aggressive and unpopular with their peers, more prone to depression, and more likely to get into trouble with the law and to commit violent crimes.

Realizing the influence of a growing child's environment and parental care or the lack thereof on an individual's emotional soundness, it must be kept in mind that victims of a devastating trauma and uncontrollable stress may never be the same again (Goleman 1995). Helplessness takes over the mental state of individuals who experience uncontrollable stress when they feel that they could do nothing or that they have no control over the catastrophe. Some of the negative psychological symptoms long noted in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as described by (Dryden-Edwards n.d.), are the inability to feel pleasure and a general emotional numbness, a sense of being cut off from life or from concern about others' feelings. Up to 100% of children who have seen a parent killed do develop PTSD, and more than one third of youths who witness community violence will suffer from the disorder. People suffering from PTSD have a loss of interest in important activities, struggle to concentrate, feel all alone, and are unable to have normal emotions or feel that there is nothing to look forward to in the future. These changes to the brain become lasting problems when the brain develops, so that these feelings become set predispositions (Dryden-Edwards n.d.). The relevance of the occurrence of PTSD to this study is the fact that youths like the respondents had to, in different degrees of intensity, deal with trauma in their developing years.

Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:48) report that successfully intelligent youth seek out and follow positive role models, while they also observe people who fail and then make sure they do things differently. Mezirow (1991) reiterates that individuals are products of their knowledge, upbringing, background and psychological development and therefore an individual's values, assumptions and beliefs can be distorted or invalid. Dobrin (2002) refers to the philosopher Aristotle who suggested that one should find a virtuous person and watch what he does. Both Freudians and behaviourists have asserted that acting morally requires the suppression of our natural tendencies and that virtuous or moral action becomes a conscious decision (Hass 1998). Building on the importance of

multiple and emotional intelligences, Gardner (1999) predicts the inclusion of a “moral intelligence” into his multiple intelligence theory. The term *moral intelligence* implies that we must use our moral self in an intelligent manner (Hass 1998). Gardner (1999) explains that morality is about personality, individuality, will and character. Moral intelligence is the ability to understand and feel another person’s concerns (Lennick & Kiel 2005; Goleman 2006). According to Borba (2001), as well as Lennick and Kiel (2005), moral intelligence consists of the personal, social, mental, emotional, and moral skills that make up solid character and guide moral behaviours. It comprises the ability to differentiate right from wrong, and to apply universal human principles to our values and actions. Universal principles refer to those beliefs about human conduct that are common to all cultures around the world, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religious belief or location. Although very young children exhibit virtues like friendliness, spontaneous sharing, sympathy, and compassion (Hass 1998), Dobrin (2002) explains that the natural inclination of humans to act virtuous or moral may be suppressed or misguided. Cattell (1987) underlines the importance of morals and values in relation to intelligence and states that, without proper values and moral standards, intelligence is of no use to society. Lennick and Kiel (2005) and Goleman (2006) conclude that one can put any intelligence to a constructive or a destructive use and those individual decisions on how to deploy intelligences is a question of values. When considering the evidence at hand in this study, one comes to question the levels of moral intelligence of youths like the respondents.

Whether emotional, social, moral and multiple intelligences are as measurable as cognitive intelligence or not, it is clear that individual differences in this regard do influence people’s behaviour, which in turn may influence individual learning processes and predispositions to learning.

#### **2.5.2.2 Significant others**

Luthar (2003:530-544) explains that resilient adaptation rests on good relationships and that early family relationships where there are strong connections with at least one supportive adult, profoundly shape children’s capacities to good interpersonal relationships later in life. Needs for attachment are met by supportive relationships in the family, peer group, school, and community. Living in mutual concern with significant others gives life meaning and purpose (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005:29-47). Maslow (1954; 1996; 1998) and Lispchiz-Elhawi and Izthaky (2005:340) agree that family is a primary source of perceived self-esteem (the feeling of worth, pride, influence, importance) for children and adolescents, as individuals’ self-esteem is dependent on esteem from others.

Studies by scholars like Luthar (2003:528), Corcoran and Nichols-Casebolt (2004:216), Godsall et al. (2004:790), and Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:28), have shown the central importance of family factors in promoting resilience. Family factors identified include healthy environment and living conditions, safety and stability in the home, monitoring and structure, attachment, and parental involvement in schooling. Children need trusting relationships with adults and peers who can provide emotional support and who look beneath their problems to show empathy and concern. Authoritative parenting, defined as warmth and involvement, but also firmness and consistency in developing rules and limits that are developmentally suitable with appropriately high expectations, has been associated with positive outcomes like mental and physical health in order to sustain the social and intellectual development of young children. According to Godsall, et al. (2004:790), families of resilient children enable them to develop autonomy, responsibility, and problem-solving and relational skills.

According to Luthar (2003:528) and Kumpfer and Bluth (2004:682), in the face of adversity, the child of any “caring other” can learn to perceive, interpret and surmount threats, challenges, or difficult environments in order to construct better environments, as the child develops adaptive emotion regulation patterns, flexible problem-solving skills, and an expectation of success. Functional family environments, which reflect considerable resilience of parents and of family systems, are strongly protective for children in buffering them from many chronic adversities.

The importance of significant others and that of extended family members in the lives of children growing up in adversity, is stressed by scholars like Werner and Smith (1982), Kumpfer and Bluth (2004:685) and Werner and Johnson (2004:710). For younger children in poverty, the presence of alternative caregivers and supportive persons, such as grandparents, older siblings, child-care providers, or nursery school teachers, is an important resiliency mechanism. Adolescents, too, seem to benefit from available support. Strong extended families can provide additional positive role models and support for high-risk children and youth to help buffer the trauma of their family life. Werner and Johnson (2004:710-716) explain the above-mentioned argument at the hand of resilient children of alcoholics, who all had at least one person in their lives who accepted them unconditionally, regardless of temperamental idiosyncrasies, physical attractiveness, or intelligence. While the most predictive risk factor for drug abuse has repeatedly been found to be associated with drug-abusing peers, the strongest protective factors for multiple negative outcomes (e.g. delinquency, drug abuse, school failure, or teenage pregnancy) are parent/child attachment or bonding, parental supervision or discipline, and communication of family (Kumpfer & Bluth 2004:675). Werner and Johnson (2004:706,707) continue that individuals who coped effectively with the trauma of growing up in an alcoholic family and who became competent, confident, and caring adults relied on a significantly larger number or sources of support in their childhood and

youth to rise above their circumstances. Werner and Smith (1982) and Luthar (2003:529) highlight the importance of adult neighbours who offer structure and monitoring for children experiencing risk in their families. High support and cohesion among neighbours, a sense of belonging to the community, and proactive supervision of youth by other adults, as well as involvement in structured after school activities are protective factors.

Cohen (2006) concludes that, in order to be able to work and love as adults, lifelong learners are dependent on social-emotional competencies and ethical dispositions, as well as safe, caring, participatory and responsive school systems and homes, where parents and educators are active and supportive partners.

### **2.5.3 Risk**

According to Schonert-Reichl (2000) and Kerka (2003), 'at-risk' children and youth are viewed as those who fail in mainstream schooling and who are unsuccessful in making the transition to work and adult life. Consequently, they are unlikely to make a full contribution to active society, because their learning styles, learning disabilities, or life experiences may be factors in low achievement or behaviour considered unacceptable. According to Kerka (2003), at-risk students' experience of isolation, marginalization, and failure contribute to a lack of optimism; they are disaffected with schooling because they cannot see an authentic connection between learning and future life and work. Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:29) warn that the popular use of suspension and expulsion in schools cut youth off from normal relationships, which leave them with a sense of hopelessness. Ungar (2001:140) claims that youth who fail or are at risk of failing at school and adolescents who experience status deprivations among their peers are the ones most likely to be delinquent. Brendtro and Larson (2004:197) report on research done in a detention centre where teens were asked if they had any hopes or dreams for their future. They quote one boy's response: "No. That's why we're here." They conclude that, without a sense of purpose, the lives of these young people are mostly about deviance control.

Risk is generally defined as a psychosocial adversity or event that would be considered a stressor to most people and that may hinder normal functioning (Masten 1994 in Arrington & Wilson 2000:223). Some of these stressors include single-parent families (McMillen & Kaufman 1997), learning difficulties, poverty, social relationships, and family and school contexts (Schonert-Reichl 2003:3) or the interrelation between the school, student and family, and community (Arrington & Wilson 2000:224). Other risk factors listed by Luthar (2003:529) include witnessing of and victimization by community violence, exposure to antisocial peers and experiences of racial discrimination. Some people have psychological problems that push them towards a life of crime

and rule breaking, an approach called 'developmental criminology' by France (2007:30). Multiple risk factors affect child and youth development. France (2007:30) identifies risk factors like dysfunctional families, broken homes and poverty. Garbarino (1992) claims that poverty correlates with increased risk for child abuse and neglect. Poverty also significantly relates to poorer cognitive outcomes for children and adolescents of poor families are less likely to graduate from school than those who never lived in a poor family (Garbarino 1992). The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (2009:45) puts poverty experienced by South African children into perspective by claiming that in 2006 more than 2.6 million children (14%) lived in backyard dwellings or shacks in informal settlements.

Lispchitz-Elhawi and Izthaky (2005:330) argue that children and adolescents who are exposed to abuse or neglect have low self-esteem and adolescents with low self-esteem show a general tendency toward adjustment problems such as behavioural problems and low academic achievement. Arrington and Wilson (2000:224) add that environments in which youth function make them vulnerable because social resources are lacking, stress is high and institutions are not supported. High unemployment and the lack of employment opportunities contribute to fighting and drug abuse among adolescents (Bellair & Roscigno 2000). Corcoran and Nichols-Casebolt (2004:220) and Luthar (2003:529) agree that children from poor quality and under resourced schools are more likely to drop out, have higher rates of teen pregnancy and higher rates of behaviour problems. The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (2009:86) puts forward some alarming findings: In 2004 there were about 16% unqualified or under-qualified primary school teachers, while in secondary education those not properly qualified represented 7% of all teachers in South Africa. Moreover, only 7.2% of public schools had libraries that were stocked with books and other materials.

Cohler, Scott and Musick (1995 in Arrington & Wilson 2000) and Kitano and Lewis (2005), agree that culture interacts with psychological development and adversity so that people experience risk differently. Schonert-Reichl (2000:11) concludes that the 'at risk' label cannot be seen as a fixed attribute of the individual, because the circumstances in which it may occur are dynamic, relative and not absolute; it is the result of environmental, as well as individual factors and it is dependent on context.

Referring to the view on children and youth 'at risk' by Schonert-Reichl (2000) and Kerka (2003), as noted in the first line of this section, I will now discuss risk factors that seem important in the lives of youths like the respondents. First, the role of environmental deprivation will be discussed (see Section 2.5.3.1), followed by the role of delinquency, crime and violence (see Section 2.5.3.2).

Substance abuse (see Section 2.5.3.3) and gangsterism (see Section 2.5.3.4) will conclude this section on risk factors.

### **2.5.3.1 Environmental deprivation**

Although this study did not try to determine a causal relationship between variables such as community of origin and the respondents' predispositions to learning, the reported literature does provide a backdrop against which the life stories of the respondents can be reflected. The main purpose of this section is to launch an inquiry into factors, which might be in a more or lesser degree fundamental in shaping the respondents' predispositions to and motivation for learning. By doing so, a better understanding of the individual learning processes of the respondents may be reached.

According to The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (2009:33), children growing in poverty have a high probability to become poor adults and in turn, to have poor children. Children who have been malnourished because of poverty are known to have slowed down cognitive development. In addition, poor children are the most vulnerable when education is a matter of concern as they often cannot afford payment of school fees, uniforms, and thus risk remaining outside the education system. To add to this bleak picture of South African children who are at risk, The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (2009:98) reports that in 2008, 1.5 million children had become orphaned and vulnerable. A study of street children in the Cape Town metropolitan area in 2000 estimated that 782 children were living, working or begging on the streets. Street children are vulnerable because of the conditions that caused them to leave home and they experience a variety of risks to their physical, emotional, social and cognitive development. The majority of homeless children are between the ages of 10 and 17 years (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa 2009:98).

Olivier (2006) identifies environmental deprivation as a core reason for persons not reaching their potential through formal education. Brendtro, et al. (2002:124) caution that delinquent youth should not carry the blame for their behaviour alone. They are reflecting values of societal institutions, including schools designed so that some young people achieve at the expense of others. Furthermore, in the absence of good family relationships and care, as well as a healthy environment and living conditions, difficult and aggressive behaviour, victimization, homelessness, depression, and law-breaking behaviour can occur. Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:21) make it clear that children develop best in environments free from the fear of physical distress or harm. For positive development, children must have their physical, emotional, and developmental needs met by caring adults (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005:22). When caretakers fail to meet a child's most basic

needs, the child learns that they are unpredictable or unreliable. This leads to some children reaching beyond their families in search of substitute attachments with other adults or peers. Those more seriously damaged become “relationship-resistant”, viewing even friendly, helpful adults with deep distrust. Expecting rejection, they employ protective behaviours learnt in prior encounters with threatening persons (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005:22). Luthar (2003:529) holds that the negative effects of a disadvantaged environment seem to be more powerful contributors to child achievement at every age than the personality characteristics of the child. Tartar and Mezzich (1992:166) refer to the reputable work of Kumpfer and Bluth (2004:678) that children with difficult temperaments are often shunned by family members, teachers and peers, hence pushing them to the “outer limits of normative social interaction” and setting the stage for deviance. On the other hand, Luthar (2003:530) claims that children’s own characteristics are likely to be less influential than aspects of the environment in promoting and sustaining resilience. Luthar (2003:520-531) reports that chronic poverty, parental mental illness and family disruptions such as divorce, have been documented as diverse negative effects on efficient parenting. Among young children with high parental psychopathology (one parent an antisocial alcoholic, two parents currently alcoholic, or both), the incidence of high adjustment problems is almost five times that of children in low-risk families. Youth exposed to multiple early family adversities show almost twice as much serious psychopathology as their low-risk counterparts and infants with insecure attachment to their mothers were more than twice as likely to show later maladjustment as those with secure early attachments (Luthar 2003:520-531). Bottrell (2007:611) adds that the difficulties of low-income families in making ends meet, the stresses and conflicts within families and manifestations of their not coping, especially parental substance abuse and family violence, are contexts of adversity faced by marginal youth. Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:32) draw attention to the fact that children who are overwhelmed by stress are in a state of ongoing crisis and when stress is managed ineptly, it intensifies conflict and pain for all involved.

According to Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:47), an array of evidence shows that humans possess a fundamental need to belong, which is fulfilled by frequent positive interactions with at least a few persons who share mutual concern. Belonging creates positive emotions, particularly pride, while rejection produces shame. Furthermore, Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:29-47) hold that positive values develop in a climate of mutual concern where individuals treat others as persons of value. Dawson (2007) adds that parents who reject their children cause a great deal of pain for such children and that this can have an effect on whether or not the children become aggressive. Brendtro, et al. (2002:65) and Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:29-47) continue that, if young people are not given the opportunity to give and receive kindness, they do not develop as caring persons; they remain self-centred and lack empathy. Some may be involved in pseudo-altruistic helping or they may be locked in servitude to someone who uses them. Others plunge into lifestyles of hedonism and narcissism (Brendtro, et al. 2002:65; Brendtro & Du Toit 2005:29-47).

Dawson (2007) relates violent crimes committed by youths in the South African context to the parents and other adults in these children's lives. Luthar (2003:520-531) warns that early onset of maltreatment reduces the ability of children to maintain an internal locus of control. Menninger (in Brendtro et al. 2002:9) sees "mistreated, abandoned, rejected, wounded children" as growing up in environments where the seeds of discouragement had been planted. As these children develop, they encounter increasing difficulties in social and emotional adjustment. Capozzoli and McVey (2000) and Burton (2008 [b]) add that physically or emotionally abused children are more likely to encounter problems in various developmental areas, including social development, relationships and schooling. Abusive parents may cause a child to become resentful, angry, and aggressive. Parental conflict may also socialize children into inappropriate interaction patterns, and family tension can heighten aggressive behaviour in a child. Children can act out their frustrations in a way that is not appropriate for society, even resulting in violent actions. Such youth are more likely to engage in crime, violence and antisocial behaviour. Alarming, as reported by the Integrated Regional Information (IRIN 2007), the majority of youth psychologically evaluated in juvenile detention centres had some degree of cognitive impairment due to childhood abuse and neglect.

According to Standage and Treasure (2002), situation and experience seem to determine motivation to learn. Fighting, drunkenness, and disorderly conduct – even violence – is not beyond the norms of some of the communities in which children and youth grow up. Some parents give their children direct and indirect messages that deviant behaviours such as these are tolerable (Ungar 2001:144). Heany and Harton (in Mezirow 1991) discuss the realities within deprived societies and the role the individual's meaning perspective can play in the motivation and process to be liberated from oppressing and depriving circumstances. These authors recognise an attitude of fatalism as oppressed and marginalised people's means of ignoring feelings of discontent and rebellion. Such groups seem to find it more bearable to accept the status quo than to oppose it and, after a while, the status quo becomes the meaning perspective of the individual. Bergevin (1967) adds that an individual cannot engage productively in learning when fear and shame are motivating factors.

When studying adults who successfully rose above suppressing childhood circumstances, Werner and Johnson (2004:716) found that among the most potent forces for positive change in this group were education at colleges, active involvement in church or religious communities, and meeting a supportive mate or friend and even moving away from home. Brendtro, et al. (2002:63) suggest a remedy for delinquent youth is involvement in an environment with abundant opportunities for meaningful achievement. Additional efforts that involve connecting youth to neighbourhood supports are needed. Particularly in situations where it is simply not feasible to change family

environments, enhancing community support systems can be invaluable in addressing youth's emotional needs for belonging and support (Luthar 2003:535).

### **2.5.3.2 Delinquency, crime and violence**

According to Kitano and Lewis (2005), culture influences how children and youth understand and cope with adversity. In this section, I will investigate the meaning of a culture of delinquency, crime and violence in terms of the development of youths like the respondents concerning their motivation for and predispositions to learning.

Internationally, crime and violence are seen as by-products of, among other factors, uneven or irregular economic development processes. Crime and violence may partly be the consequence of inequality and poverty (De Oliveria in Watts 1998; Bourguignon 1999). My study does not aim to provide an in-depth view of the political history of South Africa, although the South African history has relevance to the study, which cannot be ignored. I will therefore include a brief discussion on the significance of the political history of South Africa on the current contexts within which marginalised youth like the respondents in this study find themselves.

According to Burton (2008 [a]), much of today's crime and violence is the legacy of apartheid and he alleges that the activities of both the apartheid regime and the resistance movement created a culture of violence. The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007) explains that the implementation of the apartheid laws in South Africa accentuated the strain families were subject to, contributing to a historical legacy of a relatively large number of dysfunctional families. Gordon (2006) also refers to the "tot-system" (Afrikaans: dopstelsel) on farms, where the workers received part of their meagre pay in wine, which contributed to a culture of uncontrolled drinking. Gordon (2006) claims that the violence carried out because of apartheid laws help to explain the crime that characterizes the post-apartheid society. In the 1980's, the line between political and criminal violence was blurry. The forced removal of more than three million people deposited poor blacks in overcrowded slums. Unemployment was high, and when adults were working, they had little control over their children. A consequence of political conflict during apartheid was the criminalization of much of the poor black population (Gordon 2006). Murders and assaults reported to the police increased sharply in the 1960's and 1970's and criminal gangs multiplied. The townships outside Cape Town were murderous communities in the 1980's. An increase in the drug flow into the country began in that decade (Gordon 2006). Urbanization and labour market demands separated families and heightened poverty and insecurity. Burton (2008 [a]) concludes that a whole generation was brutalized.

While many South African families are nevertheless successful in nurturing emotionally well-rounded children, others are characterized by domestic violence or alcoholism, and this has a negative influence on children and tends to be associated with other problems, such as inconsistent or uncaring parenting, neglect or other abuse. Ultimately, the legacy of illiteracy is still part of the reality of these previously disadvantaged groups, where poverty and crime serves as evidence of an unjust society. Girls who become pregnant in their teenage years and who become single parents may be ill equipped to provide the type of care and nurturing to their children that supports healthy emotional, mental and physical development (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation 2007). According to The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa (2009:59), in 2002 two thirds of girls of 17 years and older had experienced sex, and of these girls, about half had experienced being pregnant.

Against this broad background, I would like to argue that the violence experienced by the black youth during apartheid may have, consciously or unconsciously, influenced the perceptions of their progeny and that a culture of criminality had developed because of the unfair practices of apartheid and the subsequent resistance thereto. Burton (2008 [a]) poses that the exclusion of youth from South Africa's formal reconciliation process represents a missed opportunity for them to debrief and to find psychosocial rehabilitation and healing, resulting in leaving them (today's parents) with bitterness, resentment and anger. Gordon (2006) furthermore explains that the end of South Africa's authoritarian regime has provided many criminal opportunities. The implicit promise of a better life after apartheid has not materialised for many people, and the resulting desperation and disillusionment may add a dimension of violence to what would otherwise be ordinary property crimes.

The relevance of South Africa's political history in this study lies in the acute presence of delinquent and criminal behaviour by youths like the respondents. According to Moffit (1993), international research has shown that the group between 12 and 18 years of age has the highest incidence of both offending and victimisation, and that adolescence is the most common age period for law breaking throughout the lifespan. A small number of the population (6-7% of young males) are responsible for 50-70% of all crime, and the same group is responsible for 60-85% of serious violent crime. South African Police Service statistics reports that during 2001, 17% of perpetrators of violence were between the ages of 10 and 19 years and that 38% of all sentenced and awaiting trial prisoners in correctional institutions were 25 years old, or younger (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation 2007:117-123). According to the same study, 102 children died in Cape Town during 2007 in incidents involving their peers. According to the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007), the high levels of violence caused by acquaintances and other violence reflect a situation where violence is regarded as a viable and legitimate way of

resolving problems and asserting or protecting one's interests. Violence between parents in the home, and violence against children by parents or siblings contribute to the normalisation of violence. The tolerance of violence among children in the school environment and among young men in the community more generally are also facets of the normalisation of violence (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation 2007). The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007:129) refers to the 2005–2006 South African Police annual report, where data suggests that roughly 6% of victims of murder (1 075), 7% of victims of attempted murder (1 378), 43% of victims of serious assault (20 879), and 11% of victims of common assault (25 941) were children under 18 years of age. According to the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007), most violence involves men, particularly young men, as perpetrators. Young men also make up a high proportion of victims of violence, particularly of fatal violence. Burton (2008 [a]) also claims that young men reclaim and assert their manhood with criminal and violent acts, in an environment where masculinity is widely compromised because of insufficient economic possibilities for these young men to be able to fulfil their expected roles as provider for their families.

The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007) claims that violence is in part socially learned behaviour, and levels of violence are clearly influenced by social factors. Dawson (2007), Burton (2008 [a]) and Serrao (2008) agree that community and societal examples, as well as the broadcasted and printed media seem to play a role in the occurrence of violent crimes committed by youth offenders and that children who are exposed to high levels of violence are more likely to respond with violence to difficult situations. According to The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007), social factors promote acquisitive crimes such as robbery and theft, while also contributing to the strength of the market for stolen goods. People in such circumstances often suppose their ability to obtain acceptance and respect from others depends on whether they are able to display, or provide as gifts, the right type of consumer goods. Property crime may also be motivated by a need on the part of those who are unable to find work and who, for instance, have families who are living in poverty. Individuals may also choose a criminal career in preference to the other opportunities available to them on the following grounds:

- the returns from crime are obtained more quickly than from working for a salary;
- the work opportunities open to them are regarded as unattractive, because they are uneducated and unqualified;
- the excitement, camaraderie or sense of power to be had in doing crime;
- being known as criminals, because in their communities, those are the people who are feared and even admired by others for having money; and/or

- because they are young and irresponsible, they do not think seriously about the long-term consequences of their choices and they get absorbed by the cycle of crime (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation 2007).

Braungart and Braungart (in Watts 1998) looked for a specific reason for violence amongst American youth. Their research led them to the conclusion that, although they would want to believe that youth violence and crime could be blamed on social, economic and political trends or deep-seated psychological problems, teenagers tend to attribute violence and crime to peer factors, such as being provoked or wanting to impress friends. The youth in the study mentioned above also most often cited gang or group membership, lack of parental supervision, poverty, bad schools, low academic achievement, drugs, the mass media, race, and lack of motivation as the underlying causes for crime and violence. In South Africa, there is still a strong emphasis on social, economic and political reasons for the occurrence of violence in societies. According to the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007) and Burton (2008 [a]), many young South Africans are growing up in high-risk environments that encourage criminal and violent behaviour. Violence is concentrated in lower-income communities, although not necessarily among the poorest communities. These factors increase the stress levels of children in such communities. There are few economic opportunities or recreational activities. Drugs, firearms and alcohol are highly accessible, and crime and violence are an accepted part of daily life (Burton 2008 [a]). Burton (2008 [a]) found no single cause for violent behaviour. The environment within which children grow up (especially the complex interaction of risk and protective factors in different environments over time) plays a central role in determining whether they will adopt criminal and violent behaviour. The home within which a child is raised remains the greatest predictor of violent and criminal behaviour of the child (Burton 2008 [a]). The pathway to violence usually starts with mistreatment or trauma in the early life of the child (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005:11). Burton (2008 [b]) stresses the influence of criminal or anti-social parents on their children. Children acquire their behaviours through the models of behaviour they see around them and through the support and discipline they receive from authority figures (Burton 2008 [a]). The common perception that the absence of a parental figure, particularly a father, is likely to predict or lead to offending, is challenged by Burton (2008 [b]). He suggests that life may be better without a father figure or one parent than to be exposed to a caregiver who sets a bad example.

Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:28) explain that youth who have been hurt before import anger from earlier relationships and target even well meaning persons who try to help them. They react to powerlessness with defiance and rebellion. They repay the pain of victimization by victimising others through meanness, bullying, and retribution (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005). Corcoran and Nichols-Casebolt (2004:217) claim that exposure to violence can exact a price on children's mental

health. Brendtro and Du Toit (2005) add that children who have experienced much hostility do not get used to it; instead, they are on guard for the slightest sign of disrespect. If they feel they are being violated, it may seem logical to them to be violent in return. Burton (2008 [a]) and Liebowitz (in Katlego 2008) agree that victims of crime and abuse, especially children, internalise their emotions. In their minds, crime and abuse becomes a way of life and a normal and acceptable means of resolving conflict. Brendtro, et al. (2002:113) add that antisocial youth romanticize destructive behaviour and highly destructive behaviour is often glamorized with a terminology that masks the real nature of the underlying values. Burton (2008 [a]) and Hagedorn (in Watts 1998) agree that children who are exposed to high levels of violence are more likely to respond with violence to difficult situations. Without human comforts and outlets for wholesome recreation, they may turn to drugs for excitement and seek status or security in guns and knives (Brendtro et al. 2002: x).

Children spend the major part of the day at school, and therefore the school environment serves as the second most influential socialising agent for children after the home (Burton 2008 [a]). Collier (1998) claims that the presence of high delinquency and truancy rates relates to low-ability pupils and parents of lower social class. According to Brendtro et al. (2002: x), a great deal of violence happens among young persons who feel that their lives will end in a cul-de-sac. The school climate itself, its culture, structures and educational ethos, are therefore seen as promoting, or inhibiting, offences by youth. Not only do youth seek out delinquent activities because they bring with them greater self-esteem, but because youth are motivated to seek affirmation outside normative social behaviours due to threats of failure to achieve in those socially acceptable domains (Ungar 2001). Children, who are exposed to violence at school, or who associate school with violence, are likely to model violent behaviour. The school can either catalyse or reinforce delinquent or anti-social behaviour in young people who are already at risk (Burton 2008 [a]).

School violence has become an area of concern in South Africa. On 27 August 2008, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) issued a media release (School Violence Reports 2008). This media release referred to the 153 calls (between January and July 2008) received by the Safe Schools Call Centre to report cases of assault at schools (School Violence Reports 2008). According to Katlego (2008), research done by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, shows that children as young as nine years display aggressive behaviour and that school ground fights are common, but it is at age 15 that fights become serious, with money and drugs being the main motivation. The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention undertook a National Schools Violence Study to provide data to inform policies and strategies to deal with the violence within South African schools (Burton 2008 [b]). A total of 12 794 learners in both primary and secondary schools, 264 principals and 521 educators in 245 schools nationally participated in

the study (Burton 2008 [b]:16). According to the findings of the particular study, 15.3% of primary and secondary school learners have experienced some form of violence while at school. Respondents reported that weapons, alcohol and drugs were all readily available at many schools. Principals and educators reported that learners sneak out to shebeens to buy alcohol for their own consumption. While learners bring alcohol and drugs onto the school property, they also recounted incidents of educators using children to fetch alcohol from taverns and shebeens neighbouring the schools. Both adults and learners reported on the availability of drugs, particularly dagga, close to the school. On Monday, 17 March 2008, Mr. Ebrahim Rasool, the premier of the Western Cape at the time, exclaimed the necessity of a maximum-security detention centre where young people could be rehabilitated. He referred to reports on violence at schools, which showed that at some schools, children are beaten with fists, suffer biting, are harmed with sticks, knives and even guns and are also subjected to sexual abuse and rape. Even more alarmingly, these acts are suffered at the hands of other children. Children are capable of causing great damage, especially if they are under the influence of substances such as alcohol and drugs (Rasool 2008). The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007) concludes that, while some violent offenders may be immune to awareness of the consequences of their actions, others may be deeply traumatised by acts of victimisation that they have suffered, or for which they were responsible. Unless these offenders are mature enough to accept some level of responsibility for their actions, they may become trapped in a persistent state of rationalisation or denial.

It is therefore clear to me that a culture of delinquency, crime and violence should be considered as a severe risk factor in shaping the predispositions to learning of youths like the respondents.

### **2.5.3.3 Substance abuse**

In the paragraphs to follow, I report on documented findings regarding the influence of substance abuse on the developing mind and learning. My inquiry does not cover all substances or forms of abuse, but focuses on those most familiar to the respondents. This brief background serves to indicate the possible effects of drugs and exposure to environments where substance abuse is common on youth in terms of their predispositions to learning.

According to Cutter, Jaffe-Gill, Segal and Segal (2008), drug or substance abuse involves the repeated and excessive use of prescription or street drugs. Addiction and drug dependence occur when drugs become so important that these people become willing to sacrifice their work, home and even family (Cutter et al. 2008). Alcohol is the single foremost factor causing diseases and non-natural deaths in many developing countries and alcohol is a strong contributing factor to the spread of HIV/Aids, violent crime and traffic accidents (Morejele 2007; Department of the Premier,

Provincial Government of the Western Cape 2010). International researchers like Hagedorn (in Watts 1998), refer to findings and patterns in American gang violence which indicate that both fights and gun-related violence are strongly associated with alcohol and/or drug abuse. According to the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007) and Burton (2008 [b]), often both alcohol and drugs are used to generate the courage necessary to commit crime. When a criminal is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, certain aspects of emotional responsiveness get suppressed, while aggression is heightened and inhibitions and self-control limited.

According to the Department of the Premier, Provincial Government of the Western Cape (2010), statistics by the South African Police Service (SAPS) show that the Western Province has the highest rate of drug-related crime in South Africa. The ratio per capita is over four times higher than the second nearest Province (1000 per 100 000 in the Western Cape as compared to 235 per 100 000 in Kwa-Zulu Natal), and nearly twice as high in actual numbers. In fact, the Western Cape currently accounts for almost half of all South Africa's drug-related crime on the SAPS records (52 000 out of 117 000 in 2008/2009). The significance of substance abuse cannot be ignored in the occurrence of crime and violence amongst communities in South Africa and especially in the Western Cape.

Substance abuse poses a major risk of increased child neglect and abuse. It fuels crime and violence, undermines sexual, physical and mental health and has a detrimental economic impact on individuals and households due to the use of scarce resources on substances, rather than on necessities. It further encourages financially reckless behaviour (Provincial Government Western Cape 2010:7). According to Moffit (1993), in a home environment where prenatal care is haphazard, drugs are often used during pregnancy. Infants' nutritional needs are neglected and the neuropsychological malfunctions that are clearly environmental coexist with a criminogenic social environment. Substance abuse by parents may affect children as early as conception. Significant alcohol intake by the mother during pregnancy has been linked to a variety of birth defects, the most serious of which is the Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). In the Western Cape Province 75 out of every 1000 children are affected by FAS (Provincial Government Western Cape 2010:6). FAS is the direct result of prenatal exposure to alcohol (Coles, Smith & Falek in Stimmel & Bean-Bayog 1987), which can cause permanent damage to the baby's brain, resulting in neurological impairment of the executive functions (Weinstein n.d.). Coles et al. (in Stimmel & Bean-Bayog 1987) hold that Infants exposed to alcohol while still in the womb, even when they do not suffer from FAS, may be at high risk of many of the negative outcomes typically found among children of alcoholics, including hyperactivity and other behavioural and learning problems. Even though this study did not have a medical focus, I regard the possible occurrence of FAS amongst learners like

the respondents as a valid area of concern that needs to be kept in mind when investigating their learning processes.

Venter (2001) states that not only the individual alcoholic or addict suffers, but also his or her family members. Especially the children of the alcoholic or addicted parent(s) are at risk. According to the Provincial Government Western Cape (2010:7), 67 % of domestic violence in the Western Cape is alcohol related. According to the Centre on Addiction and the Family (n.d.); Blue (in Stimmel & Bean-Bayog1987); Venter (2001); Godsall, et al. (2004) and Werner and Johnson (2004), parental substance abuse interrupts a child's normal development because children of substance abusers are often frightened and exposed to domestic violence in different forms and intensity. The scholars above mentioned above state that children of alcoholic or substance abusing parents are three to four times more likely than others to become addicted to alcohol or other drugs themselves. These children often have difficulty at school and are often depressed and withdrawn. They may witness physical or emotional abuse between family members, or experience it themselves. Because of upsetting home events, they may be preoccupied or tired and could therefore be unable to concentrate in school or other activities, which may cause them to perform below their potential. They are also more likely than their peers to have learning disabilities, be truant, repeat more grades, transfer schools and be expelled. They may even take on developmentally inappropriate responsibilities for the household, their siblings or parents. A significant proportion of children from alcoholic or drug abusing parents develop into youth with low self-esteem, conduct and learning disorders, with records of repeated delinquencies, substance abuse, and suicidal tendencies in adolescence. Like other diseases of lifestyle (e.g. diabetes, heart disease, cancer), a family history that is positive for substance abuse disorders is taken seriously as a major posited vulnerability factor for future substance misuse (Kumpher & Bluth 2004:672).

In an international research project (International Centre for Alcohol Policies 2008) it was found that young people's views on alcohol and drunkenness are influenced by culture rather than by factors such as age and gender. Striking similarities about drinking among young people in different parts of the world were found. Respondents to the reported study above were introduced to alcohol by their parents during family celebrations (International Centre for Alcohol Policies 2008). They also associated alcohol consumption with enjoyment and socialising, which mostly took place at gatherings like parties or sporting events, as well as in public venues like bars and clubs. According to the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007), difficulty in coping with negative emotions associated with low self-worth contributes to the motivation towards alcohol and other substance abuse. Cutter et al. (2008) argue that people who are suffering emotionally use drugs, not so much for the effect, but to escape from their problems. These people are trying to self-medicate themselves out of loneliness, low self-esteem, unhappy relationships, or

stress. In addition, some young people use drugs because they are thrill-seekers, some because they are curious, some try to use drugs because their friends do so, or they want to be accepted by the group. Children, teenagers and adolescents are especially vulnerable to drug abuse. In the child and adolescent brain, the centres for judgement and self-control are still developing, often resulting in them making wrong choices. Children may not realise the reality of the consequences of drug abuse and naively think that they will not be harmed or even killed (Cutter et al. 2008).

Carpenter (2001) reports on pharmacological studies that have indicated the effect of drugs on the brain's dopamine system, which regulates emotional responses and which plays a part in abuse by providing an emotional "reward" for continued use. According to Carpenter (2001), brain-imaging studies in humans and neuropsychological studies in animals have shown that repeated drug use causes disruptions in the brain's highly evolved frontal cortex, which regulates cognitive activities such as decision-making, response inhibition, planning and memory. Weingartner (in Carpenter 2001) notes that drug abuse does not only target those aspects of the brain that alter aspects like emotion, but also areas that affect our ability to control cognitive operations. Stein (in Carpenter 2001) states that the cognitive functions that are located within the frontal lobes of the brain play a role in drug abuse and that drug abuse is not only a pharmacological disease, but also a behavioural disease. Daw (2001) found that substance abuse overlaps significantly with learning disabilities and behavioural disorders like attention-deficit disorder (ADD) and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Cutter et al. (2008) continue that many drug abusers also suffer from mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia.

Pretorius and Naudé (2004) point out that dagga is perceived as relatively safe by its users, compared to drugs like cocaine and heroin. According to Maphai (n.d. [a]; n.d. [b]), all forms of dagga are mind-altering; it changes how the brain works. All the different forms of dagga contain THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol), the main active chemical in dagga. THC disrupts the nerve cells in the part of the brain that forms memories. This makes it hard for the user to recall recent events, and so it is hard to learn while using the drug. There are also signs of withdrawal symptoms when someone suddenly stops using dagga. These include irritability, restlessness, insomnia, anorexia or loss of appetite and moderate nausea. According to Maphai (n.d. [b]), many psychotic patients in psychiatric institutions report regular, long-term intake of THC (from dagga), which can increase the risk of developing certain mental diseases, such as schizophrenia. Maphai (n.d. [a]; n.d. [b]) reports that users may have very red, bloodshot eyes may seem silly and giggly for no reason and have trouble with short-term memory, attention and concentration. The use of dagga, although perceived as harmless by most users, has a negative influence not only on the user's cognitive learning processes, but also on his or her motivation to learn.

Tik is a powerfully addictive stimulant that affects many areas of the central nervous system (Plüddermann, Myers & Parry 2007; Plüddermann in Henderson 2007). These authors note that tik is easily produced in home laboratories, which leads to increased availability, but also to constant variation in the strength and type of drugs produced. The American National Institute on Drug Abuse and Addiction (NIDA 2008), as well as Plüddermann et al. (2007) state that tik triggers the release of epinephrine, norepinephrine and dopamine in the sympathetic nervous system. Common effects are euphoria, increased energy, insomnia, irritability, heightened sexuality and tremors. Furthermore, tik use tends to be associated with aggression and violence, high-risk sexual behaviour, and crime. Prolonged use leads to weight loss or anorexia, severe dermatological problems, and the risk of seizures, uncontrollable rage and violent behaviour. According to NIDA (2008), chronic tik users can also display a number of psychotic features, including paranoia, visual and auditory hallucinations, and delusions. These authors further state that chronic tik abuse significantly changes the way the brain functions and that it also leads to severe structural and functional changes in areas of the brain associated with emotion and memory. NIDA (2008) claims that the changes in the human brain persist long after the tik abuser stopped using it.

Plüddermann, et al. (2007:2) refer to statistics collected by the Medical Research Council's (MRC) Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use on patients presenting with tik problems in Cape Town. According to the MRC report, the average age of patients in the second half of 2006 who reported tik as their primary substance of abuse, was 22 years, of which 72% were male. The particular source also reports that 37% of the patients were younger than 20 years of age (Plüddermann et al. 2007:2).

It therefore becomes clear that abuse of substances and drugs affect the cognitive and emotional parts of the brain negatively, and the abuse has a ripple effect on the user's learning process and motivation to learn.

#### **2.5.3.4 Gangsterism**

The relevance of gangsterism concerning the respondents in this study is clear, as they come from communities where prison and street gangs are realities that they encounter and which form part of their frames of reference.

According to Steinberg (2004), the legend of prison gangs is too entrenched to disappear in the near future. This is reiterated in the popular media. Steinberg (2004) explains that the main purpose of a gang is to protect its members from other gangs, but also to steal from other people and then to share the profits. Steinberg (2004) continues that the rapid insertion of South Africa

into global markets brought new illegal drugs into the country, with the accompanying new merchants and new markets. This changed the culture of prison gangs, and there are now members inside and outside the prison, establishing a lucrative underworld. Steinberg (2004) holds that the street gangs of the Cape Flats have become like the prison gangs since the early 1970's. These gangs started using the same metaphors and titles as the prison gangs. The youth in the streets idolise prison gangsters and even imitate them by wearing the same kinds of tattoos. A report by the IRIN (2007) quotes a sixteen-year-old gangster from Cape Town who said that gang life was like a religion to his family and, because his father and grandfather were both members of gangs and had been imprisoned he would probably end up there as well. In the same report, Prof. Brian Robertson, former head of Cape Town University's Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health, found in his research that young people commit crimes like murder or rape in response to wanting to join a gang. Young people growing up in gang-ridden communities may feel obliged to learn and to know what it would be like to be a gang member. Such behaviour could help them to survive in their communities (IRIN 2007). If they, the youth, do end up in prison it is important for the new inmates to know the prison language in order to survive. A man in prison earns his manhood by means of violence. He may not cry or show fear or pain. In addition, sex and drug abuse are common amongst gang members (Hagedorn in Watts 1998).

Criminal gangs can easily lure vulnerable children and youth into their activities. Brendtro, et al. (2002:62) accentuate the importance of the sense of belonging to the growing child and explain that when some youth feel rejected, they struggle to find artificial or distorted belonging through behaviour such as attention seeking or running with gangs. Burton (2008 [a]) holds that, because of limited job opportunities, there are families who are unable to access material and resources to assist them in the task of raising children. These children grow up without support from their families, teachers and other role models, and are unsupervised for much of the day, while their caregivers seek to earn a living. These young children are then easy prey for criminal gangs. According to Brendtro and Du Toit, (2005:61), children's brains are primed to seek attachment figures in times of trouble and people are most susceptible to change in times of crisis. Those who have experienced trauma or unresolved conflict are desperate to find support. Herrindorfer (2004) explains that many young people who join gangs do so because of the attraction of money, power and glamour with which they associate gangsterism. Brendtro, et al. (2002:64) add that fighting against feelings of powerlessness, some youth assert themselves in rebellious and aggressive ways. Those who believe they are too weak or impotent to manage their own lives become pawns of others. These are, amongst others, reasons for youth to become involved in gangsterism.

It seems fair to assume that youth who aspire to become gangsters, will have a different stance to learning than other youth who, for instance, plan to further their education. The realities they have

to face daily, affect even those youth who grow up in gang-ridden communities, who want to learn, and who are not interested in criminality and gangsterism. They also have to acquire certain skills in order to survive in their communities. Growing up in these kinds of communities may therefore influenced and affect youths' predispositions to learning.

## 2.6 SUMMARY

This chapter provided a backdrop to my research question: *What is the predisposition to learning of youths in a place of safety?* The literature related to the differences between adult and non-adult learners and their motivation to learn, as well as factors that may influence their predispositions to learning.

Even though the respondents in this study are deemed children by law, these laws make allowance for the transition into adulthood that marks this developmental phase relatively early in the lives of people such as trial awaiting youth. Although an individual may be regarded an adult or a child, the learning needs of such individual cannot necessarily be limited to a particular life cycle. Youth may therefore benefit from both andragogical and pedagogical perspectives, depending on their current learning needs.

By regarding agency achievement, it is possible to understand why an individual can achieve agency in one situation but not in another. Young offenders' horizons are constrained; opportunities are limited, personal choice reduced to fate and agency is restricted. Resilience is of the essence for youth in marginalised circumstances to be able to survive and succeed.

Low IQ is a central risk factor for anti-social behaviour, over and above socio-economic status. A person with lower intelligence, who has a history of poor academic results and who does not get the necessary support, is more at risk of dropping out of school, which in turn leaves the person at higher risk of delinquency. Whether emotional, social, moral and multiple intelligences are as measurable as cognitive intelligence or not, it is clear that individual differences in this regard do influence people's behaviour, which in turn may influence individual learning processes.

Physically or emotionally neglected and abused children are more likely to encounter problems in various developmental areas, including social development, relationships and education. The majority of youth psychologically evaluated in juvenile detention centres had some degree of cognitive impairment due to childhood abuse and neglect.

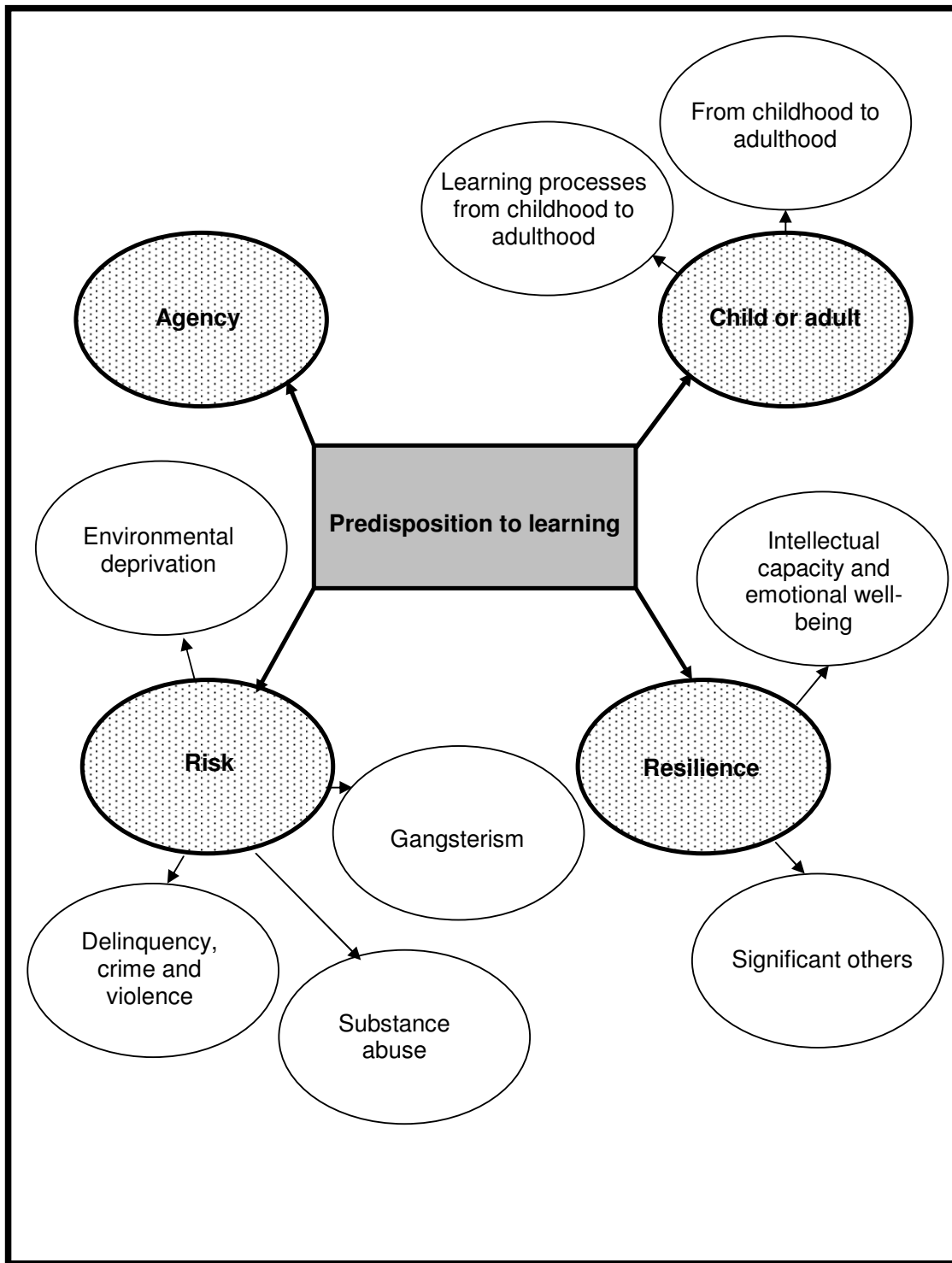
The negative effects of a disadvantaged environment seem to be more powerful contributors to child achievement at every age than the personality characteristics of the child. Children, who are unhappy at home, may compensate by seeking out peer groups that introduce them to gangs or otherwise socialise them into delinquent or violent behaviour. Those who believe they are too weak or impotent to manage their own lives become pawns of others. These are, amongst others, reasons for youth to become involved in gangsterism. The youth in the streets idolise prison gangsters, and if they, the youth, do end up in prison it is important for the new inmates to know the prison language in order to survive.

Youth are motivated to seek affirmation outside normative social behaviours due to threats of failure to achieve in those socially acceptable domains and therefore seek out delinquent activities because they bring with them greater self-esteem.

Most violence involves men, particularly young men, as perpetrators. Weapons, alcohol and drugs are all readily available at many schools. At schools, children are beaten with fists, suffer biting, are harmed with sticks, knives and even guns and are subjected to sexual abuse and rape. Even more alarmingly, these acts are suffered at the hands of other children. Children are capable of causing great damage, especially if they are under the influence of substances such as alcohol and drugs.

Substance abuse interrupts a child's normal development. Repeated drug use causes disruptions in the brain's highly evolved frontal cortex, which regulates cognitive activities such as decision-making, response inhibition, planning and memory. Substance abuse overlaps significantly with learning disabilities and behavioural disorders like attention-deficit disorder (ADD) and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Abuse of substances and drugs affect the cognitive and emotional parts of the brain negatively, and the abuse has a ripple effect on the user's learning process and motivation to learn.

To provide a holistic overview of the rest of the thesis and a "map" to the argumentation in this chapter, I developed the following conceptual framework that highlights the possible influences on the respondents' predispositions to learning as could be derived from existing literature (see Figure 2.1):



**FIGURE 2.1: A conceptualisation of influences on predispositions to learning**

The predisposition to learning of any person is continuously being shaped by the past, and present and may influence their future. In the case of youth like the respondents, both positive and negative experiences encompassed in this chapter may provide for an interpretative lens when considering their individual predispositions to learning. Figure 2.2 provides a visualisation of the interpretive and conceptual lens I used in this study.

In Chapter 4, I will report on the in-depth interviews I conducted with the six respondents. I will analyse and report on their responses to my questions. The insights I gained from the studied literature, directed my interview questions. In my discussion of each interview, I will relate my findings to the interplay between resilience and risk factors in the achievement of agency by the respondent (see Figure 2.2), which will throw light on the individual's predisposition to learning.

The next chapter will provide an overview and description of the research methodology that I followed in conducting this research project.



**FIGURE 2.2: Predisposition to learning in relation to past experiences**

I would like to argue that a variety of factors determine an individual's predisposition to learning, as explained in Figure 2.2. In order to make desired choices, strong positive personal agency is necessary. Resilience factors may positively influence one's agency, while risk factors may have a negative influence. The figure thus explains how a person's predisposition to learning has at its core personal agency, which is something that has to be developed (Biesta & Tedder 2007). It also explains that structural factors influence agency positively or negatively (Ecclestone 2007).

## CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Clough and Nutbrown (2002) explain that all social research sets out with specific purposes from a particular position, and aims to persuade readers of the significance of its claims or findings. Bodgan and Biklen (2007) emphasise that the researcher should be practical and should focus on something of reasonable size and complexity in choosing a research topic. Something that the researcher is directly involved with and finds interesting, which is easily accessible, and that might be an important issue, is preferred. I used these scholars' advice in planning my research study. As an educator and researcher, I wanted the respondents to tell their life stories and by doing so, I tried to understand their predispositions to learning. In order for me to conduct the research project, I had to follow a rigorous research process, which I will describe in this chapter.

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), the research design is a plan or a map that directs the researcher step by step towards designing, conducting and concluding the research project in the most effective ways to address the research question. Babbie and Mouton (2001) describe the research question as the point of departure, challenging the researcher to define the limits of the study, identify empirical issues and work on empirical questions. In learning from scholars like Babbie and Mouton (2001), Clough and Nutbrown (2002) and Bodgan and Biklen (2007), I mapped my research project as follows:

- a) I identified an important issue with which I was directly involved and which might be of importance, namely the apparent lack of motivation for learning amongst youth at the place of safety where I was working. This led me to the research question: *What is the predisposition of youth to learning?* I narrowed my research question down to be practical and of reasonable size. This resulted in the research title: *Youth's predisposition to learning: Case studies within a place of safety (Western Province, South Africa).*
- b) The research question and title led me towards limiting my research project to six case studies with certain shared variables. I chose the respondents in my qualitative study by means of purposeful sampling (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). I had to narrow down the criteria for their inclusion (Gobo in Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman 2004). Some constants prevailed:
  - participants were male youth between the ages of 14 and 17 years who were detained at a place of safety in the Western Cape because they came into conflict with the law;

- preference was given to older rather than younger inmates and the six respondents were the oldest inmates at the time;
- all of them came from communities where drug abuse, violence and crime were rife;
- they had used alcohol and/or drugs themselves; and
- all of them had dropped out of mainstream schools.

Uncontrolled variables shape the nature of qualitative research and make it interesting (Merriam & Clark 1991; Henning et al. 2004). Variables identified amongst the respondents, include the following:

- levels of literacy;
- individual past experiences;
- emotional state;
- personality;
- physical condition;
- race and ethnicity; and
- nature of pending court case.

- c) After finalising the research question, I started reading about the empirical issues embedded in the research question (see Chapter 2 & Section 3.6.1). The literature study directed me towards employing the most appropriate research methodology to conduct the research project (see Section 3.5).
- d) I then had to find the information required to answer the research question. Prior to gathering any information, I acquired permission from the Department of Social Development to conduct the study and I got the permission of the respondents to interview them and study their records (see Section 3.4). I studied the respondents' official documents (see Section 3.6.2.2) and conducted in-depth personal interviews with each respondent, allowing them the opportunity to narrate their life stories in reference to the open-ended questions I put to them (see Section 3.6.2.1).
- e) After collecting all the necessary data, I needed to make meaning of it in order to answer the research question. I coded and analysed the data (see Section 3.7) and wrote up the

life stories of the respondents in a narrative style, bringing it in context with the issues raised in the literature (see Section 3.8).

- f) Lastly, when I came to sensible conclusions, I had to present a report that highlights the significance of the study (see Chapter 4), come to some conclusions and make some recommendations (see Chapter 5).

### **3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

According to O'Donoghue (2003), the research paradigm determines the formulation of the research problem or question. The research paradigm also determines the application of methodologies to address the research problem or question. By using information derived from the exploration of phenomena, humans construct theories that are abstract knowledge and statements about how things are connected and why things happen as they do (O'Donoghue 2003; Henning et al. 2004; Grbich 2007).

My study was driven by the interpretive research paradigm, based on the importance of understanding experience, subjectively, from the perspectives of those involved and keeping in mind that people are shaped by the social worlds they inhabit (Henning et al. 2004; West et al. 2007). I conducted a qualitative research study from an interpretative viewpoint (O'Donoghue 2003), focusing on six individual case studies, where I tried to understand and describe the experiences and points of reference of the respondents. According to Goodson and Sikes (2001), a life story is a person's interpretation of his or her own life. By letting the respondents narrate their life stories, I also tried to give them the opportunity to interpret their experiences and how they structure the social world within which they live (Babbie & Mouton 2001; Bodgan & Biklen 2007) and by doing so, I tried to give a voice to this marginalised group of people (Henning et al. 2004). Stroobants (2005:49) and Biesta and Tedder (2007) agree that life stories comprise rich and meaningful data to understand the thinking and acting of individuals and that telling the story of one's life allows for the articulation and evaluation of one's agentic orientations and can provide a forum for the reframing of one's orientations. Learning from scholars like Merriam and Clark (1991), Holstein and Gubrium (in Seale et al. 2004), Shank (2006) and Bodgan and Biklen (2007), the qualitative approach is suitable for my research study, as qualitative research is appropriate when –

- the emphasis of the research study is on the process rather than the outcome and when discovering, describing and in-depth understanding rather than verification or explanation are acquired;
- the context of people's lives may be interrelated with the phenomenon of interest and the understanding of social action in terms of the specific context is more important than attempting to generalise to some theoretical population;
- less rather than more is known about an aspect of development where the variables are not controlled, which are many rather than few;
- the subtle nuances of attitudes and behaviours are observed; and
- when comprehensiveness of perspectives is studied.

According to Merriam and Clark (1991), Babbie and Mouton (2001), Henning et al. (2004) and Bodgan and Biklen (2007), the advantages of qualitative research include -

- a) it is an interactive process involving the researcher and respondents within the actual setting where the respondents find themselves, acknowledging the context which shaped the respondents' life experiences;
- b) the researcher is part of the research and can be regarded the main instrument in the research process;
- c) it is flexible, allowing the researcher to adapt the methodology, time frame and other aspects of the study to better suit the objectives of the study;
- d) it reports on people's observable activities and uses people's own written or spoken words and, as such, qualitative research provides rich descriptive data and report not only *what* happens, but also *why* things happen as they do;
- e) the hands-on, in-depth observations the researcher makes by means of personal interviews and the like, provide for thorough immersion into the lives, feelings and experiences of the respondents, enabling the researcher to understand why and how individuals make meaning of their realities; and
- f) this information and understanding then enable the researcher to interpret or critique or to argue what the studied phenomenon or phenomena are about, by using evidence from the data and from the literature.

According to Henning et al. (2004) and O'Donoghue (2003), the objective of interpretive research is to understand the meaning behind the phenomenon investigated. They also claim that the interpretive research paradigm emphasises social interaction as the basis of knowledge.

Interpretivists construct their world by means of multiple perspectives. They construct knowledge not only by observing phenomena, but also by mutual negotiation and descriptions of people's intentions, beliefs, values and reasons, meaning making and self-understanding. Miller and Glassner (in Silverman 2006) and Game and Metcalfe (1996 in De Carteret 2008) conclude that all research is interpretive processes, which involve conversations and storytelling, and that the social researcher mainly has stories to work with. The social researcher tells stories as if he or she was not a storyteller, exhibiting an understanding of how and where the story originated, which kind of story it is, and how to use it honestly and intelligently in theorising about social life (De Carteret 2008).

### **3.3 MY POSITION AND ROLE AS RESEARCHER IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

According to Henning et al. (2004), the researcher is the main instrument of research, and makes meaning from his or her engagement in the research project, interpreting the data collected. The researcher in qualitative studies, especially from an interpretive point of view, is inseparable from the study. Clough and Nutbrown (2002) also illuminate the personal involvement of the researcher. They explain that, because of the subjectivity of the researcher and respondents, interpretive research projects are limited to individual cases and small-scale research projects for the interpretation of the specific to be feasible. Henning et al. (2004) add that what the researcher observes (see and hear), is the researcher's version of what is "there". In addition, by the time the researcher writes his or her research findings down, he or she will have interpreted the data twice – first, through the interpretation and presentation of the respondents in the setting, and then through the text that he or she has derived from the observation. Shank (2006) adds that the researcher's stance and perspective become an important part of the data-gathering effort and that all data are seen as situated, as contextualised, and as personalised to some degree.

I therefore cannot claim to be objective as regards the research process or findings. The fact that I work with the respondents on a daily basis as school principal, gives me an insider's perspective on some of the observed phenomena (Henning et al. 2004). I consciously had to focus on the issues being investigated and had to restrain myself from being distracted by individual bias, which might occur in relation to the respondents' court cases and the sometimes-appalling details that accompany these. Although I cannot claim to be objective as I am part of the research process, I want to maintain that I tried my best to keep some emotional distance from the respondents and the data. Although my position as principal is one of authority, I prefer to regard my relationship with the learners as inviting and friendly. Nevertheless, I had to consider the obvious distance that my position as school principal encompasses. It was of the utmost importance to me as researcher to first build a relationship of trust between me and the respondents (Ryen in Seale et al. 2004). Gaining their trust was not difficult, as they had already known me for some time and trusted me in

my capacity as school principal. They knew that I have always been open to listen to their problems and that I have created a safe place for them to be in (the school). My office, where the interviews were conducted, is a warm and friendly space with yellow walls covered with photos of the learners and where soft music plays. I approached the respondents sympathetically and put myself alongside them. I approached them with respect and made them feel worthy by listening attentively to them without commenting or judging any part of the information revealed by them (Hollway & Jefferson 2002).

### **3.4 GETTING PERMISSION**

At the onset of my study, I obtained permission from the Department of Social Development to conduct the research project at the place of safety. I had to submit my research proposal to them inclusive of the questions I would use in the personal interviews. I also had to ask for permission to visit the inmates' legal documents and reports. The Department of Social Development granted permission for the research to continue and informed me that it was not necessary to obtain consent from any other authority. In the next paragraph, I will explain how I obtained informed consent from the six respondents used in my research project.

I stayed sensitive to the warning by Babbie and Mouton (2001), that social research represents an intrusion into people's lives, as it often requires people to reveal personal information. Therefore, I was very open and clear towards my respondents. The respondents in my study were under no obligation to take part in the research. After identifying the six respondents according to age (see Section 3.1b), I had a private conversation with each of them individually in my office. Miller and Glassner (in Silverman 2006) warn that especially adolescents may choose not to speak to people they do not trust about what they know and feel. I learned from Murray (in Camic, Rhodes & Yardley 2003) that, after a brief initial conversation in which the researcher describes him- or herself, the purpose of the interview, and the safeguards on confidentiality, the participants should be satisfied and prepared to disclose extensive information about their lives. I explained to them that I was busy conducting a research project and that I wanted to find out how youth between the ages of 15 and 17 years feel about learning. I asked their permission to involve them as respondents and explained the process to them and that they had the right to withdraw at any time (Hollway & Jefferson 2002). I assured them that the inquiry was about their experiences as regards learning and not about their pending court. I also assured them that I would not reveal their names or any incriminating information and that could harm them in any way (Babbie & Mouton 2001; Ryan in Seale et al. 2004). I guaranteed them that information shared in the interviews would strictly stay part of the research project. I again stressed that I would not use their names in the report and that there would be no way in which somebody who read the report would be able to

identify them (Ryen in Seale et al. 2004). All of them agreed to take part in the research project and seemed to be looking forward to the interviews.

Although a respondent must agree to the interview, Ryen (in Seale et al. 2004) holds that written consent is not always needed or appropriate. I did not let the respondents sign a form of consent or a written agreement, but rather recorded their verbal consent prior to the interview (Ryen in Seale et al. 2004). The reason for this was that not all of the respondents could read and write and I was worried that they might relate the signing of a document to a negative experience, as they have to sign legal documents after arrested. According to Hollway and Jefferson (2002), if information is treated and used in such a way as to be secure and to ensure the anonymity of participants, the ethical responsibility usually ends there.

### **3.5 METHODOLOGY**

For the purpose of my research study, *methodology* refers to how I have planned, designed and structured the research project. In addition, why I chose to apply specific methods to gain the knowledge I needed in order to understand and make meaning of the predispositions to learning of six male youths detained at the place of safety (Babbie & Mouton 2001; Clough & Nutbrown 2002; O'Donoghue 2003; Henning et al. 2004). My overall goal was to collect the richest possible data, which would represent as wide and diverse a range of information possible within the scope of the research (Babbie & Mouton 2001).

I employed a case study methodology in order to probe deeply so that I could gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and the meaning for those involved; as well as to analyse intensively in order to understand human behaviour (Cohen & Manion 1989 in Bassey 2003; Henning et al. 2004). Sturman (1995 in Bassey 2003), Merriam (1988), Yin (1989) and Stake (1997 in Bodgan & Biklen 2007) agree that a case study is a detailed examination of one setting, or of a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event. According to Shank (2006), the purpose of the single case study is not to evaluate or to generalise to a larger population. Stenhouse (1985 in Bassey 2003), explains that case study methods involve the collection and recording of data about a case or cases, and the preparation of a report on the case. It is ideal in a research scenario where the researcher tries to learn from a given individual in order to see the world in different terms (Shank 2006). Henning et al. (2004) hold that the interaction between the context and the action is usually the unit of analysis and propose, and that for the researcher who employs the case study method of data collection, discovery is more important than confirmation and, ultimately, although the process forms part of the outcome, the process is more important than the outcome of collecting data. Flyvberg (in Seale et al. 2004) explains that for the researcher, the

closeness of the case study to real-life situations and its multiple wealth of details are important. Yin (1993 in Bassey 2003) and Henning et al. (2004) agree that the context within which the data are being shaped and collected is important in a case study to present a complete description of the researched phenomenon. Henning et al. (2004) conclude that a case study focuses on a phenomenon that has identifiable boundaries and that only data applicable to the case are utilised.

My research is based on the life stories of six respondents, who as individuals formed the units for analysis. They are presented as six case studies in this thesis (Cohen & Manion 1989 in Bassey 2003). By letting the respondents voice their individual life stories in relation to their learning experiences, I did not try to generalise or predict (Sturman 1994 in Bassey 2003) or evaluate (Shank 2006). I rather focused on the interaction between the context of the life stories and the respondents' experience thereof (Henning et al. 2004). I merely wanted to put forward to the reader the individual life stories of the respondents, allowing the reader to do some evaluation and judgment (Stenhouse 1985 in Bassey 2003). I tried to create an improved understanding of this marginalised group of people, which can help to build learning theory in future (Yin 1994 in Bassey 2003).

### **3.6 THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

I will devote the following section to the actual research process, starting with the importance of the literature review in Section 3.6.1, followed by the methods I used to collect data (see Section 3.6.2). Then I will explain how the data was analysed (see Section 3.7) and how I authored the ensuing report (see Section 3.8). Ethical issues will be incorporated in the applicable paragraphs and possible limitations and biases explained.

#### **3.6.1 Literature review**

Although I documented my literature review in Chapter 2, I would like to elaborate on the importance thereof in my research study.

When I first identified the broad topic of my research, I started reading and looking for existing scholarly articles and books on the different aspects of that about which I was curious. As I read, I came to certain understandings of the different issues I was probing. This led me to narrow down my research and to confine it to a specific research question and research topic. I made sure that I was not repeating existing research (Shank 2006). I had to identify and catalogue previous research in an effort to clear space for my own research and fresh perspectives (Grbich 2007). At this stage of the research project, I only read enough to contextualise my study and to be able to refer to it in later stages of the research (Henning et al. 2004). Because I was planning to build

data-driven theory, I wanted to go into the data-collection process as fresh as possible, but still read enough to give a credible framework to my inquiry (Shank 2006).

I had to compile the interviews quite early in the research process, because the respondents that I had identified would be leaving the place of safety shortly after that. This meant that I went into the data-collection process relatively uninfluenced (Shank 2006). This turned out to be a very effective strategy. With the interviews buried in my subconscious mind, I started to read purposefully and set up a conversation with the literature, synthesising the literature on my topic and engaging critically with it (Henning et al. 2004). This helped me when I had to explain the research data, and I could refer to the literature to show the relevance of my findings. Studying the literature, better informed me on my topic, and I could make better sense of the data (Henning et al. 2004; Shank 2006). The literature review helped me to form a logical argument in using current research to support the claims of my research report (Shank 2006).

### **3.6.2 Methods of collecting data and accompanying ethical issues**

Data gathering is a crucial part of empirical research. Without data, there is no evidence (Shank 2006). My overall goal was to collect the richest possible data, which would represent as wide and diverse a range of information possible within the scope of the research (Babbie & Mouton 2001). According to O'Donoghue (2003), methods are the techniques or processes used to collect research data and also to analyse the data. Qualitative researchers like Caffarella (1994), Denzin and Lincoln (2000 in Clouch & Nutbrown 2002), and Bodgan and Biklen (2007) name various techniques and methods to gather data. For the purpose of my study, I employed personal interviews where the respondents told me their life stories as the main method of data collection. Trustworthiness is safeguarded by the triangulation of research methods. Therefore, I also studied the official documents and reports of the respondents.

#### **3.6.2.1 Individual interviews**

Babbie and Mouton (2001), as well as Gubrium and Holstein (2003), hold that interviewing is the most widely used technique for data gathering within the qualitative approach. Gubrium and Holstein (2003) go further by claiming that 90% of all social science investigations use interviews in one way or another. The low levels of literacy in South Africa results in the face-to-face interview as a common method to collect survey data in this country (Babbie & Mouton 2001). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), Gubrium and Holstein (2003), Henning et al. (2004), and Glassner and Loughlin (1987 in Silverman 2006), the qualitative interview is an interaction and a form of conversation between the interviewer and interviewee. Data is generated by asking people to talk about their lives, focussing on what people think, know and feel and how meaning is constructed.

According to Ward (in O'Donoghue & Punch 2003), this method deals with human experiences such as feelings, actions and talk as they happen within the confines of the social structure specific to the historical period within which the participant lives. It provides greater understanding of the participants' perspectives than other forms of research. The individual is allowed to speak for himself, penetrating his subjective reality. Miller and Glassner (in Silverman 2006) explain that qualitative interviewing provides the researcher with an understanding of others' points of view and affords the researcher the opportunity to document the interviewee's points of view. Babbie and Mouton (2001) and Gubrium and Holstein (2003) agree that the in-depth interview is a process where the researcher is more interested in the process by which the content of the conversation has come into being, than with the content of the conversation itself. Moreover, the researcher must leave his or her research efforts open to respondents' stories in order to understand respondents' experiences. Murray (in Camic et al. 2003), and Rossiter and Clark (2007) agree that an individual's life story has the ability to tie together the past, present and future of his or her life. By listening to stories, we can discover how individuals think and feel, and why they act as they do (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005). Murray (in Camic et al. 2003) concludes that the participant is often keen to give narrative accounts in the interview situation.

The purpose of my study was to understand the respondents' life stories in relation to their predispositions to learning. I therefore conducted personal in-depth interviews for collecting six first-person narratives (Helling 1988 in Bodgan & Biklen 2007), as a vehicle for the respondents to narrate their own life stories (Babbie & Mouton 2001) and for rich and thick accounts and descriptions to be obtained (Shank 2006). I found this to work quite well for me in trying to understand the respondents' personal experiences and interpretations with regard to the individual learning process in general (Bornat in Seale et al. 2004). Learning from Duncan (2002 in Bodgan & Biklen 2007), I used life stories to raise conscious awareness of the social and ideological roots of the respondents' self-understanding. According to Stroobants (2005), Miller and Glassner (in Silverman 2006) and Rossiter and Clark (2007), the narrative is a fundamental structure of human meaning making (for both the listener, or interviewer, and the narrator or interviewee). As we think and retrieve in narrative structures, we understand the meaning of our lived experience, through a process of telling our life stories, in which the focus is on meaning rather than fact.

In organising the interview process, I worked according to three phases. I first found the respondents (see Section 3.1b) and set up the interviews in accordance with the overall research design. I then conducted the interviews. Each recorded interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. I conducted the interviews on Saturdays to ensure that it did not interfere with the normal programmes at the facility. It also guaranteed a quiet time in the school building and I conducted the individual interviews in private with no possibility of interference. I transcribed the interviews

and translated the Afrikaans into English and used direct quotations in my research report. Lastly, I reflected on the interviews and interpreted the gathered data (Warren 2002 in Henning et al. 2004).

In planning and conducting the interviews, I ensured to be an ethical researcher by first making sure that I had permission to conduct the interviews (Pink in Seale et al. 2004). I had to make sure that the respondents trusted me (Ryen in Seale et al. 2004) and I therefore explained to them that the interview would be like a normal conversation and that they did not have to disclose any information that they regarded too personal or too private. It was important that the respondents did not suffer in any way from my research; therefore, I put myself in the place of the respondent to ensure that the questions were not hurtful in any way. When questions could remind the respondent of hurtful memories, I first asked myself whether it was necessary to ask such questions (Shank 2006). Glassner and Loughlin (1987 in Silverman 2006) emphasize the importance of rapport building between the interviewer and interviewee, and maintain that establishing trust and familiarity, showing genuine interest, assuring confidentiality, and not being judgmental are some important elements of building rapport. As Hollway and Jefferson (2002), I believe that everybody is entitled to respect and I respected the respondents by paying attention to them and by listening attentively to their stories. I was honest in working with the respondents and in analysing the data, as well as in the writing up the findings (Shank 2006).

I had to decide which format the interviews would take, keeping in mind that the purpose of my research study was to understand and interpret the experiences and views of my respondents. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001) and Murray (in Camic et al. 2003), after the researcher outlines the purpose of the interview at the outset thereof, the qualitative interview is a conversation where the interviewer encourages the interviewee to do most of the talking and to provide a narrative account. Gubrium and Holstein (2003) explain that both the interviewer and interviewee determine the course the interview will take. When the interviewee starts telling his/her story, the interviewer's work is to listen with attentive care to be able to formulate necessary questions to follow. The interviewer may need to clarify details. The interviewer must be flexible and ready to follow unexpected paths that emerge in the course of the conversation.

I decided that my interviews would be semi-structured, although relatively open-ended. The interviews focused on particular topics (as researched in Chapter 2) and consisted of some general questions (Bodgan & Biklen 2007). According to Shank (2006), the semi-structured interview allows the interviewer some latitude in how to ask questions, and in what order, but it is still necessary that all interviewees answer the same basic questions. I used open-ended questions in the interviews as described by Hollway and Jefferson (2002) and Henning et al. (2004) and

encouraged the interviewees to tell their stories. In doing so and listening empathically and supportively, as suggested by Murray (in Camic et al. 2003), I tried to let the respondents feel that their stories were deeply valued, and this helped me to get to know the interviewees better. I used the advice of Kvale (1996 in Shank 2006:46) and (West et al. 2007) and decided to include the following in my approach towards the interviewees:

- I tried to discover the everyday lived world of the interviewee and to identify key meaningful themes that are part of that lived world;
- I sought for different aspects of the interviewee's life which relate to his experience of the learning process throughout his life;
- I tried to cultivate a deliberate openness;
- I tried to keep a balance between the structured and totally nondirective line of questions;
- I realised that the interview is an interpersonal event, and that any knowledge generated by the interview is inescapably shaped by these interpersonal dynamics;
- I kept in mind that the interviewee might not hear the question through the same meaning frame as that of myself or other interviewees;
- I was sensitive to the fact that the interviewee might want to protect vulnerable aspects of himself as I realised that the respondents might not know why they experience or feel things in the way that they do; and
- I honoured the fact that the respondents might bring their own bias and secrecy into the interview situation and I had to deal with that during the interviews without probing where I was not welcome.

I used a video camera to record the interviews. I later converted the videos into DVD-format and stored each individual interview on a separate DVD-disk. I kept the six DVDs in a safe place and made sure that I was the only person with access thereto. According to Ratcliff (in Camic et al. 2003) and Heritage and Atkinson (1984 in Silverman 2006), an increasing number of qualitative research studies make use of video data in the form of videotapes and recordable DVDs. Henning et al. (2004) are of the opinion that videotaped interviews make data gathering and analysis much easier for the analyst and the interpreter of data. The use of videos involves recording and playing back visual and audio components of interviews. The information is transferred in a direct manner; therefore, the quality and detail of the data can be improved by the use of videotaping, which will lead to better analysis of the gathered data (Ratcliff in Camic et al. 2003; Pink in Seale et al. 2004).

I set up the video camera on a tripod to my left, and focused on the interviewee. I did not make use of any extra microphones or lights. I positioned the camera about two meters from the interviewee.

Before each individual interview, I first let the respondent handle the video camera. I then captured a short “screen test” and played it back to the respondent, so that he could feel safe and relaxed. I again assured each of the respondents that we would only talk about matters regarding their life experiences with reference to formal and informal learning and that they did not have to answer questions, which they regarded harmful in any way, or which could reveal any information that would make them feel uncomfortable. I also reminded them that they could terminate the interview if they wanted to. I explained to them why I had to film the interviews and that I would repeatedly watch the footage to make sure that I recorded the data properly and correctly. I also assured them that I would keep the raw data in a safe place where I would be the only person with access to it. The respondents seemed to be at ease about the confidentiality of their information.

While conducting the interviews, I kept with me a typed schedule with the planned interview questions, as suggested by (Seale et al. 2004); on areas which I regarded important enough to be covered in the interviews, referring to my literature research. I welcomed the freedom Seale et al. (2004) advocate. According to these authors, the researcher does not have to use any of the original questions, but has to follow the interviewee’s talk by responding on his responses, and should not delimit the talk to a predetermined agenda. I indeed experienced that I had to defer from the initial structured questions and I allowed the interviewing conversation to guide me towards the next question. Babbie and Mouton (2001) warn that, although qualitative research interviewing is much like normal conversation, the interviewer needs to step back and make the interviewee seem interesting, by being genuinely interested in his or her responses and remarks. According to Gubrium and Holstein (2003), the topic of the interview is fleshed out within the interview – rationally and emotionally. I had to be disciplined during the conversation and stick to the essential aim of the interview, which was to gather data on the predispositions of the respondents to learning, and not divert too much.

My main aim when interviewing the respondents was to determine their attitudes towards learning, to hear about their experiences of formal and informal learning, as well as to establish the factors which shaped their predispositions to learning. During the in-depth personal interviews, I asked questions according to the following themes which were researched and reported on in Chapter 2:

- the developmental stages of the respondents at the time of the interview (see Section 2.4);
- the respondents’ account of past experiences in relation to their predispositions to learning (see Section 2.5) presented as: the respondents’ perception of their personal agency (see Section 2.5.1) and resilience (see Section 2.5.2), as well as their perceptions of their own levels of competency and ability to learn (see Section 2.5.2.1); and the role significant others played in their attitude to and experience of learning (see Section 2.5.2.2);

- the respondents' account of the negative role environmental deprivation (see Section 2.5.3.1), delinquency, crime and violence (see Section 2.5.3.2), substance abuse (see Section 2.5.3.3) and gangsterism (see Section 2.5.3.4) played in shaping their predispositions to learning.

I conducted the interviews in the language of the respondents' choice. Only one respondent had to use his second language (English). Although I found this no obvious blockage and was satisfied with the conversation, it is fair to assume that the respondents would reveal more information had they spoken in their mother tongue. I started all the questions with more or less the same words, for example, "Tell me about ..." or "How did you feel when ...". Once the respondent started to tell his story, I listened without interrupting him. His responses would lead me to the next question, and so forth. As I had already explained, the interviews were semi-structured in the sense that I identified certain topics and possible questions beforehand. The interviews were also open-ended, especially in formatting my questions in an open-ended style and omitting yes or no questions (Hollway & Jefferson 2002). I found myself to be an "insider" during the process of conducting the interviews, as Henning et al. (2004) describe the position of the qualitative researcher. The respondents gave me a glimpse into their lives, and shared their experiences and emotions with me. This was a position that I treated with caution and respect. With each of the six respondents, I found that he was willing and open to the interview process. I could sense an eagerness to have their stories heard. All of them tried to appear very composed, but as the conversations progressed, the distance between the interviewer and interviewee shrunk and they freely exhibited their feelings and emotions. The presence of the video camera did not seem to bother them at all. They never looked at it and it was easy for me to keep eye contact with all of them. I sometimes struggled to hide my personal feelings of shared pain, but also realise that my openness and honesty, as proposed by Murray (in Camic et al. 2003), allowed for them to disclose even more of their personal and private experiences and interpretations to me.

Gubrium and Holstein (2003) suggest that the researcher or interviewer should not worry whether an interviewee is telling the truth. Rather, attention should be paid to the coherence and plausibility of accounts. It was therefore not my duty to establish or judge whether the stories told by the respondents are true or false. Murray (in Camic et al. 2003) adds to this that the main focus is on how the participant connects events together. My role was to tell their stories as close as possible to how they have told it themselves (see Chapter 4). I agree with Grbich (2007) that the qualitative researcher is not excluded from the research process and hence I took a subjective position when reflecting on the interview process. I felt satisfied that my sample was adequate and that I needed no more participants. The respondents varied enough to be representative of the target group I was researching and they were similar enough to fit the limitations of the study I proposed at the

beginning of the project. It struck me how, although they were coming from similar backgrounds and circumstances, each individual's life story differed. That is why it would be inappropriate for me to try to generalise any research findings. I rather posed to present the data in a way that would allow the voices of the participants to be heard.

In concluding this section on the interviews, I would like to comment that I found the interviews informative, enlightening and stimulating. I am satisfied that this was the most appropriate method of data gathering for this research project.

I will not analyse the gathered data or discuss my research findings in this section, but will report on that stage of the research process in Chapter 4, where I will try to enable the voices of the interviewees to be heard. In the next section, I will describe the process of data analysis, as acquired from renowned scholars like Babbie and Mouton (2001), Hollway and Jefferson (2002), Gubrium and Holstein (2003), Murray (in Camic et al. 2003), O'Donoghue (2003), Ratcliff (in Camic et al. 2003), Henning et al. (2004), Seale et al. (2004), Shank (2006), Grbich (2007), and Rossiter and Clark (2007).

### **3.6.2.2 Official documents**

In order to contextualise the individual stories and to substantiate the self-reported nature of the evidence provided by the respondents, I also visited the official documents and reports of the respondents. I conducted a documentary analysis to achieve a contextual understanding of the respondents' individual backgrounds and life histories. Documentary analysis allows one to learn about society as well as the research question and will therefore allow for contextualisation (Whisker 2001; Thomas 2003). I obtained and analyzed relevant documents. I hold no copies, as these reports are being archived at the place of safety.

The relevant documents included detailed reports by the social workers, probation officers, caretakers, educators, occupational therapist and medical nurse. The information I gathered through these documents, included information on the respondent's date of birth, his home address, the date of his arrest, detail of the alleged crime, occupational status of his parent(s), the socio-economic background of his parent(s), the marital status of his parent(s), the last school that the respondent attended, the highest grade that the respondent passed, the respondent's history of substance abuse, his medical condition, information on specialised psychological reports if applicable, information on the social worker's communication with the respondent's parent(s) and probation officer(s), as well as formative reports on the respondent's behaviour in the facility. I only consulted the reports and did not interview any of the compilers of these.

In citing these documents, I honoured the respondents' anonymous status by omitting their details. I therefore referred to the individual respondents' official documents in alphabetical order in accordance to the pseudonym (C, D, J, K, M, X) assigned to each as follows: Place of Safety (2008a), Place of Safety (2008b), Place of Safety (2008c), Place of Safety (2008d), Place of Safety (2008e) and Place of Safety (2008f).

As mentioned before, it was not my aim to establish whether the respondents were telling the truth or not during the interviews. I merely used their official reports to aid as background information as to give perspective to the data offered by the respondents through narrating their life stories. I therefore used the documents as a means of triangulation (Flick 2007) and not as a primary source of data, as explained by Silverman (in McCulloch 2004: 25):

“...texts are sometimes only important as ‘background material’ for the ‘real’ analysis. Where texts are analysed, they are often presented as ‘official’ or ‘common-sense’ versions of social phenomena, to be understood by the underlying social phenomena apparently found in the qualitative researcher’s analysis of her interviewees’ stories.”

### **3.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

I agree with Seale et al. (2004) that analysis is a process that starts prior to the first interview and which continues right through the research process, and not only belongs in the final stages of data analysis. When I chose my respondents and when I produced the thematic guide for my open-ended and in-depth personal interviews, I already made some analytical choices about which people and which types of discourses might be important. During the interviews, I also had to analyse the respondents' responses and narratives, which guided me towards the next question and which helped me to stay focused on the research topics. After each interview, I found myself rethinking the trajectory of the research and analysing the individual's responses. I had to stay disciplined so as not to deviate from my initial interview topics, but to give each respondent the same basic guidelines during the semi-structured, open-ended, personal, in-depth interviews. I felt that this was necessary to be able to stay within the scope of the research, as described in Chapter 1. Gubrium and Holstein (2003) warn that the researcher who analyses narratives should keep in mind that oral history reviews are not raw sources of information, but are themselves already analytic documents structured with complex codes and achieved meanings, where memory and history confront each other.

Henning et al. (2004:102) call the process of analysis the heartbeat of qualitative social research and maintain that the researcher displays his or her quality of thinking is displayed through the analytic process. The researcher makes meaning from the data by seeing the bigger picture and

by converting the raw empirical information into a thick description. According to Hollway and Jefferson (2002), Gubrium and Holstein (2003) and Grbich (2007), the purpose of analysis is to assist in the production of the informant's voice without imposing to know better than him or her. The informants' descriptions are grouped and summarised systematically, providing a reasoned organised framework that sums up and explains aspects of the social world that the respondents present. Hollway and Jefferson (2002), O'Donoghue (2003) and Shank (2006), argue that qualitative analysis should focus on the essence and importance of what is noticeable in the data and how, by means of identifying significant segments of data, interpret it in the most eligible way. After identifying the segments, the interpreter develops an organising scheme to sort and organise the data.

According to Murray (in Camic et al. 2003) and Stroobants (2005), we live in a storied world and we interpret the actions of others and ourselves through the stories we exchange, as narratives form the basic structure of human meaning-giving. Narratives underline our very being and our way of acting in the world. Telling our stories represents our lives in narrative form. Chappel et al. (2003) and Stroobants (2005) explain that telling life stories is an infinite process of reconstructing experiences, events and choices; and that people construct their own life stories or narratives by reflexive identification, and they come to see themselves as unique individuals who have an identity that belongs to them. This notion suggests that people have the ability to be reflexive, to look at themselves as from a distance, which gives the individual a future, a past and a present.

Shank (2006) proposes that, after the researcher defines which type of analysis he or she will use, the researcher must classify and organise the data and then present the results of the analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1990 in O'Donoghue 2003) refer to breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising, and categorising data. Through this process, assumptions held by the researcher and others about a phenomenon are analysed, questioned or explored. Murray (in Camic et al. 2003) and Grbich (2007) indicate the importance of the narrative analyst in considering the interpersonal and social context within which the narrative occurs, because the stories are narrations of events which unfold sequentially over time. According to Stroobants (2005:57), the researcher must take into account the self-interpretation of the respondent and his or her own growing understanding of it. Stroobants (2005:57) concludes that the interpretive process does not end there: readers will in turn reinterpret this narrative in relation to their own life experiences.

Shank (2006) claims that it is almost impossible to do qualitative research without listening to, and often creating, stories. He explains that narrative analysis is a family of techniques for turning

informal narratives into more formal accounts. Polkinghorne (1995:16) defines narrative analysis as follows:

“Narrative analysis relates events and actions to one another by configuring them as contributors to the advancement of a plot. The story constituted by narrative integration allows for the incorporation of notions of human purpose and choice as well as chance, happenings, dispositions, and environmental presses. The result of a narrative analysis is an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about.”

Hollway and Jefferson (2002) emphasise that the manner in which a story is told, the detail that is included in the story, the points that are emphasised, the morals drawn, all represent choices made by the narrator. These choices are revealing to the analyst of the narrative. According to Rossiter and Clark (2007), some interpretation is necessary in the construction of a life narrative, and we all bring our own perspectives and habits of thought to the interpretative task. Henning et al. (2004:123) hold that the narrator will edit and adjust the personal narrative to reflect a “performed, preferred self.” The speaker narrates with a purpose, and therefore the analyst should capture the essence and meaning thereof. The analyst must be sensitive to the way narrators position themselves, the way they portray others, and the way they emphasise certain parts of the storyline in order to portray the “preferred self.” Henning et al. (2004:123) propose that the analyst must be sensitive to the following:

- the kind of story within which the narrator places him- or herself and others;
- reasons for the narrator to share the story;
- the position the story takes in a larger societal narrative;
- discourses evident in the story;
- coherence and cohesion in the story;
- the role of archetypes in the story and the way conflict is presented; and
- the significance of the beginning and the end of the story.

Babbie and Mouton (2001) and Shank (2006) agree that the key criterion of good qualitative research is its level of trustworthiness. The researcher must be able to persuade his or her audience (including him or herself) that his or her research findings are worth paying attention to. The emphasis is on the trustworthiness of the research findings, whether we can depend on and trust the given research findings. Hollway and Jefferson (2002) conclude that the stories told by researchers should be methodologically, theoretically and clinically convincing. Furthermore, Hollway and Jefferson (2002), Gubrium and Holstein (2003), Henning et al. (2004), Shank (2006), and Rossiter and Clark (2007) agree that the analyst does not have to worry whether the informant is telling the truth and that interpretation is not pure creation. There is a difference between

objective fact and narrative truth. Sometimes the facts really do not matter to the meaning of the story. The story must be understandable to others and at least should conform to generally accepted conventions of the narrative within which it is situated. People who share the same cultural background must be able to identify with the narrative, because social and cultural contexts define the narrative. The above-mentioned scholars add that during interviews, one cannot expect answers on one occasion to replicate those on another because answers emerge from different circumstances. In qualitative data analysis, it is important that the researcher is honest in saying that what he or she has observed, in fact, what really happened. It is critical for the researcher to be honest about his or her perspective.

Shank (2006) claims that it is critical for the researcher to transcribe his or her own research data, as he or she will obtain new and fresh insights into the data. Although Ratcliff (in Camic et al. 2003) advises that it is not necessary to transcribe video data, and that video data can be directly analysed, I have decided to transcribe the interviews. Further, I took Ratcliff's (in Camic et al. 2003) advice that video data can be regarded as text and that the methods of analysis used with text can be directly applied to the video data. In transcribing the interviews, I had to watch the DVDs repeatedly until I was satisfied that I had recorded and transcribed the data as thoroughly as possible. Transcribing the interviews was a very lengthy and time-consuming process, but it allowed me to feel part of my research once again. In my opinion, this is one of the greatest advantages of videotaping the interviews. Sometimes, when I struggled to hear a specific word clearly, I could closely observe the respondent's mouth and, within the context of the sentence, could understand more clearly, what the respondent had said. Another great advantage of watching the DVDs was that I could observe and interpret the respondent's body language. For instance, I could notice when a respondent was feeling uncomfortable. Based on this knowledge, I was able to understand the answers given or remarks made by the respondent better. Although it was a lengthy and sometimes tedious process, I regard the transcribing of the interviews as a crucial part of the research and of the data analysis process.

In Chapter 4, I will practically apply and demonstrate the processes by which I analysed the research data.

### **3.8 THE WRITING PROCESS**

In writing up and analysing the life stories of my respondents, I had to stay true in reflecting a performed, preferred self within which the speaker narrates with a purpose (Henning et al. 2004). I had to be attentive to the description by Henning et al. (2004) of the way in which narrators position themselves, the way in which they portray others, and the way in which they emphasise certain

parts of the storyline. It was not for me to judge or edit this picture of the self, but to make it possible for the narrators to tell their life stories the way they preferred to (Rossiter & Clark 2007).

Shank (2006) warns that the observer, regardless of position, should be honest about his or her perspectives and truthfully report on what he or she observed or what the research process revealed. In presenting the data, I did so by using the respondents' own words and kept it as close as possible to what has actually been revealed by the individuals in the study, holding back my own voice as far as possible. I tried to be honest in approaching the data openly in a spirit of enquiry. I continually interrogated my responses to the data (Hollway & Jefferson 2002). In writing my report, I therefore stayed as close as possible to what the respondents actually said in the interviews. I tried to let the respondents be heard and seen at some point in the text where they shared personal experiences (Grbich 2007). In doing so, I attempted to give readers a feeling of walking in the informants' shoes and seeing things from their point of view (Taylor & Bodgan 1998 in O'Donoghue 2003). As already explained, I have translated the interviews from Afrikaans into English for the purpose of the report. As I tried to use the respondents' own words, I had to translate directly from Afrikaans into English. Unfortunately, it is evident that some of the authenticity of their thoughts might have been lost in the translation process.

Henning et al. (2004:2) call writing in the research process a "tool for reflection and composition." I agree, and throughout the research process, I used writing as a way of clarifying my thoughts. Reading, observing and listening gave a wealth of information, but I only really started to understand and interpret once I grappled with the data. Writing was the tool that helped me to document theoretical information and data, to develop and refine my research topic and research question, to understand theory, to plan and design the research project and finally to compose the thesis and write up the research results (Henning et al. 2004).

Because the interpretive paradigm guided my qualitative research project, I wrote in a subjective, rather than an objective or clinical manner. I wanted to portray my interpretation of the research study as well as give a personal voice to the narrations of my respondents. Once I started to engage with the data and started to interpret and make meaning thereof, I chose a more personal and intimate style of writing.

Shank (2006) provides clear guidelines for data display. During the first phase of data display, the data is explored and described. During the second phase of data display, the data is explained, ordered and the researcher starts to predict. This process helps to create displays that are organised in terms of the aspects the researcher seeks to understand. My analysis of the data

created a pen portrait, a way to make the respondents come alive for the reader who does not have access to the raw data. Therefore, my writing is descriptive and provides enough information to allow for meaningful interpretations by the reader, as proposed by Hollway and Jefferson (2002).

Grbich (2007) holds that using direct quotes from the interviewees is most effective in writing up case studies. He presents three ways of presenting data from case studies:

- firstly, the data can be consolidated narratives in the voice of a participant;
- secondly, the author can voice summaries of typical or extreme situations or individual experiences; and
- thirdly, author and participant voices can be combined.

Bodgan and Biklen (2007), on the other hand, present two ways of presenting data:

- firstly, the researcher makes a statement and then illustrates it with several examples taken from the interviews, including quotes from the interviewees; and
- secondly, the researcher incorporates the dialogue (quotations from the interviewees) and description directly into the text.

I did not use the first approach described by Grbich (2007), where only one voice is heard. My main aim throughout the research project was to be able to tell the stories of the six respondents in such a way that their voices would truly be heard. I wanted the reader to experience the story and not the views of a distanced researcher, as cautioned by Bodgan and Biklen (2007). I therefore incorporated the rest of the above-mentioned ways in writing up the data, allowing for understanding and interpretation to transpire. I combined my (the author's) voice with those of the respondents, by quoting from the individual interviews. I used several examples to illustrate the statements I made. I derived these statements from the research data.

Finally, I regard it a constraint that I had to translate four of the six respondents' own words from Afrikaans to English. Although I did my best to stay as close as possible to the original tone and meaning, it follows that some nuances might have been lost in the process.

### **3.9 SUMMARY**

The purpose of this chapter was to give an overview of the research design and research methodology used in my research project. I conducted a qualitative research study from an interpretative viewpoint. I presented the research project as six individual case studies as a

research unit. I gathered data by conducting in-depth personal interviews with the six individuals and through studying their official documents. In the next chapter, I will discuss the results of the research project by analysing the data through the telling and interpretation of the stories, which the six respondents narrated.

## CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will give detailed information on the case studies with relation to the conceptual framework, which outlines this research study (see Figure 2.1). I will do so by referring to the in-depth interviews I conducted with the six respondents in relation to their predispositions to learning. I will also refer to information gathered from their official files (Place of Safety, 2008a; Place of Safety, 2008b; Place of Safety, 2008c; Place of Safety, 2008d; Place of Safety, 2008e; Place of Safety, 2008f). The chapter is set up as follows: In Section 4.2, I will report in depth on the research findings. I will refer to information on the respondents' official files, as well as to the in-depth individual personal interviews where each respondent had the opportunity to narrate his life story. In Section 4.3, I record my interpretation of the research data in relation to the research question (see Section 1.6), and conceptual framework (see Figures 2.1 & 2.2). Section 4.4 serves as summary of the chapter.

### 4.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section, I will reflect on the research findings as revealed by each individual respondent. Before reporting on the actual interviews, I will first provide a general background of each respondent. This information was collected by reading the respondents' official files (Place of Safety, 2008a; Place of Safety, 2008b; Place of Safety, 2008c; Place of Safety, 2008d; Place of Safety, 2008e; Place of Safety, 2008f) where their legal documents, as well as reports from the social workers, occupational therapist, nurse and educators at the place of safety are stored. More information was available on some of the respondents than on others. It is thus important to note that the thickness of the background information varies between individual respondents.

I present the six individual case studies from the one with the most data available to the one with the least data available. The background information on each respondent is factual and, to my best knowledge, true. The respondents themselves will remain anonymous and only letters are used as names in order to protect their identities. I present them in the following order: K, D, M, X, C and J. I conducted four interviews in Afrikaans and two in English. One of the respondents was white, one was black and four were coloured. English was a second language to all of them. Five of the respondents were Afrikaans speaking and one was Xhosa speaking. I translated the Afrikaans interviews directly into English. I used direct quotations from the interviews and tried to stay as close to the original information as possible. Unfortunately, I had to translate four of the interviews from Afrikaans into English. I conducted only two interviews in English, but for both respondents, English was their second language. As I had to present none of the interviews in the respondent's

mother tongue, it is fair to assume that some of the authentic nuances might be lost in the process. I present the translated direct quotes from all the interviews in English.

During the in-depth personal interviews, the questions I asked each respondent related to the following themes discussed in Chapter 2:

- the developmental stage of the respondent at the time of the interview (see Section 2.4);
- the respondent's perception on his own ability to learn (see Section 2.5.2);
- the respondent's account of past experiences in relation to his levels of personal agency and resilience, as well as to the role significant others and environmental deprivation had played in shaping his predispositions to learning (see Sections 2.5.1; 2.5.2; 2.5.2.2; 2.5.3.1);
- the role that risk factors like substance abuse played in his life (see Sections 2.5.3 & 2.5.3.3); and
- how the respondent's involvement with delinquency, violence, crime and gangsterism contributed to his learning experiences and ambition, or the lack of it (see Sections 2.5.3.2 & 2.5.3.4).

I had no control over the content of the respondents' files. All I had control over was the way in which I conducted the interviews and, to a lesser degree, my personal interpretations of the respondents' life stories. As I have stated in Section 2.6, I will relate my findings to the interplay between resilience and risk factors in the achievement of agency by the respondents (see Figure 2.2), which may shed light on the individual's predisposition to learning. The data on each individual is given in the following sequence: general background information (taken from official files), followed by the respondent's life story according to his narration during the interview. In Section 4.3, I will interpret the research findings.

#### **4.2.1 Respondent K**

##### **4.2.1.1 General background information**

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1993
HOME LANGUAGE:	Afrikaans
DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL:	GR. 6 (2004)
LITERACY LEVEL WHEN	

PLACED AT PLACE OF SAFETY:	GR. 7 (2008)
DATE(S) ARRESTED:	05/10/2006; 12/10/2006
AGE WHEN ARRESTED:	13 years
DATE ADMITTED TO PLACE OF SAFETY:	19/10/2006
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	26/04/2008
AGE ON DATE OF INTERVIEW:	14 years and 6 months
RESIDING ADDRESS:	Grassy Park / Ottery
ALLEGED CRIME(S) COMMITTED:	Housebreaking and theft
PREVIOUS PLACEMENT(S):	Place of Safety Pollsmoor Prison

K was the second oldest of three children. According to his mother, K was born out of a “one-night-stand” with a man who at that time was serving a 15-year sentence in Pollsmoor Prison for rape. Since his birth, K’s father had shown very little interest in his general welfare, leaving the responsibility of contact in the hands of the paternal grandfather. K had visited his father in jail up to the age of nine years. The mother’s eldest daughter was born out of a long-term relationship and the youngest child was born out of a marriage, which lasted for approximately five years and disintegrated because of the excessive drug abuse by the husband. They got divorced in 1999, and their son was born in 2000. Their mother abandoned K and his sister since infancy and left in the care of their maternal grandmother and step-grandfather. During this period, there were allegations that the mother was involved in prostitution for a while and that she was living a nomadic and unstable life. Because of the mother’s lifestyle and the fact that she had no accommodation or income at that stage, a welfare organisation removed the children and placed them in foster care with the maternal grandmother in February 1997. This provided K and his sister with the emotional stability and care that they needed, and K grew much attached to his grandparents.

During October 1999, the step-grandfather immigrated to England and obtained a working visa. The grandmother remained behind to finalise their application to adopt K and his sister and to rear them as their own children. Arrangements were made by the step-grandfather regarding schools that K and his sister were to attend in England and he forwarded a letter stating his intention to adopt them. The biological mother signed her consent to the proposed adoption, but both biological fathers of the children opposed the application. During the adoption investigation, K and his sister accompanied their grandmother to England to visit their step-grandfather. The service rendering social worker at the time had to investigate an allegation by one of the opposing biological fathers that the grandmother was abusing drugs. The grandmother apparently admitted that she had

battled with a drug addiction problem in 1992, but that she received counselling and overcame her addiction. Due to an administrative problem (the step-grandfather's unwillingness to return to South Africa to sign the necessary adoption documents in person), the adoption process could not be concluded. The grandmother then stayed in South Africa and the personal circumstances of K's biological mother gradually improved after she came to live with her mother and her two children during 2000. The step-grandfather financially supported the whole family, including the unemployed biological mother, with monthly deposits. In June 2001, the grandmother went on holiday to England for a period of twelve weeks. Subsequently, K and his sister were put in the care of their biological mother, and the grandmother emigrated to join her husband in England in September 2002. Before her departure the grandmother made a commitment to support K's mother and her children until such time that the mother became financially independent. Due to the improved social circumstances of the mother, K and his sister were discharged from the Child Care Act 74/83 during March 2003 and the welfare organisation subsequently closed the file in May 2003.

In September 2004, the case was re-opened due to the serious behavioural problems displayed by K. K's mother reported at that time that he was uncontrollable and disrespectful at home and that he was abusing tik. At the same time, K's mother admitted to the service rendering social worker that she was addicted to both tik and alcohol. She admitted that her abusive relationship with a fellow drug addict exacerbated the unstable home circumstances. In October 2004, the school complained about K's verbally and physically aggressive behaviour. K apparently left his mother's care and went to live with his parental grandfather who promised to ensure that K attended school regularly. In November 2004, the grandfather admitted to the social worker that K was uncontrollable; he refused to attend school and did as he pleased. The maternal grandmother, who was visiting the family at that time, reported to the social worker that she had been supporting the family with a monthly amount of between R2 000.00 and R3 000.00. She complained K and his mother squandered the money on drugs and indicated that she would terminate the financial support with immediate effect.

Despite regular social work intervention, K's behaviour continued to deteriorate. He was truanting on a regular basis, abusing drugs, sleeping out of the house and living an unsupervised and nomadic life. He also became undernourished and underweight. As a result, Children's Court proceedings were eventually opened on 19 April 2005 and the court subsequently placed K at a place of safety for at-risk children, on 21 April 2005. Reportedly, his placement and progress were extremely positive. He attended school, displayed good leadership skills and reported that he was happy about the regular telephonic contact that he received from his maternal grandparents in England. He complained, however, about the lack of interest, visits and telephonic contact from his

mother. The mother also failed to respond to the contact attempts of the social worker at the time. Children's Court proceedings were eventually finalised and K the court referred K to a children's home on 24 June 2005. Unfortunately, K absconded from the place of safety where he was staying before his admission could be finalised, and attempts made by the social worker to find him were unsuccessful. K was arrested for robbery at the age of 13, on both 5 and 12 October 2006. At first, the court sentenced him to Pollsmoor Prison and after a week transferred him to the place of safety, on 19 October 2006. Finally, the court sent him for two years to a youth care centre.

On the date of the interview, K was 14 years old. He was a tall, handsome young man. If I did not know his age, I would have thought that he was at least 18 years old. He had an unshaven moustache and carried himself with confidence.

#### **4.2.1.2 K's narrated life story**

I conducted the interview in Afrikaans, K's home language. Since birth, K had experienced tension and rejection. He was only one year old when the court sentenced his father to 15 years' imprisonment for rape. K visited his father in prison up to the age of nine years. I do not know whether K knew the truth, but when I asked him why his father went to jail, he told me that it was because he accidentally killed a robber who wanted to steal his money. When I asked him how he felt about his father, he replied as follows:

"How do I feel about my father, Miss? Actually I love him a lot, Miss, but there are many days that I'm angry at him, Miss, because I never see him, Miss, and he comes out in two months, Miss and nowadays he phones me frequently, Miss, now that I'm here."

His mother rejected him when he was still very young and shifted her responsibility as mother to K's grandmother, whom he dearly loved. When I asked him what the reason was for him to live with his grandmother, he replied:

"My mother scolded me a lot, Miss ... when I did wrong things, Miss. I haven't noticed the wrong things, Miss, and I thought it was right, Miss, and one day I decided no, I don't want to stay there anymore, Miss, then my grandmother took me along to England, Miss ... I was five years old, Miss, and then I stayed there for a year, Miss, then I came back to South Africa, Miss ... then I stayed with my grandfather for a short while, Miss. Then I went to my mother's house, Miss."

K attended pre-school when he was five years old. Considering his date of birth, he was sent to primary school during the year in which he turned six. He told me that during the time that he lived with his grandmother and before he started abusing drugs, he used to do his homework in the afternoons after school, after which he played TV games or played with his friends outside the

shops. During the interview, he told me that he never had to repeat a year at school and his school reports had been good. He dropped out of school when he was in Grade 6.

He admitted that his behaviour at school challenged authority and that he frequently got into trouble because of fighting at school:

“My reports were all right, Miss. Only I didn't want to give my co-operation at school. I was – how can I say Miss – I was very short tempered, Miss. Anything a boy would say to me, Miss, then I wanted to hit him, Miss. I fought now and then. But my report was all right... The educators at the school, they talked to me a lot, Miss. Every afternoon the teachers maybe called me, the teacher, then they would talk to me, Miss, then I had to stay in detention where I had to write on a page, write I'm sorry, on three pages, Miss. Every day every time, write when I fought at school and so on, Miss.”

When I asked him why he fought at school, he replied:

“You see, Miss, I always wanted to be a bully at school ... uhm ... I always wanted to be the bully at school. When a guy only looked at me, Miss, then I would fight with him and if I saw there was a fight at school, Miss, when a guy, Miss, maybe hits another guy that I liked, then I also wanted to chime in and hit him, Miss.”

He told me that there were about 19 pupils in his class at school. The teachers helped learners who struggled, but he did not like to ask for help. When I asked him what he disliked most at school, he replied as follows:

“Worst for me, Miss...there's no way to say that school was bad, Miss. Because I'm sorry that I dropped out of school, Miss. Like now, Miss, because school wasn't bad, I made it bad myself, Miss. Because I didn't like, Miss, to go to detention class, Miss, every Friday afternoon, Miss. Then I decided that I will drop out of school and then I started to bunk every day, Miss. Then I went home, my mother was at home, Miss, then I told my mother, then, Miss, I said that the educator said I may not come to school that day.”

What he liked most about school, was sport and Mathematics. At first, he claimed that he dropped out of school because the teachers sent him to detention class, and because of his abuse of drugs. Later in the interview, he mentioned that school was boring. He did not want to attend classes in subjects with which he struggled, like Afrikaans and English. He liked Mathematics and was despondent when he had to leave the Mathematics class:

“Because maybe I didn't like the classes in the school. I maybe didn't like it to go to another class. Maybe, Miss, I wasn't... I was actually in an English school, but I can't properly ... uhm ... write English and Afrikaans. Maybe when I had to go to the Afrikaans class, I bunked and went to the toilet and then smoked cigarettes. When I felt bored then I would leave the school building. I liked Maths a lot. When I had to change to another class, I didn't like it to go out of the class.”

Resentment filled K's recollection of school. He started to attend school at a very young age. He attended an English school, while his home language was Afrikaans. He therefore could master

neither language properly. According to him, he could do Mathematics without much trouble. He refused to do anything he disliked. This resulted in him misbehaving in class and fighting on the school grounds. He was sent to detention every Friday afternoon, with no success. This was the final reason for him dropping out of school. At his mother's home, there was no real encouragement for him to go to school or to do his homework. He told me that his mother did attend school, but he did not know to which level. He knew nothing about his father's education. He assumed that his maternal grandmother and step-grandfather went to school, as his step-grandfather was a dentist. (According to K's official file, his grandfather was a dental technician) (Place of Safety, 2008d). His older brother dropped out of school in Grade 9 and was a gangster. His sister went to school up to Grade 10 and was unemployed at the time of the interview. K's younger brother was still attending school, but frequently stayed away.

During the interview, K told me that he started to use drugs in 2005. He told me that his family had a business of selling flowers and that the young men who worked at the flower stands introduced him to drugs. He started smoking dagga and moved on to mandrax and tik:

"First, Miss, I worked, Miss, with my family, actually Miss, with the flowers, at the flower stands, Miss. The boys that worked with us, Miss, I started with them, Miss, maybe I drove with them somewhere, Miss, I helped them and then I saw that they stopped to buy stuff, Miss. Then I asked them what it was and then one day I tried that thing tik, up to now, Miss. Now I can't stop. It is very difficult, that drug is difficult to get off, Miss."

According to K, at home there was enough money to live comfortably. He admitted that he was spoilt and that he only wanted more and more money to buy drugs. When his mother refused to give him more money, he started to sell his clothes and eventually started to steal from other people. He even broke into the neighbour's house. He gave the following reason why the court sent him to a place of safety:

"Yes, Miss, 2005, Miss, I was in that place, Miss. I was a problem child, Miss. Every day I ran away from home, Miss, when I was busy with my homework, Miss, then I ran away, Miss, then I played games, Miss, with my friends outside the shops, Miss. My mother sent me to a social worker, Miss. She said I don't want to go to school, Miss. Then I was placed in a place of safety, Miss. Then I stayed there for eight months, Miss. Then, one day, one weekend, I went home, Miss, and then they didn't pick me up again, Miss and I thought, okay, I'm not going back again, I am going to stay outside, Miss. And then I stayed outside for a long time, Miss and then I began to... with my friends, Miss, go to night clubs, Miss. I was 14... I was 13 years old, Miss, when I started to go to night clubs, Miss, and drink, Miss, and there I smoked tik and dagga and stuff, Miss."

Although K told me that his relationship with his mother was non-existent, he told me that his mother only smoked cigarettes even though his files attest that he was aware of his mother's drug problem. According to the social worker's reports, K and his mother used to smoke tik together. They used the money sent by K's grandmother to buy drugs. According to the social worker's

reports on his official file, K's maternal grandmother whom he admired so much was also at one stage addicted to tik. Throughout the interview, K never referred to drug abuse by any of his family members.

K smoked tik, which kept him awake for days. He needed to smoke dagga or mandrax after he had smoked tik, as he then needed a tranquiliser to sleep. He told me that there were no drugs at his school. The learners only smoked cigarettes. He described how tik made him feel:

"How do I feel ... I feel high, I feel different and I see stuff in the road. You see stuff and you can't sleep and you suspect people of doing stuff that they maybe didn't do and so on and it is very short temper – some of the people are short-tempered when they are tikked."

According to K, dagga did not make him aggressive; it made him laugh. He said that mandrax was similar to dagga, but it also made him feel numb and sleepy. When I asked him whether tik was bad for him, he replied as follows:

"It eats your brain cells and the more you use tik, you are going into a high but you are not going like the first time you used tik. You will go high, then you come down from tik, then you go low in the brain cells. It eats your brain cells."

K told me that when he was on drugs, he did not want to go to school:

"When I did drugs, Miss, I didn't want to go to school. Made trouble, then maybe I went home late. Then maybe I smoked dagga the whole night and then I go home late and then I go to sleep. Then my mother wakes me in the morning when she goes to work. Maybe I will then close the door and continue to sleep and then I don't want to get up."

I asked him if he could still learn as well as he did before he used tik. He replied:

"In a way that you ... tik, Miss, they say that tik makes you smart. Many people are clever when they use tik and then they would write and draw a lot and so on."

K told me that he always wanted to be a fire fighter. However, when he was using drugs, he only wanted to become a drug lord or merchant. He also wanted to be a gangster like his older brother. He saw his brother was carrying a gun and he aspired to do that as well. K grew up in an area notorious for crime and violence. Gangsterism was a way of life for many young men and even boys in those areas. K told me that he always liked to fight with other boys. When I asked him where he had learned to fight, he replied:

"It's the area, Miss. When I, if I go out of my mother's area, then maybe I go to my stepmother for the weekend, Miss, but that area, Miss, they fight a lot. The people there drink, they shoot with guns, stuff like that, Miss. I also fought like that, Miss. There were small gangs, Miss. Maybe it's the Mongrels gangs and the JFK gangs, Miss. Those are not gangs for big men, those are small gangs, Miss. The small guys, then we fight against the other guys, Miss, on the field or so on, Miss."

He described the gangs as follows:

“My eldest brother, Miss, is one area, actually Miss, it is one place, Ottery. It is divided into two parts, Miss. The one side there are flats – both sides there are flats. It is situated wide apart, Miss. This side the Mongrels are staying and that side the JFK’s, Miss. There it goes like this, Miss, if they fight: there is a field and then they fight there, Miss. That is why the gangs never stop fighting, Miss.”

I asked him what type of skills a person needed to have in order to survive in that area, why he had to join a gang and what happened to somebody who did not belong to a gang:

“You must be quick, Miss. You must always look wherever you go, Miss. You must always be on the lookout, Miss, for the other gangs, Miss. Then you must – it’s actually not ... (difficult) to get accepted in a gang, Miss. If you steal for the gang, Miss, then you will be accepted, Miss. The gang doesn’t invite you and they won’t chase you away either, Miss ... The gang is for your own safety, Miss. We live in the area, Miss. Maybe if you have a quarrel with a guy, then the whole gang will come, Miss ... There are many guys who don’t belong to a gang, Miss. They, they shoot him, Miss, they kill him, Miss.”

He told me that he was scared of the gangs in his area and that the gangs would look for him when he goes home:

“I am really, Miss, I’m scared of the gang, Miss. Because when I get outside, Miss, the gangs are looking for me, Miss. Because I actually shot the other gangs, Miss. Therefore all the gangs are looking for me, Miss. Last year I ran away, Miss, October, Miss. Then there was a war between the gangsters, Miss, and the gangsters shot at each other and then I went along, Miss, and then I shot one of their members, Miss. Now they are looking for me outside, Miss ... I shot him in the arm. They tell me that his one arm is paralysed, Miss.”

He told me that he came into conflict with the law for the first time in 2006, when he was 14 years old (according to his official file, he was 13 years old when arrested) and lived in a house with three adult male friends. He admitted that during that time he visited nightclubs where he abused alcohol and drugs like dagga and tik. During the same time, he had worked in a fast food outlet in Cape Town. He was paid R1 200.00 per month which he used to buy clothes, food and pay rent, and the rest he spent on drugs. He got arrested for shoplifting, but was sent home on bail. A few months later he was arrested again and detained in Pollsmoor Prison. According to his legal documents, K was detained in Pollsmoor Prison and was locked up for a week with adult male prisoners. K told me that he was there for a whole month. He described his time in Pollsmoor as follows:

“It’s not nice in Pollsmoor, Miss. You don’t sleep well, Miss. Because the guy would come to me ... came, Miss ... and they fight a lot in the cells because if you’re not – how can I put it – a number then you must wash socks and things like that, Miss.”

I did not ask K what the guy would do to him, as I could see that he was struggling to talk about his time in Pollsmoor Prison. After a week in Pollsmoor Prison, the court transferred him to the place of safety.

Although K was only 14 years old at the time of the interview and although he admitted that he was too young to look after himself, it was clear to me that he was no longer a teenager. He looked much older than his age. He was tall and had to shave his beard. Although his one front tooth was missing, K was a good-looking young man. He told me that he had always been taller than his peers. He had a 17-year-old girlfriend who was waiting for him, but who had never visited him at the place of safety. K preferred to be in the company of adult friends and he liked to spend time with them doing adult things. He showed insight into the proper age for a young man to live on his own – he claimed that he would be able to do this once he was 18 years old. He realised that he took off too early in his life and that he was not ready to take full responsibility for himself when he actually tried to live like an adult at the age of 14. In his own words:

“... it was too soon, yes. If I think, yes, because at that time I was, yes, I was the same height as now, Miss. Many people didn’t take me for my age of 14, Miss. Because I lied about my age – a lot. I said no I’m 17; I’m 18, maybe went to night clubs and then said I’m 18, and then they let me in and so on, Miss.”

K showed insight into the proper age for a young couple to become sexually active (18 years), although he claimed that boys and girls in his community became sexually active at the age of 14. He said the proper age for a young woman to have a baby was between 18 and 21, although there were girls in his community who became mothers at the age of 13. According to K, these girls were regarded adult by the community:

“People don’t see her as a child anymore, Miss. Because she’s now an adult. There are many girls who use drugs. Maybe they will get babies and so on.”

When I asked him whether the babies’ fathers would support the children, he replied:

“Hu-uh. You get many fathers who maybe help, Miss. And there are many who don’t help. They only want to ... gangsterism ... they steal, they don’t want to pay for the school, for the child and so on.”

He knew what to expect from his near future. He said that the court already sentenced him to two years at a youth care centre and that he was awaiting placement. He told me that the centre had a school where he would be able to learn vocational skills, like training in the hospitality business as a chef. Once he completed his sentence at the youth care centre, he would go and live with his mother in Grassy Park. When I asked him to visualise him being 30 years old, he replied that he would like to have his own house, car, wife and children. He wanted to become a fire fighter to

help people when their houses burnt down and to save lives. He knew that he had to go back to school to be able to become a fire fighter. He considered going back to primary school to finish Grade 7. He claimed that there were learners in Grade 7 who were 16 years old. He was also aware of night schools for adults that he could attend. He said that if he had his own children, he would see to it that they attended school. He also said that he would not spoil his children because if parents spoil their children, the children always want their way and if they do not get what they want from their parents, they turn to crime.

#### **4.2.2 Respondent D**

##### **4.2.2.1 General background information**

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1994
HOME LANGUAGE:	Afrikaans
DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL:	Grade 4 (2006)
LITERACY LEVEL AT PLACE OF SAFETY:	Illiterate (2008)
DATE OF FIRST ARREST:	26/10/2006
AGE WHEN ARRESTED:	12 years
DATE ADMITTED TO PLACE OF SAFETY:	27/10/2006
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	26/04/2008
AGE ON DATE OF INTERVIEW:	14 years
RESIDING ADDRESS:	Strand
ALLEGED CRIME(S) COMMITTED:	Murder; theft
PREVIOUS PLACEMENT(S):	None

D's parents were divorced. His father contributed no maintenance money to his unemployed mother. According to the social worker's report (Place of Safety Western Cape 2008b), severe poverty was visible in his mother's house. It was very small and consisted of only one room of about 6 m<sup>2</sup>. There was a basin behind one curtain and apparently a toilet behind another curtain. In the remaining space, there was one bed for the mother and both her young daughters. According to D's medical reports, he had apparently suffered from tuberculosis when he was younger, but had fully recovered. His mother was involved with many boyfriends, who were "drug lords" (drug merchants). D dropped out of school many times and after he had started using drugs, he never returned to school. He was addicted to tik and abused dagga and mandrax. As a result, his mother could not control him. His father lived in another house with his new wife. He sometimes gave D money, which he then used to buy drugs. At the age of 12, D the police arrested for a very

serious murder case. At the place of safety, he exhibited severe withdrawal symptoms from tik. He also stuttered and was extremely aggressive and rude. He was underweight and visibly suffered from malnutrition. He seemed much smaller than his age group. He was hyperactive and aggressive. The social workers and teachers reported that it was quite difficult to make contact with him as he was very withdrawn. He apparently did not make friends easily and always wanted to fight. He seldom smiled when someone tried to engage with him, he would withdraw.

According to the reports on his official file (Place of Safety Western Cape 2008b), D had no obvious purpose or ideals in life. Although he had attended school up to Grade 4, he was illiterate. According to the educators' reports, he was at first very rebellious and acted out when he was at school at the place of safety. This negative attitude changed over time and he started to cooperate. In spite of intensive remedial and developmental interventions by the educators, D's cognitive abilities never seemed to improve. This could be a result of his lengthy history of drug abuse, especially his addiction to tik (see Section 2.5.3.3). D's abilities were limited in comparison to other children his age. At first at the place of safety, he could only write his name and could not even write his surname. He could only add and subtract small numbers, at a level even lower than Grade 1. He could not read at all. He had a poor vocabulary and stuttered, sometimes failing to complete his sentences.

D absconded from the place of safety during October 2007, but the police returned him after a week. During that time, he stayed with female strangers in Cape Town. They thought he was a street child and took him in. He then stole a cell phone and the police apprehended him. The nurse reported that after the police returned him to the place of safety, he requested to undergo a test for HIV, as he had had sex while he was outside. He was 13 years old at the time.

His mother never came to visit him at the place of safety and the social worker had to take him on home visits to see his family. According to the social worker's reports, on one of these visits, D's mother exclaimed in front of him that it was much easier for her since D stayed at the place of safety and that she dreaded the thought of him returning home.

Apart from the information in D's official documents (Place of Safety Western Cape 2008b), I also had some previous insights into D's case. Although I undertook not to refer to the respondents' court cases, I deem it necessary to do so in D's case, as I regard the serious nature of the crime committed an important factor in D's development. As I have described in Chapter 1, I did some research for a drug awareness video. I filmed a number of people, inter alia with D. During that interview, he told me in detail what had happened on the day of the murder. He allegedly was an

accomplice to the killing of an eighteen-year-old girl. At the time of the murder, D was not sleeping at home and his mother did not know where he was. He was abusing tik and other drugs with three adult men. At the time of the murder, they had abused tik. They apparently accused the girl of stealing from them. D was sent to buy petrol. The three men threw the petrol over the girl's body and set her alight. She died in hospital a week later. D was witness and accomplice to this very traumatic event. Because of his young age at the time of the murder, the High Court discharged him after a widely publicised High Court appearance. His three accomplices received lengthy jail sentences. During the interview reported on below, I never referred to the previous interview or the crime itself. The questions I put to D were similar to those put to the other respondents.

#### **4.2.2.2 D's narrated life story**

I conducted the interview in D's home language, Afrikaans. At the time of the interview, D was 14 years old. He had already been in the place of safety for 18 months. Contrary to his unwillingness to allow contact by other people, during the interview he freely revealed information without really showing any emotion. Sometimes, it seemed to me that the lengthy court case had drained him emotionally and that he was used to answering questions. Even so, it was clear to me that he wanted me to listen to his story.

According to D, his mother worked in the catering business and his father was a painter but, according to D's official files, both his parents were unemployed and his mother lived from social grants. D did not think that his mother was doing anything wrong:

"Yes, Miss, I think she works from 7 o'clock to 10 o'clock at night, Miss. My mother is off a lot, Miss. Sunday's she's off, Miss, but sometimes she works early, then she gets off at 5 o'clock, Miss. And when my little sister is sick, she stays at home, Miss."

There was no supervision at home and D loitered every day after school. In his own words:

"After school I loitered, Miss – was naughty."

When his mother worked (supposedly as a prostitute, according to the social worker's report), she came home very late. D and his sisters would then stay with their aunt, but there was no proper supervision either. D told me that his parents divorced when he was three years old. He was the eldest child in his family, with two younger sisters. D had regular contact with his father, who was living a few houses from his mother. His father had a new wife and they had two children. D grew up in a home where he received no cognitive stimulation. There was no room for him or anybody else to do homework or to study. According to him, his mother passed Grade 12 at school and his

father Grade 10. When I asked him whether there were books at home and whether somebody ever read him stories when he was younger, he replied as follows:

“Nu-uh. My mother only reads *Die Son* (Afrikaans tabloid newspaper).”

He said that his mother paid his school fees and that he had everything he needed for school. He said that he liked Mathematics, but he could not read properly. In his own words:

“I haven’t ... that time I haven’t learnt to read, Miss.”

When I asked him why it was necessary for a person to go to school, he replied:

“For your education, Miss. Because one day you will not find a job, Miss. Maybe you can get lost and then you can’t read what is written on the stop sign and where you are, Miss.”

No efficient parenting took place and D could do as he had pleased. His mother did not even know that he was abusing drugs. In own words:

“She only found out when I got a court case, Miss, my first court case, Miss. She only found out in the court, Miss, that I use drugs, Miss.”

D started to smoke dagga at the age of 12 and moved on to mandrax and tik. A young man who was loitering on the school grounds introduced him to drugs. D explained as follows:

“The whole day he walked around at the school, Miss. Then we walked with him, Miss. He also had a gun, Miss. Then we walked with him, then he decided to buy dagga, Miss. He bought dagga for R5.00, Miss. Then he made a pipe, Miss. He told me I must hold it like that, Miss, I must puff like when I smoke an *entsjie* (cigarette), Miss. Then I puffed, Miss. Then he said I’m not drawing my cigarette, Miss, and then I drew, Miss. From that day, dagga made me high, Miss. I laughed a lot, Miss, told jokes ... then I started ... that was the real drug.”

D told me that some learners brought dagga to school and smoked it on the school grounds. Sometimes a learner would leave the school grounds during school hours to buy drugs at the “ai” (drug merchant). When the teachers caught a learner smoking or when they noticed that he was high on drugs, they would phone the learner’s parents. When I asked him what his mother did after she found out that he was smoking dagga, he replied:

“When she could smell dagga on me in the evenings, my mother hits me or she waits until I’m in the bath, then she starts to hit.”

I asked him how he paid for the drugs:

“Every Friday I got pocket money, Miss. Every Friday my mother gave me R100.00, Miss. Then I went to my father, Miss, and then he gave me about R20.00, Miss.”

When he started using tik, he realised that it made him feel very good and that it kept him awake:

“Then I smoked everyday if I had money or I broke into cars to steal, Miss. Then we bought tik. We didn’t worry about dagga anymore, Miss, only tik, tik. And when you ... you didn’t eat anymore, Miss. When I got home, I only washed and changed and then maybe my mother would give me money. She asked if I wanted to eat, and even if it was a Sunday meal, then I don’t eat, Miss. The whole weekend I would only smoke tik, Miss. Now and then I would steal five rand, twenty rand at home, Miss, but never a lot of money. My mother didn’t know, Miss. I would tell her I didn’t feel well.”

He realized that the drugs were bad for him. He told me that he wanted to become a painter, but when he used drugs, he did not think about that. He only thought of stealing to be able to get drugs:

“My brain is damaged, yes, Miss. Because I couldn’t think of anything else, that wasn’t nice anymore, Miss, only drugs, drugs, Miss... No, Miss, I didn’t think about school, I only thought we must steel, Miss, that’s what you want to do, Miss.”

Since he was very young, D enjoyed fighting at school. That was what he preferred to do during break times at school. Even if there were no reason to fight, he would get involved in a fight because he wanted to. He took part in gangster-like fights. In his own words:

“It’s like playing a game, Miss. They stay in another place, Miss ... in another camp, you see, Miss. We stay here, Miss ... we don’t walk with them on the same street ... then we have a gang fight, Miss ... over nothing, Miss, only ... break to pass, Miss, but then they got too serious, Miss ... after a while.”

He also smoked dagga at school:

“Yes, Miss, I was naughty at school, Miss. Every day gang fight, at school, Miss. And then I started with drugs, Miss, dagga, Miss.”

He realised that he was not coping with schoolwork when he was in Grade 4. According to D, he had a very strict male educator in Grade 4 who expected him to do a lot of work. He could not cope. He felt stupid when he could not do the work. Then he would tear up the page or book during break. The school provided extra classes in the afternoon, but he never wanted to attend. The other children did not tease him, because they knew that he would hit them. He then started staying away from school more frequently:

“I decided I’m not going to school anymore, Miss ... when my mother thought I went to school in the morning ... got out of the bus and climbed over the fence, Miss, every day, for two months, Miss, then they expelled me.”

He frequently skipped school with his friends:

"No, school wasn't nice. At break, when the school came out, we took our bags, Miss, and we went away, Miss. Then we stayed with the *ais* (drug merchant) for the whole day, because we smoked. When the school came out, we then robbed the school people like the school children. Then we walked like the school boys and when I got home, I just put my bag down and without eating, I went away again, Miss."

The educators gave him notices to give to his mother. These he tore up on his way home. At school, he was given three disciplinary warnings, but got expelled when he broke into the school with his friends. He was 12 years old and in Grade 4 at the time. In his own words:

"They called my mother a lot, Miss. And sent letters home with me, but then I tear it up on my way home, Miss. Then they gave ... they gave me three warnings, Miss. After a while, I became less restless, Miss, and then I started to do wrong things with my friends, Miss. Then we broke into the school, and then they expelled me from the school, Miss. Then my mother sent me to her sister... then my mother said ... okay, she will send me away, Miss ... but then I stayed at my mother's house, Miss ... in the mornings before she goes to work, she gives me my shoes...and then my mother locks me ... and then she leaves me at her sister ... and from then on me and my sisters stayed there, Miss ... my one sister went to school and the other sister was still small ... but while my mother was at work, I drank ... drugs, Miss."

He committed more and more crimes after he started to use tik, but he the police did not apprehend him. He befriended criminal adult males and became uncontrollable. His mother never knew where he was and he did not sleep or eat for days. D has never worked to earn money. If he needed money, he simply robbed someone. When I asked him about his ambitions, he told me that he would like to become a painter. He had no idea of how to find a job. When I asked him how he would be able to support himself once he got out of the place of safety, he answered as follows:

"Steal, Miss, that's the best, Miss."

Although D struggled to verbalise his thoughts, he displayed insight into the predicament (as explained by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2007) that work opportunities open to youths like him are regarded unattractive, because these youths are uneducated and unqualified. He did not expect that anybody would give him a job:

"Where, Miss? Most people think ... better man ... Miss, when you're alone and as small as I am now and don't go to school, Miss, then they know a guy wants to steal, Miss, you know, Miss."

D had no idea of future learning opportunities and was under the impression that everybody had to attend school up to the age of 19 or 21. He had no future vision. When I asked him what he would like to be at the age of 30, he replied:

"I don't know, Miss, I haven't thought of that, Miss."

He told me that he had a girlfriend when he was 11 years old. This was a childlike relationship. When I asked him whether he had bought her gifts, he replied:

“No, sometimes we played games, Miss and uhm we play games, Miss. Games, soccer and friends, Miss, then our whole team, Miss, and then we go to the girls, Miss, then maybe we play hide-and-seek and so on, Miss.”

When I asked him his opinion about which age he thought would be proper for a boy and a girl to have sex, he replied:

“The time now, Miss ... any ... they have sex from any age the people have sex now, Miss.”

He put strong emphasis on the importance of a person knowing his or her rights before having a baby:

“You must know all your rights (before you have babies). Twenties, in my twenties, Miss. Everything must be in place, Miss, when I one day have children, Miss.”

I asked him to tell me how he would raise his children one day. He replied:

“More or less like my mother raised me, Miss, but not with a hard life, Miss, but in a different way, Miss ...Not letting them stay away from school, Miss. Then I will tell them about all the places, Miss. They mustn't do what I did, Miss. I will show them the right way, Miss, like my mother always showed me, Miss.”

When I asked D what he would like to say to his mother, he reacted as if he had recited the answer. D had been at the place of safety for at least 18 months and during that time underwent quite a few therapeutic programmes. His response therefore was probably not a spontaneous one and he did not stutter as he used to when he was answering previous questions:

“I'm sorry for what I have done and I don't want to do it again. Reason, because I have learnt out of my mistakes. When I get out, I want to enjoy a good life. Then I want to go to school again and do nothing wrong and I won't smoke drugs anymore. I won't do drugs and I won't walk with bad friends. I will never steal from people again. I will change my whole life. I will go to school where I find myself... to get education and I won't do wrong things again.”

At the end of the interview, D told me that he was very nervous about his pending court appearance, as the case was reaching its end. He was afraid of going to a youth care centre. He told me that the boys at the centre stabbed one another and did terrible things. He wanted to go home.

### 4.2.3 Respondent M

#### 4.2.3.1 General background information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1991
HOME LANGUAGE:	Afrikaans
DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL:	GR. 8 (2007)
LITERACY LEVEL AT PLACE OF SAFETY:	GR. 7 (2008)
DATE OF FIRST ARREST:	03/09/2007
AGE WHEN ARRESTED:	15 years 11 months
DATE ADMITTED TO PLACE OF SAFETY:	04/09/2007
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	16/02/2008
AGE ON DATE OF INTERVIEW:	16 years 3 months
RESIDING ADDRESS:	Ysterplaat
ALLEGED CRIME(S) COMMITTED:	Theft out of motor vehicle; Possession of suspected stolen goods
PREVIOUS PLACEMENT(S):	None

According to his official documents (Place of Safety Western Cape 2008c), M was the youngest of three children born from the relationship between his parents. His parents had been divorced 24 years ago but had been living together again for more than 20 years. They were residing in a garage after losing the house they were renting. They had no access to amenities such as a kitchen, bathroom or toilet. The mother was working as a bookkeeper. She was the breadwinner of the family. The father was a qualified boilermaker and used to be self-employed but then stopped working because of his drinking habits. M's sister was in a children's home from a young age, she was married and was experiencing marital problems at the time of the interview. M's brother had shortly before moved in with his girlfriend.

The relationship between M's parents was characterised by violence. The abusive father, an alcoholic, was very violent towards his wife and children. M's father physically abused his sister and mother. According to the social worker's report (Place of Safety Western Cape 2008c), the mother indicated that she had no intention of leaving her husband and claimed that the beatings were much less since M was at the place of safety. The reason for this was that M used to intervene and tried to protect his mother and sister from his father. M's mother was cold towards and emotionally detached from him. She failed to be present at M's court appearances. Only his older sister had visited him at the place of safety.

M had attended a secondary school for learners with special educational needs (ELSEN). He did not attend school regularly and dropped out of school halfway through 2007 (grade 8) when he started to use drugs. Most of his friends, who were much older than M, were also using drugs. M repeatedly exhibited criminal and violent behaviour when he was with his friends. The police arrested him on 3 September 2007 on a charge of theft out of a motor vehicle and the possession of suspected stolen goods. He indicated that these offences were committed with friends who, like him, abused drugs and tried to support their respective lifestyles through crime. The court placed him at the place of safety on 4 September 2007.

According to his social worker, M put very strong emphasis on fairness and wanted to be trusted by other people. He always admitted when he did something wrong, but could not restrain himself once provoked. He was very short-tempered and used his physical strength to assert himself. He often mentioned that he did not want “to be like his father.” Unfortunately, he seemed to be as violent and short-tempered as his father whom he despised so much. According to reports by social workers and educators, M was involved in a number of violent fights at the place of safety. He was the only white inmate, and experienced severe racial discrimination from his black peers. He was transferred to another place of safety to ensure his safety.

At the time M was transferred from the place of safety, plans were made by the social worker to have him placed with his siblings instead of sending him home to his parents. Unfortunately, the circumstances of his siblings were not very stable at the time.

#### **4.2.3.2 M’s narrated life story**

I conducted the interview in English, as requested by M. He was 16 years old when I interviewed him. He looked much older. He was tall and strongly built. He had a bad skin and his teeth were not in a good condition. It was difficult to let him open up during the interview. He gave very short answers and easily replied that he did not know.

The violence and alcoholism of his father moulded M’s life. During the interview, M told me that he was the youngest of three children. His brother and sister were much older than he was and lived on their own. At the time of the interview, his sister was 30 years old. She was unhappily married with three children. His brother was 25 and lived with his girlfriend. M’s brother used to walk him to school when he was still living with the family. When he was the only child in the house, M went to an after-care centre after school. He played soccer and cricket at school. Although they were poor, he apparently had everything he needed for school and his mother prepared his daily lunchbox for

school. He had never met his grandparents. M's father was an alcoholic and was unemployed because of that. M said:

"He sits at home or he goes out to his friends. He makes a way to get his drinks. Ya, I dunno ... Really, we don't actually communicate."

Although they were very poor and lived in a garage, M told me that they lived in a house. He despised his father and did not want to be like him. His father got aggressive when he was drunk and then hit his mother or his sister. Although his mother was cold towards M, he felt responsible for her and at many occasions had to intervene when his father had hit her or his sister. When I asked him whether his mother sometimes retaliated, he replied:

"Sometimes, but sometimes I have to, because he gets out of hand and ... ja."

Although the violent nature of his father dominated M's childhood, he told me that he never looked for a fight when he was at school, but added that he would defend himself when other boys started fighting with him:

"Uh they just tried to pick on me. They think I'm one of those other boys that can't defend themselves and stuff like that and then I'm not and then I fight."

Because of the violence and quarrels at home, M frequently stayed away from school and even slept out of the house. I asked him whether he was sometimes upset in the mornings when he went to school. He replied:

"Yes. The arguing and then I have to go sleep late at night or sometimes I just go out and I walk late at night then I go *sommer* to my friends."

He was angry at school:

"A anger in me which boiled up maybe through what happened last night and something, ja ..."

He was worried about his mother:

"Yes, I'm worried, because every time when I ask her when I phone her what is happening, then she ... I don't know if she's lying or telling the truth."

When I asked him if he could change anything about his childhood, what it would be, he replied very seriously and emphasised every word:

"My mother and father should not be drinking. Non-alcoholics. They should not drink at all, not even one sip and ja, that's all."

M referred to his mother's use of alcohol only once during the interview. M did not know which grade his mother, father or grandparents had passed at school. He did not know what his mother's occupation was. He only knew that she was working on a computer. According to M, his brother left school for a year and then returned to finish Grade 12. According to M, his brother "worked with his hands, almost like a mechanic." M wanted to become a welder or a mechanic. Although he understood the importance of education, he did not know what he had to do to become a mechanic or welder and had no knowledge of educational institutions whatsoever.

M had attended a secondary school for learners with special educational needs, where the focus was on practical skills. He was Afrikaans speaking, but was in an English class. He spoke a mixed language. He told me that he had to repeat grades twice in primary school. I asked him what he liked most about going to school. He replied:

"Workshops and break-time and sometimes we have something in the hall like a show or something which we make up and enjoy the day."

M told me that he was sent to detention class a lot when he back-chatted the educators:

"Because they *skel* (scold) me out with no reason and then I *skel* at them also."

He went for extra Mathematics lessons in the afternoons and gave his cooperation. He said education was necessary, because if one has no education, you would have to steal money, as you would not be able to find work. He dropped out of school during Grade 8 because of drug abuse:

"My school, yes, school is actually all right, but is just now I'm doing drugs and that's why I dropped out, that's the only reason."

M admitted that he had been abusing tik for nearly two years and that he smoked dagga and mandrax. He told me that he drank beer and brandy at parties, but emphasized that he never got out of hand and that he could control himself. He started smoking dagga at the age of 15. He also took some dagga to school. The boys smoked dagga on a field far from the school building. He later moved on to mandrax and tik. He said dagga made him feel high, "slow-buzz." Tik let him stay awake, feel energetic and fearless. Mandrax made him "almost like you go numb for a few minutes, then you come back." He said tik also made him very productive:

"That feeling, ja. Then you like to be busy the whole time. Sometimes when I use tik then I like to draw, it gives me that ... uh."

He knew that tik was bad for him. He said it “eats your insides and it makes your outside look ugly.” He said that he got more pimples. He knew that he was doing bad things when he was using tik, but:

“I didn’t take note of it. I didn’t care.”

He admitted that drugs negatively influenced his education:

“I do *bank* (stay away from school) and do tik in the day and then tried to get money ... I just didn’t feel like going to school. I just wanted to do drugs only. I wanted that feeling, I just want more.”

I asked him whether someone should experiment with drugs. He answered:

“Huh-uh. They cannot experiment, because you get so addictive. One hit and you want more hits, ja. If you do tik once, you immediately want more.”

He admitted that he had stolen articles like sweets out of shops when he was much younger. He never stole from his parents and he never had to steal in order to survive. Once he was addicted to tik and needed money to buy it, he broke into vehicles and robbed people. He was nearly 16 years old before he was the police arrested him for the first time. He claimed that he had tried to stop abusing drugs and wanted to return to school in order to become a welder, but was then arrested.

M had previously worked for an income for a few weeks when he was 15 years old. That was after he had dropped out of school. He worked as a painter for his friend’s uncle. He was paid R300.00 per week. According to M, he used the money to buy shoes and drugs. He had a girlfriend who was 16 years old. He sometimes bought her gifts with money he got from selling stolen goods. He was of the opinion that a boy became an adult when he finished school, at the age of 18 or 19. He regarded 18 the proper age to become sexually active, but claimed that children became sexually active at the age of 14 or even younger. He was of the opinion that a girl should only have a baby once she had a job, at the age of 20 at the youngest. He one day wanted to get married and to have children. He said that he would not have children if he could not support them. He would want his children to get an education. When I sketched a scenario of him having to look after himself, he replied as follows:

“You are ... if you don’t have parents ... you’re gonna make a way to look after yourself, even if it’s selling drugs. That’s what I would do if I don’t have parents.”

When I asked him how he wanted his life to be at the age of 30, he replied:

“Me working and I have a family and everything is going well.”

He was looking forward to be discharged and when I asked him what would happen when he went to court, he replied:

“I donno, but I’ve heard now in the panel assessment ... then they said I’ll be coming out and I gonna go ... they are going to put me into ... similar to a college to get my education finished and I’m going to live with my brother.”

When I asked him whether he wanted to say something to his parents, he replied:

“I would say I’m sorry for what I’ve done and I also want ... also want them to change so that I can also change.”

#### **4.2.4 Respondent X**

##### **4.2.4.1 General background information**

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1991
HOME LANGUAGE:	Afrikaans
DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL:	GR. 7 (2005)
LITERACY LEVEL AT PLACE OF SAFETY:	GR. 4 (2008)
DATES OF ARREST:	11/08/2007; 13/08/2007
AGE WHEN ARRESTED:	15 years 11 months
DATE ADMITTED TO PLACE OF SAFETY:	13/08/2007
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	16/02/2008
AGE ON DATE OF INTERVIEW:	16 years 5 months
RESIDING ADDRESS:	Malmesbury
ALLEGED CRIME(S) COMMITTED:	Theft; malicious damage to property; theft out of a shop; housebreaking
PREVIOUS PLACEMENT(S):	2 different places of safety

According to his official documents (Place of Safety Western Cape 2008d), X grew up in Malmesbury, mostly on farms in the district. Since he was born, his mother refused to have anything to do with him. He had lived with his mother’s sister since he was a baby and had to take care of himself since he was 10 years old. He seemingly operated from a survival perspective. X did not listen to anybody, lived by his own rules, and was continuously engaged in criminal activities. He stole in order to pay for drugs, food and clothes. He did not stay at home and had a nomadic way of life. The social worker at the place of safety reported that X’s parents never

attended his court appearances. He never received any phone calls from his family. It was impossible for the social worker to make telephonic contact with the parents or any other family member.

He absconded from the place of safety and, during the time he was outside, committed another crime and the police was brought back to the place of safety. At the place of safety, the social worker reported that X had no respect for other people's belongings or feelings and would steal anything he could lay his hands on. From the place of safety, the court sentenced him to two years at a youth care centre.

#### **4.2.4.2 X's narrated life story**

The interview was conducted in X's home language, Afrikaans. X was 16 years old when I conducted the personal interview with him. He was short and small of posture and he looked much younger than his age. He was very open and spontaneous during the interview and enjoyed telling his life story to me. The urgent way in which he narrated his story and the way he constantly kept eye contact with me gave the impression that he wanted to tell his story. It was like an outcry for help or attention.

According to his official file (Place of Safety Western Cape 2008d), X's parents were unemployed alcoholics. X told me that only his father worked and that both his mother and father were heavy drinkers. Apparently, his parents physically and emotionally neglected him and he seemed angry at them for not taking care of him. He grew up without guidelines and morals and had to learn by trial and error. X's aunt was like a mother to him and she did not drink like his parents. His aunt used to buy him clothes and he received clothes from other family members. He first met his parents and stayed with them for a while when he was 10 years old. He explained:

"My father had a job, but he also didn't give me money, only sometimes he gave my aunt money for food for me."

X told me that his parents were heavy drinkers, especially on the days his father received his weekly pay. In his own words:

"When my father was paid, they seemingly didn't worry about us, Miss, they only wanted to drink, Miss."

Then they would argue and hit one another:

"Then they argued and fought, Miss ... and then I felt sad, Miss ... then I cried, Miss ... then I went away, Miss."

He did not explain his reasons to me, but he started to use drugs only once he went to stay with his parents. It was also while he was staying with his parents that he got into conflict with the law:

“Afterwards when I started smoking drugs, I went to stay there, Miss ... It was nice, Miss, then I got arrested, Miss.”

When I asked him what he would have wanted if he could start his life over, he answered as follows:

“My parents should have bought me the things I needed, Miss, they shouldn’t drink, Miss, or fight, Miss, and there should have been rules in the house, Miss.”

If he had the opportunity to tell his parents something, he would say the following:

“I would like to tell them, Miss, they must please leave the wine and they must work, Miss. They must look after us, Miss and they must look after us properly. They mustn’t fight and argue, Miss.”

X told me that his father attended school up to Grade 7. He did not know whether his mother, aunt or grandparents went to school. His grandparents were farm labourers. X’s dream was to work on a computer one day. He showed some insight into the necessity of an education:

“It is to teach you, Miss, so that one day you can have a house, Miss, a wife and children, Miss ... so that one day you can teach other people, Miss, right from wrong, Miss, then you can tell them the truth, Miss ... I will get somewhere in life if I study, Miss.”

X told me that he never got into trouble at school and that he liked going to school. His teacher was very kind to him and bought him clothes, shoes and food. When he was little, he would go to school with his cousin and after school he played with her and his friends. He did his homework and studied for tests. He told me that he was good in Afrikaans and Mathematics, but he struggled with English. The teachers helped him with his schoolwork when he needed help. According to X, he never had to repeat a year at school and he got good marks. He took part in sports like rugby and athletics. According to X, there were many fights at school, but he did not take part in it. When other boys hit him, he would walk away and did not hit back:

“Many fights, Miss ... They wanted to hit me but then I did nothing, Miss, because I knew what would happen, Miss ... They would slap me and so on, but then I left them alone, Miss.”

He dropped out of school when he was 14 years old and in Grade 7. When I asked him why he dropped out of school, he replied:

“Because my parents used to drink, Miss. They never paid my school fees, Miss and then the teacher said I must bring my school fee money and my parents, when I asked them, they said yes, they will deposit the money and when I got to school, the money wasn’t paid, Miss.”

The educator read aloud the children’s names whose school fees were not paid and told them that they would not get their report cards before their school fees were paid. The other children would mock him because he was poor. This made him feel very sad and upset. Even his aunt could not pay his school fees, but he never blamed her:

“Because she had other children to look after and we needed school uniforms and so on, then she said she didn’t have enough money for school fees.”

Although he despised his parents’ drinking habits, he turned to drugs and alcohol himself. Later in the interview, X admitted that the primary reason for him dropping out of school was not his report card and school fees:

“Miss, then I started smoking drugs, Miss, and I thought drugs were nice, Miss, then I quit the school and then I smoked drugs, Miss.”

When she saw him in town, his teacher tried to persuade him to return to school, but without success.

X started to use drugs at the age of 13:

“I started when I was 13. Started smoking drugs, Miss, and to drink, Miss ...When I was 13, Miss, then I started sniffing glue, Miss. We bought it at the pet shop, Miss.”

According to X, there were no drugs on the school grounds and the children only smoked cigarettes at school. He said it was easy to buy drugs in town. He explained to me in detail:

“Then I go sit under the bridge and sniff glue, Miss. Later on I started buying dagga, Miss and buttons, Miss ... Then I heard about tik, Miss, and I wanted to taste it, Miss. Then it became a habit – it got me, Miss ...Glue, Miss: I couldn’t see clearly, Miss. When there was one person, I thought there were many people, Miss ... Buttons, Miss: All I thought about was to steal and then I did it, Miss. Tik keeps you awake, Miss. You lie to your aunt – your mother needs so much, she will return the money, and then you buy drugs with the money, Miss ...Mandrax is the same as tik, Miss ...Dagga lets you think, Miss.”

I asked him whether he wanted to go to school while he was on drugs and whether he thought that the drugs had damaged his brain:

“No Miss, you only think how nice it is now, Miss ...Because I forgot many things, Miss. Every day I would only think about getting drug money, Miss, stuff like that, Miss. Forget all about school, you don’t even think of school.”

He told me that the drugs made him unhealthy:

“I got very tired, Miss. Because I sometimes coughed badly, Miss, then I had to go to the nurse, Miss. Drugs messed up my life, Miss. I don’t think straight anymore, Miss. I forget about school and I only think of my friends, Miss, to steal, Miss.”

X became a compulsive thief because of his addiction to drugs. He did not care about anybody or anything else but drugs. X, along with his friends, started stealing for the following reasons:

“Sometimes I have nothing, Miss. Then I could do nothing, then I would break into houses to steal, then I could buy drugs, Miss. Sometimes you survive, sometimes they catch you, Miss ...Drugs, Miss, and you buy drugs, food, anything, Miss.”

While he was on drugs, he forgot about his dream to work on computers and he thought of becoming a gangster:

“I wanted to become a gangster – 28 – or so, Miss, I thought ... because nobody can do anything to you when you’re in jail, Miss, you get everything you want, Miss.”

His parents knew that he was abusing drugs. I asked him what they did about it:

“Later on they told me, Miss, ‘you must stop using drugs’, Miss and then I said but then you must also stop drinking wine. Then my mother said ‘I am an adult, you can’t tell me what to do’, then I said but I am your child. Then she said ‘you think you’re a big man’, Miss.”

He had worked as a farm labourer when he was 15 years old:

“I worked on the farm: cut grapes, picked oranges, Miss. They pay R350.00 per week, Miss ... I saw I could earn my own money, Miss ... I bought clothes, Miss. Bought food, Miss, everything and with the remaining money I bought drugs, Miss.”

He was of the opinion that he could return to primary school at the age of 17. He was not keen on going to high school, because he did not know anybody there. He thought that it was compulsory for everybody to attend school up to the age of 21 or 22. He told me that if he could not return to the primary school, he would like to go to the children’s home, where he would attend night school. To his knowledge, homeless people went there and it was free of charge.

He argued that one becomes an adult when one can think for oneself, between the ages 18 and 21. His girlfriend was 17 years old. She had visited him at the place of safety and remarked that he looked healthy and fat. According to him, a man and a woman should be 21 years old before they had sex, but he felt that he was old enough to have sex, even though he was only 16 years old. He thought a girl should not have a baby before the age of 18, but he knew of a girl who became a mother at the age of 11. His view on teen pregnancies:

“They say life is hard today, Miss, it isn’t easy to have a child today ... she messes up her life, Miss ...They the fathers) buy drugs, steal and then they go to jail, Miss ...Then they say the children must sue them for son-support, Miss ...Then she – the mother of the mother – must take the child to school, Miss.”

Although he said that a person only became an adult between the ages of 18 and 21, he was adamant that he had been able to look after himself since the age of 10. He knew what to expect from the near future. He waited to go to a youth care centre for two years. He felt good about this possibility and looked forward to be going home during school holidays. He knew that there was a school and he knew that the boys who went there were tough and that they smoked dagga. When I asked him how he thought his life would be once he was 30 years old, he replied:

“When I’m 30 years old, Miss, I will look like an old man, Miss. I want a good life, Miss. My own money, my own car, Miss, my own house, my own wife, Miss.”

He said he wanted to have his own children:

“I’m going to tell them not to follow in my footsteps, Miss, because I used drugs, Miss, when I was still young, and I dropped out of school, Miss.”

If he had the opportunity to talk to other children of the community, he would tell them the following:

“I’m going to tell them, Miss, that I went to school and I left the school because I didn’t get everything I wanted, Miss. So I quit school and abused drugs and then I went to jail and that’s not nice and once you’re in jail then you think about a lot of stuff, Miss. They must finish school, Miss, and they must find a job, Miss and they mustn’t do bad things, Miss.”

#### **4.2.5 Respondent C**

##### **4.2.5.1 General background information**

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1992
HOME LANGUAGE:	Afrikaans
DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL:	GR. 9 (2007)
LITERACY LEVEL AT PLACE OF SAFETY:	GR. 7 (2008)
DATE OF FIRST ARREST:	05/10/2007
AGE WHEN ARRESTED:	15 years 7 months
DATE ADMITTED TO PLACE OF SAFETY:	09/10/2007
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	26/04/2008
AGE ON DATE OF INTERVIEW:	16 years 2 months
RESIDING ADDRESS:	Kensington

ALLEGED CRIME(S) COMMITTED: Attempted murder

PREVIOUS PLACEMENT(S): None

C was a first offender and there was not a lot of information in his official files (Place of Safety Western Cape 2008e). His parents were not married and did not live together either. He stayed with his mother and sister. Both his parents received social grants and C's mother sold groceries, like sugar, from her house. Their only other income came from C's sister. C was very loving and respectful towards his mother. At the place of safety, he was very open, polite with good manners, in control of himself, and respectful towards others. He was kind and was never aggressive. It was evident that peer pressure had played a very strong part in his getting into conflict with the law. He received bail and went home.

#### **4.2.5.2 C's narrated life story**

I conducted the interview in C's home language, Afrikaans. He was 16 years at the time of the interview. C told me that he lived with his mother and sister. According to C, there was enough money, but his mother could not always afford his school fees, which amounted to R150.00 per year. The teacher would then send him, as well as a few other children home during school hours to fetch his school fees. The teacher told them not to return to school without the money. This had such a negative influence on him that he, directly after he had told me about serious gang violence at the school and I asked him what the one thing was that he hated most at school, replied as follows:

"When I was sent home to collect my school fees."

Although he did not have money for school fees, he used to take money to school to spend at the tuck shop. In his own words:

"Then I buy chips and so on, Miss. I didn't like to take bread to school, Miss ... In the afternoon after school, I go to my father. Then he will give me R5.00 or R10.00 which I will take to school."

C said that he went to a good school and that the teachers helped learners who struggled with their work. His mother and his sister helped him with his homework. There were no books in the house, but his father liked to read the newspaper. C dropped out of school at the age of 15 when he was in Grade 9. Initially he said that he got high marks at school. Later into the interview, he admitted that he had struggled with some subjects:

"Now and then I struggled so and so with reading, with English reading. I didn't like to read, Miss. Because I wasn't good at it, Miss. But when I got to Standard 3, in Standard 2, Ms. Forbes helped me. Then I got a little better. Then I went to Standard 3 and got even better. When I got in Standard 5, then I could read properly, Miss. Mr. Ross then helped me."

I asked him what he normally did at home after school. He replied:

“I first do my homework, Miss, and then I prepare something to eat, then I go and play. I will first ask my mother if there is anything I must do at home, then I do it, then I clean the yard, in front and at the back and then I go and play, Miss.”

C told me that his mother attended school up to Grade 9 and his father up to Grade 11. He showed insight into the importance of education and wanted to become a bricklayer:

“If you finish school and you go for further studies, then you can get a good job. Because if you don’t have a Standard 10 certificate, you won’t get the job that you want.”

He knew where to go to if he wanted training to become a bricklayer. He also said that he would repeat Grade 10 when he went back to school. If he could not go back to school or become a bricklayer, he would find a job:

“I can also work on the taxi, Miss. As a guard, Miss. You get one fifty (R150.00) per day, Miss. The people tell you where the stops are. You help the people to get off the taxi with their bags. Then you get back on and you go ride to Cape Town, Maitland, and Woodstock.”

C exhibited some insight into human developmental phases. According to him a man could be regarded an adult when he was 21 years old, when he had a wife and could be independent. According to C, some learners leave school when they are in Grade 10 or 11, at the age of 21. He said that many boys dropped out of school at the age of 15 and 16. He had a friend who did not even complete Grade 1. He explained why children drop out of school:

“When they start to smoke and they think they are big, Miss. When they get into high school they think that they are big, Miss. Then they start to smoke and do wrong things, Miss. Then they start to stay away from school. They don’t go to school and then they go to their friends’ houses – maybe a friend’s mother and father aren’t at home, then they will stay there until the school comes out. Then they stop going to school. When people find out, they quit going to school, Miss ... Most of them are children who struggled at school, Miss...Some of them didn’t struggle at school, Miss. They were smart learners at school, Miss. Maybe they chose bad friends, Miss.”

C was of the opinion that a couple should only have sex once they were married, but he knew that children started having sexual relationships from the age of 14, 15 or 16. When I asked him at which age a girl could become a mother, he replied:

“When she decides she wants a baby after she got married, or if she decides that she is 21, 22, then she decides she is a big girl now, she can have a baby, and when she and her boyfriend have been a couple for a long time, then she can have a baby.”

He told me about a girl who had a baby at the age of 13:

"She stays at home, Miss, she doesn't work, Miss. Her mother looks after the baby, Miss, her mother and father. She only sits at home, Miss. The father is a gangster, Miss. He stays in Bonteheuwel, he doesn't stay in our place, but he comes there often. He has many girlfriends. Her whole life is messed up, Miss."

When I asked him how he wanted his life to be at the age of 30, he replied:

"I want a good life, Miss ...I want my own house, Miss, my own car also, Miss and I don't want my children to grow up like I did, Miss ...I will give them everything I didn't have, Miss. I will show them the right way, Miss, like my people showed me the right way, Miss ... I will read to them – books, Miss, and I will help them with their homework, Miss."

I asked him what he would tell other children if he had the opportunity. In his own words:

"I will tell them about my life, Miss and I will tell them that it wasn't a good life, Miss. As time goes by you maybe think no, this is a good life, you're right, nothing is wrong. But as time goes by you'll see that you will get caught and you will see your friends are not there with you like they were – your family always come to you. our friends do not worry at all when you come out. hey will come to you again and then you will – if you haven't changed your mind – you will do the same bad things again."

C grew up in an area where gangs rule. It is a very dangerous area and it is almost impossible for a youngster to stay away from gangs. He dropped out of school because of gangster activities in the area. After he had dropped out of school, C started smoking dagga at the age of 15. He smoked it with his friends. He said dagga made him lazy and he did not want to learn anymore. His mother never knew that he smoked dagga:

"When I smoked, then I first waited until the stuff has worked out, until I'm done, when my eyes are not that small anymore, then I go home, Miss. I had my own money, Miss. Maybe, when I stroll down the street, I will meet one of my friends, then he will give me money, Miss."

C used to get into trouble at school for fighting and then had to go to detention classes in the afternoons:

"Sometimes we quarrelled about soccer, because maybe we play three-a-side and the three must go off, but they don't, then they may be stronger than our three who are playing and then they want to start a fight with the three of us."

According to C, there were fights on the school grounds daily. Some of the fights were quite violent:

"They have stabbed with knives at the school. They shot somebody on the school grounds. He died ...Two guys came from outside onto the school grounds, Miss. Then we – first break was already gone, it was past one and when the bell would ring, it would be second break – then we heard the gun shots. Then we had to stay inside the classrooms and they sent us home early, Miss ... I felt bad, Miss."

Sometimes he could not go to school because of violence:

“Yes, Miss. Sometimes they say we must stay at home when they shoot like that in the mornings. They – when they saw children going to school, then they started shooting and when the school came out, they would start shooting. They shoot at each other. Gangsters, Miss ...Why – some gangsters’ girlfriends go to school. Now, when they go fetch their girlfriends at school, the other gangsters see them and then they shoot them, Miss.”

I asked him whether he was a member of a gang:

“I wasn’t part of a gang. When I went to Standard 7, the friends whom I hung out with weren’t gangsters, Miss. Some of them were gangsters, but I didn’t worry about the gangster business. But when I reached Standard 7, then one day the one gang was looking for another guy from the other gang and then they came looking for me at the school. Then I decided no, I must quit school, because they are going to hurt me at school, Miss. Later on they started shooting at me on my way to school, Miss, then I couldn’t go to school, Miss ...They wanted me because of my friends and then they thought I was part of the gang.”

He eventually also became a gangster:

“Then I wanted to go with the friends who lived in my street, Miss. Then everything started happening to me, Miss ...I started going with the gangster business, Miss. I never worried about that but now the people chase me away. I used to be able to go anywhere before.”

C told me that he never stole or robbed somebody. Without me asking him about his alleged crime, he started to talk spontaneously about it. He told me that he the police arrested him for attempted murder. According to him, he was innocent. He stuttered a lot when he tried to explain to me:

“Me and my friend, Miss ... I didn’t know where he was ... he said he was in the next road. I was at my aunt’s house. There were shootings up there. Then they said it was me and him. But that man said he didn’t lay charges against us. It was only the police who were looking for us. Because they said we looked like the people they were looking for: one was short and one taller and dark.”

I asked him whether he was afraid of the gangsters once he got out:

“No, Miss My mother and father went to those people to talk to them, Miss. Then they said they only wanted us to be drug merchants for them at the school, Miss. And that person had died, Miss. He’s been shot.”

The court discharged C and granted him bail. He went home.

#### **4.2.6 Respondent J**

##### **4.2.6.1 General background information**

YEAR OF BIRTH:

1991

HOME LANGUAGE:	Xhosa
DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL:	GR. 9 (2006)
LITERACY LEVEL AT PLACE OF SAFETY:	GR. 7 (2008)
DATE OF FIRST ARREST:	04/01/2007
AGE WHEN ARRESTED:	15 years 11 months
DATE ADMITTED TO PLACE OF SAFETY:	17/10/2007
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	26/04/2008
AGE ON DATE OF INTERVIEW:	17 years 2 months
RESIDING ADDRESS:	Gugulethu
ALLEGED CRIME(S) COMMITTED:	Armed robbery; murder; possession of a firearm and ammunition
PREVIOUS PLACEMENT(S):	Place of Safety Pollsmoor Prison

According to his official documents (Place of Safety Western Cape 2008f), Both J's parents were murdered. Criminals killed J's mother in front of him when he was 11 years old. He then stayed with his father. When J was 15 years old, in June 2006, rival taxi drivers killed his father. J then lived with his aunt, whom he called "Mom." He never received any trauma counselling after both his parents had died. His grandfather passed away while J was at the place of safety and he got permission to attend the funeral.

The police arrested J for alleged murder and detained him at Pollsmoor Prison for nine months. The court then transferred him to the place of safety. He was very concerned about the welfare of his siblings, especially his younger brother. He claimed that he never used any drugs, but admitted that he used to drink beer. According to reports on his official file, J exhibited very good communication skills at the place of safety. He behaved very well and acted as leader during group sessions.

As he grew older, he unfortunately started to act like a gang leader, where the other inmates had to hand over to him the gifts they received from their visitors. He would then distribute it amongst all the inmates in the dormitory. He was transferred to another place of safety because of his gangster-like manipulative behaviour and because he got too old to be detained at the place of safety.

#### 4.2.6.2 J's narrated life story

I conducted the interview in English, J's second language. His first language was Xhosa. At the time of the interview, J was 17 years old. He was the eldest of three boys. He told me that his brothers were staying with his father's sister. He was a good-looking, strongly built young man. He was soft-spoken and well mannered.

J told me that when he was a little boy, his mother stayed home most of the time. Throughout the interview, J could not refrain from linking most of his responses to the loss of his parents. I said to him, "I can see that having lost your parents at a young age had a big influence on you." He responded:

"Yes, Miss, it have a very big influence in my life, Miss...Actually there was some problems at school ... Especially when I missed my mother regarding the primary (school), then I had lots of problems ... I used to cry in the classroom. I used to want to be alone all the time ... Actually they were no ... uh ... there were white people so they came and encourage and support ... and at the time at school I used to go out and my parents ... I mean my fathers' sister didn't have money to pay for me ... some friends of my parents paid the money for me [upset, sad]."

After his mother had passed away and he had completed primary school, his father sent him to live with his aunt. He attended high school. He played rugby for the school's team and soccer for the community's team. Before his father had passed away, he used to take care of all J's expenses:

"My father used to make sure that my school fees and my transport money were okay and my aunt used to take care of my uniforms and school clothing and food."

After the death of J's father, his aunt paid his school fees and took care of him. He had everything he needed for school. When I asked him whether he had enough money, he replied as follows:

"Not actually enough money, just because I didn't have a mother and a father, so I couldn't like ask everyone for money every time for school."

J said he never had real problems at school and never purposefully dropped out of school. He enjoyed going to school and the teachers were good to him. He told me that he struggled with Mathematics and when he asked for help, the teachers would help him. He always did his homework. He enjoyed playing sports and having friends. He liked everything about school:

"Actually I never dropped out of school. Then in December 2006 ... some kind of criminal activity took place during December. At that time, I passed Grade 9. The next year I was going to be in Grade 10, but then on 3 January the police take me ... took me."

The death of his father disrupted J's life and he started to get into trouble:

"It was kind of like confusing at the time and I started not asking for money and I thought the better way is just to make money for myself ...I used to steal from my own house ...I started stealing some money because I didn't want to ask money. They kept on telling me I must ask money if I want money they can give me any time. It took some time for me just because I'm not used to that. I used to ask money from my mother or my father. Then I started stealing money, taking money that's not mine just because I know there's still kids in the house, they don't expect children to take money and if I see money I just take, I don't ask. They never catch me, but they knew someone was taking the money ...I used to take some of the money to school and sometimes play TV games."

I asked him whether his parents were educated. In his own words:

"If I can remember, my father had. He went to Grade 12 but after that I don't know what happened. He didn't tell me the whole story. Actually all my parents went to school. My father and my aunt. She used to ask me about my homework and stuff: did I do my homework and stuff. I never saw my father read the newspaper just because he was always on work."

He showed insight into the necessity of education:

"School is necessary, Miss, because without education you won't go anywhere in South Africa. I don't know about the other countries. Learning is fair. Learning is important especially nowadays. Without education you can go nowhere."

J was under the impression that it was compulsory for a child to attend school up to the age of 17. He wanted to become an architect. He knew some people who were architects and he understood that he had to go to university to become an architect. He said that he had passed Grade 9 and that he wanted to go back to school. If he could not go back to school, he said he would find a job and then attend night school (Adult Basic Education). He knew where the night school was in Gugulethu. He also knew people who went there. According to J, a person becomes an adult:

"...when a person is really done with school and Grade 12 and he's independent and then you can look after ...like drinking and stuff, like that when you really have your own money because if you're a drinking person, you must manage to buy it yourself and not ask other people."

J lived in an area where drug abuse and crime were common. He told me that he was frightened when the police searched for drugs at the school. He was scared that the culprits would put drugs in his bag and that he then would get into trouble:

"They came often just because some of the boys in school they were ... they were ... uhm ... criminals. On their way to school they robbed people."

J told me that he never used any drugs. He only smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol over weekends. He went to nightclubs and drank extensively with his older friends. His aunt never knew about this because he told her that he was sleeping at a friend's house. He had some regrets:

"Yes, Miss, just because I wasn't ready for going to night clubs and stuff like that. At that time I was still young, Miss, so I couldn't handle myself. I still needed that parent's guidance stuff."

Abusing alcohol got J into trouble:

"Actually I have got into trouble just because ... it was some kind ... there's a place... I had a fight there ... because I was drunk. I was almost handed in at the police because I assaulted the person."

He admitted that he was not old enough when he started drinking and visiting nightclubs. He told me that he had a girlfriend who was one year older than he was. He used to buy her gifts out of his pocket money. He was not sexually involved with girls who went to the nightclubs he frequently visited. In his own words:

"I wasn't involved in that stuff actually. I was still young, so girls who go to night clubs are much older girls."

J argued that the proper age for a boy and a girl to have sex was 18 or 19. I asked him at which age a boy and a girl should have a baby. He replied as follows:

"O, that now is a decision that you first sit down and talk about, just because the child is not something ... you know, you must think about all the money you must use for the child. So you have to be old enough like 30 or 25. You must be independent."

He knew girls who had fallen pregnant while still young:

"They drop out of school. Some become prostitutes. Some find a way. Some find a way but afterwards they just end up in the streets. The fathers want nothing to do with the children."

When I asked him at which age he thought he would be able to look after himself and be independent, he replied:

"Uhm, actually when I was younger, I thought I would have my parents for the rest of my life. Then I think ...an age limit is maybe 29, 30."

J had the following vision of himself when he was 30 years old:

"Actually in 30 years' time – I mean in 15 years' time I'll be like I'll be independent of course. I will find the right ... even if I don't make it to be an architect, just because they don't want criminals and stuff, but I will try to get a job, a professional job. Married is one thing I want to be in life, ja, and I'll teach the people that not everyone can uhm do the

same thing over and over again. I will like to have children, because I love children, especially babies. I would provide education; try to give them the life I never had, yeah.”

If he got the opportunity to talk to children, he would tell them the following:

“I will tell them that being cool and stuff is not the only way you can survive in life and being in prison is not ... uhm ... something nice. Where the people say it's nice, it's not nice. I'll try to convince them to not do bad stuff, Miss.”

J was arrested for murder and other offences and detained in Pollsmoor Prison for nine months before he was sent to the place of safety. He had the following to say about his time in prison:

“It wasn't fine in Pollsmoor, Miss. But then there were some kind of people who were doing activities there and every month they would give me a book to read, so I wasn't involved in the Pollsmoor activities. It was almost like studying there. They used to give me work and stuff to do just keeping myself busy.”

He was very uncomfortable when he told me that some of the bigger inmates hurt him once. I could see that it was hard for him to talk about it, so I did not probe any further. I asked him what he thought the future would hold for him:

“I don't know what's going to happen with this case, Miss ... but my wishes are to go back home to my parents (aunt) and my brothers, to go back to school, just because I saw where is my mistake now and I don't think I'll do the same thing again...According to me ... uhm ... for my future I will try to make a better living for myself. Just because I know at the end of the day friends and family won't be there for me and I will have to stand by myself and so I'm just going to give myself courage that I'm going to do it. Just because I believe in myself.”

### **4.3 INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

In Section 4.2, I used direct quotations from the interviews to put forward some of the life and learning experiences of the six respondents as interpreted and narrated by them. This was done as an important step in the process of trying to interpret and better understand the respondents' predispositions to learning. Cranton (1994) reminds us that, as a child becomes an adult, it is important to be mindful of the influence of past life and learning experiences on the learner. I use this guideline by Cranton (1994) to steer the interpretation of the research findings.

This study reports on an in-depth investigation of six youths' predispositions to learning while awaiting trial in a place of safety. The respondents' unique life experiences prior to their detainment at the place of safety, guided me in the research process. During the individual interviews, I asked questions according to the themes listed in the conceptual framework (see Figure 2.1): developmental phases; agency; resilience; intellectual capacity and emotional well-being; significant others; risk; environmental deprivation; delinquency, crime and violence; substance

abuse; and gangsterism. The data gathered from the interviews and official documents helped me in contextualising each respondent's predisposition towards learning, as illustrated in Figure 2.2. The following paragraphs therefore should not be regarded causal factors, but rather contextual realities in the development of each respondent in relation to his motivation for and predisposition to learning.

In reporting on my interpretation of the research findings, I will talk to all of the themes as illustrated in Figure 2.2 and listed in Figure 2.1. In Chapter 2, I researched and reported on these themes. These themes will be integrated in the discussion of the research findings and a holistic approach will be followed in the interpretation of the research findings.

#### **4.3.1 STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT AND PREDISPOSITIONS TO LEARNING**

I argue that the six respondents should not be regarded merely children, but that they in some developmental areas present themselves as adults and therefore might present with adult learning needs, while they in some ways still act like children and still need assistance and support like children. Secondly, I also put forward that when they were younger, some of their developmental needs were not met and therefore they were struggling to make the transition from childhood into young adulthood. In the following paragraphs, I will tap into the knowledge of reputable scholars in correlation with the research data in my pursuit to substantiate the above-mentioned argument.

The respondents in my study had to accelerate in certain aspects of adulthood at an early age. With little or poor formal education, they had to learn how to survive and be self-sufficient, while facing adult responsibilities with regard to taking care of themselves and, in some cases, of other family members. Although they might not have been formally educated or mature in terms of chronological age, they were fulfilling adult life roles to a larger or smaller degree, as described by Knowles (1978).

The respondents typically found themselves in the psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood because it seemed that they were confused about their identity and roles as either children or adults, as explained by Erikson (1963, 1968, 1980). When comparing the respondents' ages to the findings of Levinson (1979) and Cross (1981), it is suggested that they could be grouped as adolescents or early adults, a stage which Levinson (1979) calls pre-adulthood, followed by the early adult transition (17–22 years). During this period, a person normally lives within the family or an equivalent social unit, which provides protection, socialisation and support of growth, which did not seem to be the case in any of the respondents' situations. Levinson (1979) calls this stage the most dramatic of all stages, as the individual in this transitional stage is

vulnerable and immature while he moves from his early adult self. This was evidently even more so in the case of the six respondents who apparently had to fend for themselves in different ways at different ages.

According to Knowles (1978), a person becomes an adult when he or she achieves a self-concept of essential self-direction. From the research data, it appeared that the respondents did not seem to be self-directed and responsible and they did not reveal realistic or strong ideals. At the same time, they did not regard themselves as children either. None of the respondents was, at the face of it, undoubtedly mature, as they seemingly had not yet achieved constructive spiritual, vocational, physical, political, and cultural goals as indicated by Bergevin (1967) to be crucial objectives for individuals to aspire to in becoming mature. Loevinger (1976) adds to this the importance of the development of the ego for the creation of a central frame of reference through which individuals view themselves and their relationships with others. From the research data it became apparent that all of the respondents were at low levels of ego development, as all of them reacted to egocentric needs, as explained by Kohlberg and Turiel (1971). X was a compulsive thief, because he had to survive on his own from the age of 10. J stole money from his family members because he did not want to ask for money that he wanted for luxuries, alcohol and adult night clubs. He never tried to earn money in a law-abiding way. M could not control his temper. He even declared that he would become a drug dealer if he could not find employment. D lived from moment to moment, doing whatever he wanted to do. He showed little insight into the consequences of his deeds. He had no future vision as explained by Kumpfer and Bluth (2004) and indicated that he would continue to steal to get money. K took part in adult activities of his own accord. C did not think for himself and impulsively went along with his gangster friends.

When considering the developmental stages of the respondents in relation to their predispositions to learning, I argue that all of them were youths who were deprived of the opportunity to be children because of the harsh circumstances within which they had been raised. According to Brendtro, et al. (2002:9-32), when caretakers fail to meet a child's most basic needs, some children reach beyond their families in search of substitute attachments with other adults or peers. Through the research data, it became apparent that all the adults in his life deserted K. When his grandmother left the country, he had nobody to take care of his basic needs. D was severely neglected by his parents and therefore had no boundaries whatsoever, except for the law of the country. M was much younger than his brother and sister and lived alone in poverty with his parents during his fragile years of boyhood. His circumstances forced M to deal with adult responsibilities like taking care of adult tasks by protecting his sister and mother from his alcoholic and violent father. X's parents abandoned him since birth and had to be self-sufficient since the age of 10. J was an orphan since the age of 11 and had a very strong urge to be independent. He also mentioned that

he was worried about his two younger brothers. Although it seemed that C received some nurturance and guidance from his mother and sister, he was apparently lacking strong male role models and got engaged in gangster activities. From the research data it appears that the respondents were denied parental nurturance and guidance while they were children and were forced into adult responsibilities too soon. Erikson (1963; 1968; 1980) explains that, while children depend on others for their welfare, adults are responsible, independent and self-sufficient in managing their own lives. Most of the respondents had made many mistakes in trying to manage their own lives and to cope within an adult world. As a result, they had made irresponsible choices and were not quite able to be independent and self-sufficient; hence they got arrested for committing crimes.

During the interview, K demonstrated a level of maturity that none of the other respondents had. He took full adult-like accountability for his deeds, as explained by Erikson (1963; 1968; 1980). According to reports on his official file (Place of Safety Western Cape 2008a), K presented himself as a respected leader amongst the older group of inmates at the place of safety, although he was younger than most of them. K, M and X had found employment and could provide for themselves during the time prior to their arrest. Despite the limitations of their physical and emotional resources, they had been responsive to the opportunities, although undesirable and even unlawful, which had arisen for them during their lives. This, as well as the fact that they seemingly had developed some degree of personal autonomy and that they had tried to better their lives, even when life was difficult and regardless of the fact that the actions they took were detrimental to their future, relates to resilience as described by Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:49). It therefore appeared that K, M and X had a level of control over the ways they could respond to the problematic situations they had encountered, as explained by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), Small and Memmo (2004), Biesta and Tedder (2007) and Ecclestone (2007).

D, C and J had not shown the same level of accountability as K, M and X. They also never had worked to earn a living. Although D was practically living on his own at the age of 12, he seemingly did not try to better his life by his actions and the decisions he took. He was streetwise and robbed people and broke into cars and houses and therefore was able to pay his own way with money which he stole. He stayed away from home for days, committed crimes, and abused drugs with adult men, with whom he felt at home. As Brendtro, et al. (2002:62) predict, D felt good about himself when his adult friends took him in, and he adopted their delinquent lifestyle, including sexual activity since the age of 12. He was irresponsible and seemingly did not fit into what could be regarded normal society. He therefore fit the description by Schonert-Reichl (2000) and Kerka (2003) of youth who is at risk. Regardless of the fact that D had committed several crimes, he got arrested for the first time when he was an accomplice in a murder case.

C appeared to be vulnerable and immature when compared to the theory of Levinson (1979) and easily fell prey to the influence of gangs in his community. He simplified everything and did not show insight into the consequences of his deeds. He maintained his childlike belief in his parents as explained by Erikson (1963, 1968, 1980) and Perry (1970) and that they would solve his problems. Knowles's (1978) explanation that children are still dependent on their parents is relevant in the cases of C, M and J. It appeared that M still regarded himself part of his mother and father, as he mentioned that he needed them to change before he could change. He blamed them for not being able to stop drinking. J indicated that he viewed himself as lacking parental guidance that, according to Levinson (1979) and Cross (1981), is indicative of a low level of development towards adulthood. He put strong emphasis on the importance for a person to be financially independent to be regarded an adult and to be able to take on adult responsibilities like drinking and parenting. The responsibilities that he chose to assign to adulthood seem to be suggestive of his seemingly distorted expectations of what adulthood supposed.

Considering the evidence at hand, it is fair to assume that the respondents were not either children or adults. As argued in Section 2.2, considering the respondents' age group alone, they by law were children. However, according to the research data taken from their official files and gathered during the individual interviews, their predispositions to learning in relation to their developmental stages were of a more adult nature, as explained by scholars like Lindeman (1926), Erikson (1963; 1968; 1980), Knowles (1970; 1978; 1979; 1984), Mezirow and Associates (1990), Merriam and Clark (1991), as well as Rossiter and Clark (2007). Because of their realities, the respondents focused on acquiring knowledge and skills that would help them to survive in their particular environments. They seemingly were not particularly interested in learning to read and write, but focused on ways to sustain themselves and to be independent. These would include criminal skills in order to find or pay for food and drugs. This notion suggests the relevance of adult education to the respondents' adult-like learning needs. This is explained by Knowles' theory (1978), where he argues that adults' readiness to learn is determined by their evolving social roles and the developmental tasks required for performing these roles (see Section 2.4.2). Knowles et al. (2005) remind us that adult learners have acquired specific knowledge, skills and values throughout their lives, which influence their predispositions to learning. Such knowledge and skills play an important part in future learning and may include negative learning experiences, which need to be addressed through the process of lifelong learning (Knowles et al. 2005). According to Knowles (1970; 1978; 1979; 1984), lifelong learning encompasses both pedagogical and andragogical approaches (see Table 2.1). Learning from Knowles (1970; 1978; 1979; 1984) and Conner (2004) and keeping in mind the individual developmental stages the respondents had found themselves in (as learnt from Levinson 1979 & Cross 1981), I would like to put forward that learners like the respondents could

benefit from exposure to an educational approach which incorporates both pedagogical and andragogical paradigms. Such an approach would be likely to accommodate the learners' need for direction and assistance (pedagogical approach), as well as their need for self-direction and autonomy (andragogical approach).

#### **4.3.2 SELF-CONCEPT AND PERSONAL AGENCY**

In Figure 2.2, I propose that a vast number of factors determine an individual's predisposition to learning and that it has at its core personal agency. Strong positive personal agency is needed to make desired choices. Biesta and Tedder (2007) explain that agency is not individual capacity that one has, but something that has to be developed. Ecclestone (2007) explains that resilience factors influence the development of agency positively and risk factors influence it negatively by risk factors. Learning from the research data, the manner in which the respondents seemingly applied their sense of agency relates to the notion of Biesta and Tedder (2007), that they apparently were able to achieve agency in certain situations but not in other (e.g. to survive within their communities and on the streets but not coping in normal society and mainstream schools). They have tried to exert control over and give direction to their lives, as explained by Brookes (2004) and Biesta and Tedder (2007). They have also attempted to, true to the notion by Ecclestone (2007:8), construct their own life courses through the choices and actions that they took within the opportunities and constraints of their individual circumstances. Learning from scholars like Maslow (1954; 1996; 1998), Brendtro, et al. (2002) and Brendtro and Du Toit (2005), it seems that the strongest driving factors for the respondents to apply their sense of personal agency were that of their need to survive and their need for belonging and to be accepted and respected by other people.

K exhibited a strong sense of personal agency, as described by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), Small and Memmo (2004), Biesta and Tedder (2007) and Ecclestone (2007). He never accused anybody else for the mistakes he had made. On the contrary, he blamed himself for things that were not his fault, like the lack of care he received from his mother. He even claimed that at the age of five years he had decided not to stay with his mother, but with his grandmother. This tendency provides evidence of K's agency (Emirbayer & Mische 1998; Small & Memmo 2004; Biesta & Tedder 2007; Ecclestone 2007), as he showed the ability (or at least willingness) to take responsibility for his own circumstances. He also showed insight into his barriers to learning and could explain why he did not want to go to Afrikaans or English classes. Although he attended a reputable school with only 19 learners in his class, he wilfully refused the help offered by educators. He chose not to return to the place of safety where the court had placed him due to the

detrimental circumstances at home, but rather to prematurely live with adult friends. He also showed insight into the harmful influence drug abuse had on his education and future ambitions.

Henning et al. (2004:123) hold that the narrator will edit the personal narrative and adjust it to reflect a “performed, preferred self.” This was relevant in K’s version of the true account of things in his life, which differed from the data found in his official files. For instance, he, not surprisingly, made mistakes regarding dates and times, as well as the occupation of his step-grandfather. It is possible that he also did not know the truth about his father’s charge of rape. Nevertheless, he deliberately lied about his mother not abusing drugs and he never referred to himself abusing drugs with his mother. He also never said anything about him going to a children’s home. Even though we may question K’s decisions, his story does tell us of the resilience of youth in dire situations.

Both M and J exhibited a strong sense of personal agency as described by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), Small and Memmo (2004), Biesta and Tedder (2007) and Ecclestone (2007), although negative in nature (see Section 2.5.1). Apparently, they deliberately made certain decisions in their lives and took responsibility for their choices. According to data gathered from his official records and his narrated life story, it appears that M asserted himself with his physical strength and resorted to criminal ways to bear with the realities of his life. He suggested that he most probably would have to look after himself once he was discharged and he was fully aware of the obstacles awaiting him. He indicated that he would again resort to crime if he needed to support himself. This relates to the notion by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007) that one of the strongest motivations for property crime is the fact that the returns from crime are obtained more quickly than from working for a salary.

J’s meaning perspective seemed to be one of “the survival of the fittest.” He fits the description by Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:11) of a person who had suffered trauma in his early life that had detrimental effects on his development. He could justify why he did things like stealing and drinking and admitted to all the wrongs he had done. It was apparent that, because of his status as an orphan, he chose to steal in order to be independent despite the fact that he was in the capable care of his aunt. As he grew older, it became clear that J had acquired some prison gangster skills, as described by Steinberg (2004), during his time in Pollsmoor Prison (see Section 2.5.3.4). According to his official records, he started to act like a prison gang leader and was involved in smuggling and bribery. It was noticeable that he was steering his life in a negative direction. Although J wanted to become an architect, he seemingly realized that his criminal record would not allow this dream to be realized and therefore he had found himself at what Brendtro et al. (2002:x) call a cul-de-sac. He therefore started to use his delinquent skills to help him survive and become

independent within his new context and conceivable future. Thus, although J had made what could be regarded undesirable choices, he exhibited some degree of personal agency as described by Biesta and Tedder (2007), in that he took control over the course his life was taking, although apparently destructive.

Seemingly, D was the respondent with the lowest level of personal agency (Small & Memmo 2004; Biesta & Tedder 2007; Ecclestone 2007), and who exhibited little or no resiliency characteristics as described by Moffit (1993), Wachs (2000), Werner (2000), Small and Memmo (2004), Werner and Johnson (2004) and Kitano and Lewis (2005). He presented a naïve and immature perspective on life and did not seem ready to take responsibility for himself. He grew up in severe poverty without proper supervision and seemingly very poor parenting, factors which Brendtro, et al. (2002:9-32) and Luthar (2003) argue to be more influential than delinquent youth's own characteristics in promoting and sustaining resilience, as these factors reflect values of societal institutions. D seemed to have no control over the course his life was taking, an important element of agency as described by Biesta and Tedder (2007). He displayed no ambition or future vision as explained by Kumpfer and Bluth (2004) and claimed that he would continue to steal to get money if he had to. According to Mezirow and Associates (1990), adults are motivated to criticise and understand the meaning of their experiences better. On the other hand, Moffitt (1993) claims that parents and children resemble each other in their cognitive abilities. During the interview, D did not criticise the conditions at home or his relationship with his mother. It seemed that to him this was normal and he even suggested that he would raise his own children following her example. It is thus fair to assume that the apparent cycle of thoughtless acceptance of the status quo was visible in D's verbalised perceptions. This notion relates to the explanation by scholars like Erikson (1963, 1968, 1980), Mezirow and Associates (1990) and Bourdieu (in Chouliaraki & Fairclough 2004:22) that our expectations about how things are supposed to be are being strengthened, extended and refined by experience.

X evidently had a limited perception of his possible self and resorted to what Cutter et al. (2008) refer to as self-medication by smoking dagga and sniffing glue to escape the harsh realities of rejection and failure. X typically related to the notion by Boeck et al. (2006) about young offenders in that his horizons were constrained, his opportunities limited, his personal choice reduced to fate and his agency was restricted. As explained by Boeck et al. (2006), because X belonged to a tight network of similar persons, the possibilities for him to escape the conditions of social exclusion were limited. He did not exhibit the agentic capacity (according to Biesta & Tedder 2007) to shape his responsiveness to the situations which he had encountered in his life.

According to the research data found in the C's official files and from information shared during the personal interview, he had dropped out of school previously. Regardless of this fact, I would like to suggest that he most probably would be able to continue his school career and find proper employment. Learning from the above-mentioned scholars, this would only be possible if his agency increased and if he stayed away from drugs and gangs, and resisted the other detrimental influences within the community. Relevant to C's disposition, is how his relationships with his parents, siblings, educators and peers would affect the types of support he received when he encountered new learning challenges during life transition stages, as explained by Brookes (2004).

It therefore becomes observable that, at the time of the interviews, the respondents exhibited different levels of personal agency and, as Biesta and Tedder (2007) explain, different levels of capability to shape their responsiveness to the situations, which they had encountered in their lives.

Ecclestone (2007:9) stresses the importance of structural factors in shaping personal agency, since key social divisions shape opportunities for access to economic, social and symbolic forms of capital, thereby framing possibilities and restricting social mobility. I learn from Biesta and Tedder (2007), and conclude that ideally, if the respondents could change the composition of their agentic orientations, they would be able to engage more effectively or satisfactorily with events in their lives. They then could influence the diverse contexts in which they acted and could alter their own structuring relationships to the contexts of action.

#### **4.3.3 SOCIAL FACTORS SHAPING PRESISPOSITIONS TO LEARNING**

Referring to the argument by Ecclestone (2007:9) about the influence of structural factors on a person's agency, I will report on some of these factors, which scholars regard to be important in shaping the predispositions to learning of individuals like the respondents. I will do so by clustering the factors within the following contexts: (a) environmental and social contexts; (b) intellectual capacity and learning contexts; (c) emotional and moral contexts; and (d) the context of anti-social conduct.

##### **(a) Environmental and social contexts**

Learning from scholars like Luthar (2003), Brendtro and Du Toit (2005), Olivier (2006) and (Bottrell 2007:611), it is clear that children develop best in environments free from the fear of physical distress or harm where their physical, emotional, and developing needs are met by caring adults. The respondents seemingly did not have these privileges. The social contexts in which an

individual develops as well as environmental deprivation are regarded core reasons for persons not reaching their potential through formal education (Cross 1981; Luthar 2003; Werner & Johnson 2004; Brendtro & Du Toit 2005; Olivier 2006; Bottrell 2007). According to these scholars, environmental deprivation may point to factors like poverty, deficient parenting, and conflict within families, parental mental illness, and family disruptions such as divorce, parental substance abuse and family violence. Luthar (2003) illuminates that the environment in which a child grows up has a stronger influence on his or her scholastic success than that of the child's intelligence and that early onset of maltreatment reduces the ability of the individual to maintain an internal locus of control, which is important in maintaining a sense of agency.

In the paragraphs to follow, I will relate the individual life stories of the six respondents to the theories of the above-mentioned as well as other reputable scholars. I will refer to information that was gathered from the respondents' official files as well as from the personal interviews. In doing so, I will seek to interpret and understand the contexts from which the respondents' points of reference originate. This understanding may shed light on their predispositions to learning.

According to Knowles (1978), children identify themselves mainly in terms of external markers: who their parents and siblings are, where they live, and according to their school and church affiliation. Learning from sociologists like Bourdieu (in Chouliaraki & Fairclough 2004:22) the individual's frame of reference and disposition are shaped through the process of habitus. The socialisation of the six respondents did not follow the conventional pattern, and the influences of significant others such as parents, older siblings and educators were in some cases detrimental to their predispositions to learning. According to information collected from the respondents' official files and from the respondents' individual interviews, all of them came from dysfunctional families and/or divorced parents, which are regarded by Luthar (2003:520-531) negative effects on efficient parenting. They grew up in poverty and in environments that were not safe or conducive to learning. Except for J whose parents were deceased, all the respondents' parents seemed to be severely inept. In considering the significance of the influence of parental behaviour on their children as stressed by Capozzoli and McVey (2000), I point to the significance thereof when I refer to the research findings in the paragraphs to follow.

While he was growing up, K's father was an imprisoned rapist and his mother a drug addict and prostitute. As explained by Werner and Johnson (2004:710-716), K found in his grandmother a person who loved and accepted him unconditionally, which is of the utmost importance for children of alcoholics to become resilient. He seemed to have been overly dependent on his grandmother. Unfortunately, once she had moved to England and terminated the payment of maintenance money to K's drug abusing mother, K suffered severe hardship. This made him feel betrayed and

he started to rely on himself only. K seemingly found comfort in living an untimely adult life long before he was old enough to do so by becoming street wise, learn survival skills and pursue a gangster lifestyle, as explained by Brendtro, et al. (2002:62), Steinberg (2004), and Burton (2008 [a]). He could not cope and got into serious trouble. This ended up in him abusing drugs, stealing and shooting a rival gang member. During his detainment at Pollsmoor Prison, he witnessed criminal adult behaviour. It is clear that his mother's substance abuse and his negative experiences as a child of an addicted parent, severely disrupted K's development (Centre on Addiction and the Family n.d.; Blue in Stimmel & Bean-Bayog 1987; Venter 2001; Godsall et al. 2004; Werner & Johnson 2004).

M evidently had no role models. He lived alone with his parents in a garage without electricity. Domestic violence, where his alcoholic and unemployed father whom he apparently despised, physically abused his mother and sister, determined M's development. Scholars agree that parental substance abuse interrupts a child's normal development, because children of substance abusers are often frightened and exposed to domestic violence (Centre on Addiction and the Family n.d.; Blue in Stimmel & Bean-Bayog 1987; Venter 2001; Godsall et al. 2004; Werner & Johnson 2004). M resented the fact that his father always found ways to keep up his alcoholic habits, even though he had no income. During the interview, M told me that his mother would sometimes try to defend herself from the blows of his father. He also indicated that the arguing between his parents made him sporadically flee from the house. M supposedly acted out the disrespect he had for both his parents at school and the teachers often punished him for not showing respect. Without a conceivable alternative lifestyle, M continued the cycle of alcohol and drug abuse. Sadly, even though he tried to protect his mother from the abuse of his father, she was emotionally detached from him and never contacted him while he was detained at the place of safety. At the place of safety, according to reports, M frequently took part in violent fights with other inmates. M's behaviour relates to the notion of Brendtro and Du Toit (2005) that children, who have experienced much hostility, do not get used to it; instead, they are on guard for the slightest sign of disrespect. In further supporting this notion, during the interview M admitted that he had a short temper and that he also shouted at teachers who had tried to discipline him. As Burton (2008 [a]) and Hagedorn (in Watts 1998) predict, M responded with violence to difficult situations because he had been exposed to high levels of violence at home.

The risk factors in D's life were overwhelming. Some of the stressors experienced by him, included a single-parent family (McMillen & Kaufman 1997), learning difficulties, poverty, social relationships, and family and school contexts (Schonert-Reichl 2003:3) or the interrelation between the school, student and family, and community (Arrington & Wilson 2000:224). This was evident from the information gathered through the personal interview and from his official file. D's divorced

parents were unemployed and he grew up in severe poverty. His mother also entertained drug merchants at her house, where D had lived. Ironically, although there seemingly was not enough money to live a decent life, D received pocket money, which he spent on drugs. He received no direction from his parents. To D, adult life was presented as immoral and selfish. He had seemingly grown up without moral values, as explained by Gardner (1999), Borba (2001), Lennick and Kiel (2005), and Goleman (2006), and had come to know that he could do whatever he wanted to do. Sadly, it appeared that he craved adult attention and found belonging in a group of criminal adults (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005). He therefore he stayed away from home for weeks loitering and abusing drugs with his criminal adult friends. His mother only found out that he was addicted to tik after the police arrested him for murder. This emphasises her level of non-involvement in her child's life and relates to the theory of Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:23-27) that people who feel unwanted and rejected respect neither themselves nor others. Dawson (2007) emphasizes the negative influence of rejection by their parents on the development of children, which was seemingly extremely apparent in D's life. Nobody ever visited him at the place of safety and his mother openly exclaimed in front of him that she dreaded the thought of him returning home.

X grew up as a poor, neglected child. Both his parents were unemployed alcoholics who had abandoned him since birth. His aunt raised him. During that time he attended school, was a good learner and did not present with delinquent behaviour. He met his parents for the first time at the age of 10, when he had left the care of his aunt who could not provide in all of his needs. He went to stay with his parents for a short while, but was utterly disappointed in them. During the interview, he revealed that he had disrespected them and blamed them for abandoning him both emotionally and physically since birth and for not providing in his basic needs like paying his school fees. When this arrangement did not work out, he found employment as a seasonal worker on a farm for a short while. Thereafter his life was in disarray. He had to live on the streets and steal in order to survive. Despite the fact that X had despised his parents because of their drinking, he got addicted to drugs. This notion is explained by scholars like the Centre on Addiction and the Family (n.d.); Blue (in Stimmel & Bean-Bayog 1987); Venter (2001); Godsall, et al. (2004); and Werner and Johnson (2004), that children of alcoholic or substance abusing parents are three to four times more likely than others to become addicted to alcohol or other drugs themselves. He apparently sniffed glue and used drugs like dagga, tik and mandrax to self-medicate out of his miseries. X seemingly had no respect for himself or other people, as explained by Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:23-27), as he became a homeless drug abusing criminal who would steal anything he could lay his hands on. His parents' rejection had apparently scarred him so severely (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005:22; Dawson 2007) that he would not even allow his devoted teacher whom had found him on the streets, to persuade him to aspire to a better life. He by all accounts felt betrayed by his parents and it persuaded him to find belonging in a group of drug-abusing, criminal friends. His

need for belonging as described by Brendtro and Du Toit (2005), also directed him in finding a girlfriend who was older than he was.

It seemed that C came from a home with structure. He lived with his mother and sister, who helped him with his homework. C never indicated during the interview that he was unhappy at home. Nevertheless, his parents were not living together and both were unemployed. His sister was the only breadwinner. Even though he dreaded the fact that the teachers sent him home because his school fees were in arrears, he chose not to take sandwiches to school, but to buy potato chips and sweets at the school's tuck-shop. He seemingly did not understand the severity of his family's lack of money. It was clear that C fitted the description of Perry (1970) of an immature person who was in need of authority outside himself. C grew up in a violent gang-ridden community without future vision as explained by Kumpfer and Bluth (2004). In communities like these, youth loiter, abuse drugs and commit crimes (as is evident from the work of Olivier in Pretorius & Machet 2004; Linington & Excell 2004; Bouwer & Jordaan 2002). According to the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007), teenage girls get pregnant from their gangster-boyfriends. Luthar (2003:529) holds that the negative effects of a disadvantaged environment seem to be more powerful contributors to child achievement at every age than the personality characteristics of the child. C attended an unsafe school where indecisive boys like him easily fall prey to criminal and gang activities. He dropped out of school because of gangster activities in the community and started to abuse drugs with gangster friends. It was clear that C's meaning perspective was shaped by the deprived society in which he was raised, as explained by Heany and Harton (in Mezirow 1991). This seemingly resulted in him adopting an attitude of fatalism, as is the case of oppressed and marginalised people who ignore feelings of discontent and rebellion. Such groups seem to find it more bearable to accept the status quo than to oppose it and, after a while, the status quo becomes the meaning perspective of the individual (Heany & Harton in Mezirow 1991). It appears that C had become a victim of the seemingly immoral and crime ridden community which had overshadowed everything else in his life and which had shaped his meaning perspectives. Scholars like Luthar (2003:528), Corcoran and Nichols-Casebolt (2004:216), Godsall, et al. (2004:790), and Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:28) emphasize the important role of significant others and positive role models in the lives of developing children and youth. Without any strong role models in his family, C never questioned the detrimental lifestyle of his friends and peers and he could not rise above his circumstances. This relates to Bourdieu's notion of habitus as explained by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2004:22), where what is done in a particular place, is hardened into relative permanence.

Understandably, the violent death of both his parents and his status as an orphan overshadowed J's life completely. Luthar (2003:529) names the witnessing of violence a serious risk factor.

Corcoran and Nichols-Casebolt (2004:217) claim that exposure to violence can exact a price on children's mental health. This seems to be applicable to J, as he was witness to the killing of his mother when he was 11 years old. Although I would not claim it to be a medical diagnosis, I would like to suggest that J most probably might suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (as described by Dryden-Edwards n.d.). Furthermore, when he was moving into adolescence, he also had lost his sense of sanctuary after the death of his father, as his father used to financially supply in all J's needs. This detrimental factor can explain J's apparent overwhelming awareness of and fight for survival, as illustrated by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954; 1996; 1998), where the need for survival is the most basic human need. Apparently, the loss of financial stability played an important role in shaping J's meaning perspective. During the interview, he could mention nothing about his parents other than that they had provided for him financially until the death of his father. Although he cared for his aunt who took care of him and called her "Mom", he seemingly never really regarded himself part of that family. He resisted his aunt's care and found belonging, as described by Brendtro and Du Toit (2005), in a group of adult men by abusing alcohol and visiting adult nightclubs with them. According to the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007) and Cutter et al. (2008), people like J who are suffering emotionally use alcohol and drugs, not so much for the effect, but to escape from their problems; and also because they are thrill-seekers or want to belong to a social group. According to the information revealed during the interview, J had felt the need for more money to be able to sustain his newly found social status amongst his alcohol abusing adult friends. Although his aunt seemingly adequately supplied for him, he would steal money and got into trouble after drinking heavily. J seemingly had never come to peace with losing his parents and he appeared to be very lonely. Although he chose to present himself during the interview as a confident young man, he claimed that he was lacking parental guidance and he actually used the loss of his parents as an excuse for doing the wrong things that he did. This relates to what Luthar (2003) calls a lack of an internal locus of control, which could have been the result of him growing up without his perceived physical, emotional, and developmental needs met by caring adults. This put him even more at risk.

Due to the reported absence of good family relationships and care, as well as the lack of a healthy environment and living conditions, all of the respondents exhibited difficult and aggressive behaviour. Reports on their official files confirm this statement. Furthermore, Dawson (2007) stresses that parents who reject their children cause a great deal of pain for such children, which can have an effect on whether or not the children become aggressive or anti-social. Brendtro and Du Toit (2005) illuminate that an individual has a fundamental need to belong to significant others. In addition, supportive relationships allow for the development of positive values and emotions (like pride). Unfortunately, the respondents seemingly did not receive adequate kindness, love and the opportunity to experience a sense of belonging, as explained by Brendtro and Du Toit (2005). Learning from Brendtro et al. (2002), I would like to argue that it was apparent that all of the

respondents had fallen prey to undesirable social groups and delinquent lifestyles because of the lack of a sense of belonging within their families. In relating this lack of belonging to the respondents' predispositions to learning, Schonert-Reichl (2000) holds that children's and adolescents' performance in school strongly relates to the levels at which they have experienced a sense of belonging and connection to the school environment, peers and teachers. During the interviews, none of the respondents indicated any strong relationships with peers or teachers. These notions hold true in the cases of K, D, M, X and C who indicated during the interviews that they had dropped out of school because of different reasons of which foremost was the lack of a sense of belonging, safety and achievement, which also relates to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954; 1996; 1998).

Ideally, as explained by Werner and Smith (1982), Kumpher and Bluth (2004:685) and Werner and Johnson (2004:710), significant others such as grandparents, older siblings, other extended family members, child-care providers or teachers, could have assisted the respondents in the face of the apparent absence of capable parents. Unfortunately, no evidence of this kind was found in any of the respondents' personal files or during their interviews. On the contrary, K's whole life seemed to collapse when his grandmother left the country. X's teacher had tried to persuade him to return to school and had even bought him clothes, but she could not persuade him to change his lifestyle. Ultimately, in C's case, the involvement of his mother and sister in his life might be the distinguishing factor for him to be, if possible, able to return to school and become a responsible citizen. Relevant to the respondents' narrated life stories, Brendtro et al. (2002: x) concludes that, without human comforts and outlets for wholesome recreation, youths at risk may turn to drugs for excitement and seek status or security in guns and knives.

#### (b) Intellectual capacity and learning contexts

The purpose of this section is not to report on the respondents' measured intelligence, or to provide a clinical or educational psychological lens on the respondents, but to establish the relevance of intelligence or intelligences in terms of the shaping of the respondents' predispositions to learning. I will relate the information I gathered from the respondents' official documents and during the personal interviews to the theories of cognitive intelligence, multiple intelligences, emotional intelligence, social intelligence and moral intelligence. I will discuss these within each respondent's unique learning context.

Olson (in Sternberg & Spear-Swirling 1999) holds that children acquire knowledge and skills, like language, from their surroundings. English was the second language of all of the respondents. The six respondents exhibited limited vocabularies, regardless of whether the interviews were

conducted in their first or second language. According to Cranton (1994), an individual's meaning perspectives (the uncritically assimilated ways of knowing, believing and feeling) act as filters through which a person experiences life and learning. Cross (1981) reiterates the fact that the environments and social backgrounds where individuals grow up have an influence on their predispositions to learning. Negative and punishing learning experiences during childhood influence the predispositions of adults to learning. The environment, within which the respondents had grown up, evidently had a strong influence on their predispositions to learning. They were members of societies which evidently did not provide adequate learning opportunities as defined by Bergevin (1967), Merriam and Caffarella (1999) as ideal. Cohen (2006) holds that learners are dependent on social-emotional competencies and ethical dispositions, as well as a safe, caring, participatory, and responsive school system and homes where educators and parents are active and supportive partners. It was evident that none of the respondents had grown up in homes where there was emphasis on education, which may have been detrimental to their predispositions to learning. Typically, during the interviews, none of them could tell up to which age education was compulsory and most of them was of opinion that they could return to school at any age.

K had no knowledge of his parents' level of education. Neither his brother nor his sister had completed Grade 12. D had no knowledge of his parents' levels of education. M knew that his mother was working on a computer, but he did not know that she was a bookkeeper. X's parents were illiterate farm workers. C told me that his mother attended school up to Grade 9 and his father up to Grade 11. According to J, his father attended school up to Grade 12. He assumed that his mother and aunt also went to school. According to their narrated life stories and school reports, it became apparent that all of them had struggled academically. According to the information gathered in the interviews, books and other educational material were lacking in all of the respondents' homes. They seemingly had grown up without the necessary motivation and support to be able to reach their potential at school. The argument put forward by Brendtro et al. (2002:63) that some youth who are frustrated in struggling to achieve, retreat from difficult challenges by giving up in futility, while others seek to prove their competence in distorted ways (such as skill in delinquent activity), is applicable to the respondents. Furthermore, Siegel (1999:227-249) refers to the reputable work of Sternberg, *Perspectives on learning disabilities: Biological, cognitive, contextual* (1999) and emphasizes that people with learning disabilities often have trouble with self-esteem and self-concept. As they proceed in school, these people experience more and more failure, resulting in psychological problems and even antisocial behaviour. According to reports found in their official files, all the respondents had struggled with barriers to learning.

According to Schonert-Reichl (2000) and Corcoran and Nichols-Casebolt (2004), it is extremely important for at-risk children to feel safe at school and to have supportive teachers. In addition,

adolescents who are victims of poor relationships at home and at school are more likely to feel anxious or depressed, develop serious smoking, drinking and drug habits and drop out of school. This was the case with five of the six respondents, as they have dropped out of school before the police arrested them. K has had barriers to learning since primary school, which seemingly were not addressed. The teachers could not persuade him to accept the help they had offered him. Therefore, his work and behaviour deteriorated and the teachers sent him to detention class on a regular basis. K had the ambition to become a fire fighter. Unfortunately, his barriers to learning and lack of support at home led him to acquire knowledge and skills that would empower him within the criminal environment he seemingly chose to operate (Brendtro et al. 2002:63). His interest in the vocational learning programmes at the youth care centre which he was sentenced to shows his readiness for adult education (as described by Bergevin 1967; Knowles 1970; 1978; 1979; 1984) at this young age.

During the interview, D indicated that he was not at all eager to learn at school. When the teachers had sent him out of the class because his work was incomplete or incorrect, he smoked in the toilets and even stayed away from school (Brendtro et al. 2002:63). He told me that he enjoyed breaks at school and took part in gangster-like fights on the school grounds. It was apparent that D had struggled with severe barriers to learning, as pointed out by Siegel (1999:227-249) in referring to the reputable work of Sternberg, *Perspectives on learning disabilities: Biological, cognitive, contextual* (1999), but seemingly no one ever intervened or helped him. According to reports found in D's official file, he was very aggressive and apparently did not particularly succeed in making friends. This relates to the notion held by Tartar and Mezzich (1992:166 in Kumpfer & Bluth 2004:678), that children with difficult temperaments are often shunned by family members, teachers and peers, hence pushing them to the "outer limits of normative social interaction" and setting the stage for deviance. Scholars like Luthar (2003:528), Corcoran and Nichols-Casebolt (2004:216), Godsall, et al. (2004:790), and Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:28) emphasize the importance of parents' involvement in the education of their children. Apparently, there was very little communication between the school and D's mother. When the principal gave him a note to give to his mother, he tore it up on his way home. When she at last knew that D was expelled from school, she shifted her motherly responsibilities to D's aunt, who also could not contain him. D never acquired basic learning skills and therefore was illiterate at the age of 12. Despite intensive remedial interventions by the teachers at the place of safety, D's intellectual capacity seemingly did not improve. It is fair to assume that this could be the result of his extreme abuse of drugs like tik (Weingartner in Carpenter 2001; NIDA 2008). Alarming, he never showed any regret that he was illiterate. He related the importance of education to the ability to recognize road signs not to get lost – merely survival-focussed, as explained by Maslow (1954; 1996; 1998). He naively thought that if he went back to school at the age of 14, he would be able to go back to Grade 4. D did not exhibit insight into and understanding of the learning process. Because he could not read and write, he

resorted to the coping skills he had mastered, like fighting and stealing, which in this adverse context can be regarded anti-social adult skills as described by Merriam and Clark (1991). Because of his poor upbringing, he seemingly had little or no moral judgement (Hass 1998; Gardner 1999; Borba 2001; Lennick & Kiel 2005) and his only purpose was to get money to be able to buy drugs. Considering his age and his perceived level of intellectual capability (Wachs 2000), it became apparent that he was unfit for normal education, whether it was at primary school or adult level. He reportedly had no interest in learning anything apart from coping within the environment in which he grew up, and how to find money to buy drugs.

M was the only respondent who actually indicated that he had enjoyed school. During the interview, he told me that he had to repeat grades twice in primary school. It therefore seems that his barriers to learning were noted (as explained by Siegel 1999:227-249 by referring to the reputable work of Sternberg *Perspectives on learning disabilities: Biological, cognitive, contextual* 1999), as he was sent to a technical secondary school, which had suited his learning needs at the time. Afrikaans was M's home language, but he was in an English class. He struggled to express himself in words and spoke a mixed language. He apparently was interest in learning practical skills only. Typical to a child of an alcoholic (as explained by Bergevin 1967 and Brookfield 1991), M could not concentrate at school, as an individual cannot engage productively in learning when fear, anxiety and shame are present. Domestic violence constantly troubled M, and he was worried about his mother's safety. As Capozzoli and McVey (2000) explain, the conflict between M's parents may have led to inappropriate interaction patterns. For example, while he was still attending school, M was disrespectful and rude towards educators and got into trouble because of that. He eventually turned to drug-abusing friends to escape from his troubles at home, as explained by Cutter et al. (2008). According to reports on his official file, M was very eager to learn and enjoyed the small groups and individual attention of the educators at the place of safety. He was very artistic and especially enjoyed art lessons and other practical workshops. He wanted to become a welder. He would most probably have succeeded in doing that if he had not dropped out of school.

Although he seemingly had the cognitive abilities to pass his grades at school and although he reported that he enjoyed going to school, X could never reach his potential, because he was exposed to multiple early family adversities. Because his parents had abandoned him, he was denied secure early attachments, as explained by Luthar (2003:520-531). He grew up in an environment and home that were not conducive to learning (Hynd et al. 1999 in Sternberg 1999; Olivier 2006 in Pretorius & Machet 2004; Linington & Excell 2004; Bouwer & Jordaan 2002). Nobody paid attention to his developmental needs and schoolwork. He never mentioned receiving any cognitive stimulation at home. During the interview, he told me that his worst memory of school

was when the teachers would send him home during school hours because his school fees were in arrears. Brendtro and Du Toit (2005) name shame as one of the most painful social emotions humans can experience. Furthermore, Bergevin (1967) adds that an individual cannot engage productively in learning when feeling ashamed. To make things worse, he also did not receive a school report because of his outstanding school fees. According to information shared in the interview, this was the main reason why he decided not to return to school.

C's association with secondary school was that of violence rather than learning. As stated in the School Violence Reports (2008) and supported by Rasool (2008) and Grant (2010), violence on the school grounds and in the communities surrounding schools in the Cape Flats is a growing concern. Kennedy (in Mezirow & Associates 1990) emphasizes that the filters through which one perceives the world are products of personal and group history. It is fair to acknowledge the important role the particular social group in which C had grown up had played in the development of his self-identity and self-interest and the way in which he viewed the world. During the interview, C described in detail how the gangsters had ruled the area surrounding the school. He was scared to go to school because one boy was killed on the school grounds and the gangsters would shoot at one another outside the school. Furthermore, he did not want to go to school because, like in the case of X, the teachers sent him home without a report card because his school fees were in arrears. He easily fell prey to negative influences of his peers and soon found himself out of school and involved in gang wars. Burton (2008 [a]) reiterates that an indecisive boy like C is easily lured into gang activities. C fits the description by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007) that young, irresponsible youths do not think seriously about the long-term consequences of their choices, and they get absorbed by the cycle of crime.

During the interview, J told me that he never had any real problems at school. He enjoyed going to school and the educators were good to him. He said that he had passed Grade 9 at school and that he wanted to go back to school. He exhibited future vision and goals, a feature that Kumpfer and Bluth (2004:674) allocate to resilience. He wanted to become an architect, as he knew people who were architects. J was the only respondent who had grown up knowing people and family members in professional positions, as pointed out by Cross (1981) to be important for youth to become resilient. J understood that he had to go to university to become an architect. At the place of safety, he exhibited very good communication skills. He was behaving well and acted as leader during group sessions. Brookes (2004) and Ecclestone (2007:8) attribute this capacity to personal agency (see Section 2.5.1), as he seemed to be self-directed with a desire to shape a specific field or context like in this case, his immediate environment at the place of safety. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, he seemingly realised that he would not be able to make his dream to become an architect come true because of his criminal record. It therefore seemed that, although he

apparently could withstand the stress of one or two family problems in his life (Kumpfer & Bluth 2004:676), when the stressors became too severe, he seemingly gave up his positive goals and resorted to destructive behaviour focussed on survival within his unfortunate realities. He then started to present with gangster-like traits which he probably had picked up during his detainment at Pollsmoor Prison, and applied his cognitive abilities in negative and manipulative ways.

Education did not seem to be a priority in their communities or of the parents of the respondents. Olivier (2006) draws from work by Bouwer and Jordaan (2002), Pretorius and Machet (2004) and Linington and Excell (2004), in identifying environmental deprivation as a core reason for persons not reaching their potential through formal education. Hynd et al. (1999:60-79) refer to the reputable work of Sternberg, *Perspectives on learning disabilities: Biological, cognitive, contextual* (1999) and argue that learning disabilities are not only due to some type of minimal brain damage, but that environmental factors may affect the normal scope and sequence of brain development in persons with learning disabilities. Cattell (1987) highlights the indisputable role that society plays in the development of the intelligence of its members. All of the respondents had lacked guidance from their parents, while the levels of education of most of them (the parents) were below Grade 12. None of them held professional positions. Because of the poor educational and occupational status of their parents, the respondents did not receive adequate cognitive stimulation and did not enjoy the benefits of technological advances. Their families were poor and therefore could not afford expensive articles like computers and books. According to Collier (1998), high delinquency and truancy rates have a bearing on low-ability pupils and parents of lower social classes. The respondents grew up in areas which were unsupportive of learning and which were not always safe. They did not have strong role models, had to learn through trial and error, and were easy prey to the degrading lifestyles of people in their communities. Their experiences influenced their predispositions to learning negatively, and they had to focus their learning on survival and coping skills customary within the communities and social groups within which they grew up. The respondents may therefore have found it difficult to function in a complicated society and, as Cattell (1987) explains, they might end up as unemployed delinquents. Their need for belonging as defined by Brendtro, et al. (2002) seemed to have been so strong that they would do and learn anything in order to be able to fit in with their respective groups of friends. Evidently, none of them had the strength of character to be able to withstand the negative influences of the homes and environments within which they grew up. Heany and Harton (in Mezirow 1990) recognise this attitude of fatalism by oppressed and marginalised people as a means of ignoring feelings of discontent and rebellion. Such groups seem to find it more bearable to accept the status quo than to oppose it and, after a while, the status quo becomes the meaning perspective of the individual. Standage and Treasure (2002) conclude that situation and experience seem to determine motivation to learn.

Maslow (1954; 1996; 1998) describes survival as the most basic need of a person and self-actualisation as the highest developmental need. When one considers Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954; 1996; 1998), it is sad to note that respondents seemingly only related to the first three levels of the hierarchy. X had to steal in order to be able to eat and find shelter. K, D, and M had to steal to be able to feed their need for drugs. This relates to Maslow's first level, the need for survival. All of them had a need for safety and security (Level 2). They had grown up in unsafe areas with incompetent parents. K explained that it was necessary for him to belong to a gang and to acquire skills typical to those of street gangs, like fighting, stealing and even shooting. He also carried gangster-like tattoos on his arms and legs. D enjoyed taking part in gangster-like fights at school. X idolised prison gangs and wanted to become a "number" (prison gangster). C grew up in a gang-ridden community and got involved in gang wars. J spent nine months in Pollsmoor Prison and exhibited gangster-like manipulative behaviour at the place of safety. It is thus apparent that all of the respondents looked for love and belonging (Level 3) outside the family structure within which it was supposed to be provided. This search for love and belonging has led to detrimental results in all of the respondents' cases.

Although the six respondents had barriers to learning and although they had dropped out of school, there was no evidence that any of them suffered from mental or physical disabilities. Although they had failed to become what normal society would regard as successful, they had managed to survive despite of their marginalised circumstances. I therefore argue that, before the police arrested them and the court placed them at the place of safety, they had to have some resilience and agentic abilities to be able to cope and to stay alive. In order to identify these characteristics, I learnt from Gardner's theory of "multiple intelligences" (1999; 2006) where he argues that intelligences are potentials that will or will not be activated, depending upon the values of a particular culture, and the personal decisions made by individuals, as well as the influence of significant others on the individual's life. He then poses the existence of seven separate human intelligences. As mentioned in Section 2.3.2.2, the relevance of Gardner's multiple intelligences with regard to the youths in my study, lies in the question whether or not these learners have had the opportunity to develop their individual intelligences in order to reach their learning potential. Evidently, none of the respondents had reached their learning potential. It is fair to assume that their cognitive abilities, how limited it might have been, have not been mobilised and developed optimally because of their own inclinations and the individual contexts within which they had grown up. Even so, it became evident that the six respondents each presented with skills in one or more of the intelligences as classified by Gardner. I therefore would like to present the relevance of these acquired skills (in relation to Gardner's multiple intelligences) to that of the respondents' proven capabilities that apparently have enabled them to survive within harsh circumstances.

K carried himself with confidence, even though he had a very low self-esteem. He took full responsibility for his actions and never blamed anybody for the mistakes he had made. This points to what Gardner (1999; 2006) would call “intrapersonal intelligence” (the capacity to understand oneself). K also exhibited strong leadership skills or interpersonal intelligence (a person’s capacity to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people and to work effectively with them). This was evident in his ability to adapt to the lifestyle of his adult friends. Unfortunately, neither of these intelligences helped him to succeed at school and to overcome his barriers to learning.

Brendtro et al. (2002: x) claim that a great deal of violence happens among youths who feel that their lives will end in a cul-de-sac. This holds true in especially D’s case. According to information shared during the interview, he realized that he could not cope at school and that he would not be able to find decent employment because of his illiterate status. He seemingly chose delinquent activities because they bring with them greater self-esteem and because he was unable to succeed in sociable acceptable domains (Ungar 2001). Although D had a very low level of performance at school, it is fair to acknowledge his ability to assert and defend himself with his physical strength (bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence: the ability of using one’s whole body or parts of the body to solve problems). Even though D was short, he was very strong. He was not afraid of anybody. He would most probably win most of the fights he would fight. He told me that nobody would tease him at school, because they knew that he would hit them. He also found it easy to bully other learners and to take their money or items they bought at the school’s tuck shop. He enjoyed gangster-like fights on the school grounds. D evidently applied his strengths in a negative fashion to enable him to be in control of his personal environment. He obviously associated school with violence and therefore had modelled violence, as explained by Burton (2008 [a]).

M had to repeat grades in primary school and attended a secondary school for learners with special educational needs. This suited him well, as he preferred practical skills and enjoyed working with his hands (logical-mathematical competence). He was also artistic (visual-spatial intelligence, good at visualising and mentally manipulating objects). He enjoyed working with his hands and enjoyed only certain subjects at school. Gardner (1999; 2006) underlines that, even though a person may have a preference in for instance logical-mathematical competence, he/she might not have the cognitive ability to excel in subjects like Mathematics. This seems to have been the case with M. Although he was talented, he could not cope with academic school subjects like languages and dropped out of school.

X was a very likeable person. During the interviews, he had a way of making eye contact that none of the other respondents had. He wanted to tell his story. Furthermore, he told me that his teacher had given him food and clothes and that she tried to persuade him to return to school after he had quit. He also had a girlfriend who had visited him at the place of safety. Keeping in mind that he never had a normal life as a child with caring and nurturing parents, his ability to reach out to other people was astonishing. He was popular amongst the boys at the place of safety and never got involved in fights. This implies that he had a strong tendency towards inter-personal intelligence. This also leads to a paradox, as he would not hesitate to steal from anybody, whether it was from a stranger or a friend. His need for survival overshadowed everything else in his life.

C appeared to lack a strong identity and was a follower rather than a leader. He was dependent on his parents to solve his problems and he got involved in gangsterism without even thinking about the consequences. There was no evidence on his official file that he had exhibited any special talents or interests. His personal circumstances seemed to be overwhelming. The violent and criminal community within which he grew up played such an important role in his life experiences and future vision as explained by Kumpfer and Bluth (2004) that he seemingly never even tried to think for himself. It seemed that in C's case, the school had reinforced, rather than catalysed, delinquent or anti-social behaviour in youth like C, who were already at risk (Burton 2008[a]). On the other hand, and regardless of the risk factors in his life, he succeeded in describing to me in graphic detail how gang wars in his community and school have influenced everyone in the community. He knew people and, for instance, could explain to me what would happen to a girl who got pregnant from a gangster. Therefore, I will assign to him linguistic intelligence (sensitivity to spoken and written language and the capacity to use language to accomplish certain goals).

J was good at sport at his previous school and at the place of safety. His nickname at the place of safety was Bafana Bafana, the name of the national soccer team. It seemed that his special intelligence was bodily kinaesthetic, as he enjoyed sport and physical activities and his peers respected him for that.

After investigating the relevance of different intelligences as regards my respondents' predispositions to learning, it seems that their levels of intelligence have played an important part in shaping their learning needs and predispositions to learning. Although their inherited intelligence may have partly shaped their predispositions to learning, their acquired intelligences were evident from their life stories, as explained by Olson (in Sternberg & Spear-Swirling 1999). Like the description of adult learners by Knowles (1970, 1978, 1979, 1984) and Merriam and Clark (1991),

the respondents have applied these intelligences to acquire knowledge and skills, which they could use in their daily lives to survive within morally crippled communities, rather than to reach self-actualisation. Self-actualisation is regarded the highest level of personal development according to Maslow (1954, 1996, 1998) and the need to survival is the lowest level. It is thus clear that the respondents were still primitive with regard to their developmental needs, which in turn had a negative influence on their predispositions to learning.

(c) Emotional and moral contexts

As mentioned in Section 2.5.2.1, awaiting-trial youths have a history of emotional neglect and this might influence their predispositions to learning. According to Goleman (1995), one learns emotional and social lessons best during childhood and adolescence. Looking at the life experiences of the respondents, it appears that they did not have the opportunity to acquire adequate emotional and social skills during childhood and adolescence in their homes and from their significant others. Goleman (1995) argues that, when emotions rule, intelligence cannot be realised. This might partially explain why none of the respondents were able to optimally develop their intrinsic cognitive abilities.

According to Goleman (1995), children whose parents and caregivers neglected them emotionally, struggle with feelings of despair. K's mother never gave him any emotional support and he grew up without a father. He seemed to have been emotionally very dependent on his grandmother, who had deserted him and moved to England. It appeared that he was struggling with feelings of despair. During the interview, he told me that he was scared of the gangsters who would be looking for him once he returned to the community. It was obvious that K had started on a life journey with which he could not cope. D seemed emotionally numb and did not even try to find better alternatives to life than those he had known. He even claimed that he would continue to steal in order to support himself. M despised his father and his mother distanced herself emotionally from him. He evidently struggled with the apparent hopelessness of his parents' lives. He also communicated no future vision as explained by Kumpfer and Bluth (2004) and even exclaimed that he was willing to become a drug dealer if he had to make a living on his own. X never had the privilege of having parents who had cared for him. Therefore, he looked out for himself and never let emotions get in his way. He had to steal in order to buy drugs, which helped him to switch off his emotions and to forget about his miserable life. Although C had a good relationship with his mother and sister and although he trusted his parents to solve his problems, he was immature and never displayed any empathy or caring towards them. He must have disappointed his family when the police arrested him, but had never shown any remorse. He was confident that his parents would get him out of the place of safety. He had a selfish outlook on life. J's parents died before he could grow emotionally strong (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005). He told me

that he was very upset after his mother had died and that there were people who came to the school to comfort him. He did not indicate whether the comforting was in any way helpful to him. He was withdrawn from other people and had abused alcohol to, supposedly, suppress the emotions with which he never had learnt to deal.

Goleman (2006:61) stresses that anxious, angry, or depressed students struggle to learn. It seems to me that the emotional deprivation suffered by my respondents had influenced their predispositions to learning in similar as well as in different ways. According to Brendtro, et al. (2002), emotionally damaged youths may become relationship-resistant and view even friendly, helpful adults with deep distrust. This notion applies to especially K, D and M, who struggled to communicate with their educators and did not want to accept help from them. J apparently was in a state of ongoing crisis (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005:32) because of the death of his parents and therefore could not give attention in school, as he was sad and cried a lot in class. According to the Centre on Addiction and the Family (n.d.); Blue (in Stimmel & Bean-Bayog 1987); Venter (2001); Godsall, et al. (2004) and Werner and Johnson (2004), children of alcoholics like M, because of upsetting home events, may be preoccupied or tired and could therefore be unable to concentrate in school or other activities. M could not focus in class because he was upset by the arguing and fighting between his parents. He told me that he carried “an anger” inside himself. Because of that he was disrespectful towards educators and was sent to detention class frequently. X and C felt angry, sad and ashamed because their school fees had not been paid and because the teachers had sent them home to fetch the money. Other learners would tease them because they were poor. This relates to the suggestion by Bergevin (1967) that an individual cannot engage productively in learning when fear or shame is a motivating factor.

The argument by Siegel (199:227-249), by referring to the reputable work of Sternberg, *Perspectives on learning disabilities: Biological, cognitive, contextual* (1999), that people with barriers to learning often have trouble with self-esteem and self-concept, is relevant to the respondents. Maslow (1954; 1996; 1998) stresses that an individual's self-esteem depends on the esteem of others. Especially children and adolescents need respect and recognition from other people in order to build up self-esteem. The respondents came from marginalised communities and even within those communities, they were struggling to gain respect from their peers. Because people with barriers to learning experience more and more failure, they may encounter psychological problems and may even exhibit antisocial behaviour, as explained by Siegel (1999:227-249), referring to the reputable work of Sternberg, *Perspectives on learning disabilities: Biological, cognitive, contextual* (1999). This could help to explain why the respondents apparently chose to acquire knowledge and coping skills that would enable them to feel good about themselves, even if it was by abusing drugs, fighting and breaking the law.

All of the respondents exhibited little or no empathy towards others, which scholars like Moffit (1993), Wachs (2000), Werner (2000), Small and Memmo (2004), Werner and Johnson (2004) and Kitano and Lewis (2005), attribute to a lack of resilience. They would first satisfy their egocentric needs before considering the effects their actions could have on other people (Kohlberg & Turiel 1971). When the respondents committed the crimes for which the police arrested them, they evidently did not consider the victims' feelings or even respected them as humans. They only wanted to satisfy their egocentric needs. Although all of them understood society's rules and knew that what they were doing was wrong (as I had gathered from the reports from the social workers on their official files), factors like emotional neglect and drug abuse regrettably impaired their moral development. In addition, as learnt from the individual interviews, the respondents did not seem to have many good, moral and virtuous people whom they could imitate, as pointed out by Dobrin (2002). Their egocentric needs dominated and evidently let them act immorally.

Apparently none of them had the ability to face and solve their problems in a rational way (which, according to Tyler et al. 1992: 208, 209 and Kumpfer & Bluth 2004: 682, points to low levels of personal agency) and therefore all of them had dropped out of school for different reasons. It is fair to assume that, if they had been better equipped emotionally, they could have been more resilient and could have been able to continue their education. I therefore argue the relevance of Mezirow's stance in the case of the respondents (1991 in Cranton 1994) that, because individuals are products of their knowledge, upbringing, background and psychological development, their values, assumptions and beliefs may be distorted or invalid. Because these distortions shape the perspectives an individual has on his world, his predisposition to and motivation for learning may be influenced negatively.

#### (d) Anti-social conduct

This section will argue that the respondents' exposure to and experience of delinquency, crime, violence, substance abuse and gangsterism have played an important part in shaping their predispositions to learning.

According to data found in their official files and from the personal interviews, all of the respondents were using either alcohol and/or drugs at the time of their arrest. All of them grew up in communities and/or houses where alcohol and drug abuse seemed to be a way of life. Their perception of a "normal" life was seemingly distorted because of how "normal" it was for people, young and old, to use and abuse alcohol and drugs. The anti-social conduct by the respondents relates to the theory of Brendtro et al. (2002:63) that when some children and youths are frustrated

in their attempts to achieve (academically or socially), they may seek to prove their competence in distorted ways, such as skill in delinquent activity. According to information gathered during the interviews, the respondents agreed that, once they were on drugs, they did not want to learn anymore, but only thought about getting money in order to buy drugs. During all of the interviews, the questions on the respondents' involvement with drugs had them excited – they would go into lengthy explanations and descriptions of their drug abuse and even appeared to be proud of their knowledge of drugs. D, for instance, was extremely eager once he started to talk about drugs. It seemed that his whole life revolved around drugs and he bizarrely seemed proud of his experience in this regard. It is fair to assume that drug abuse may be one of the distinguishing factors that played a part in getting the respondents involved in crime and in shaping their apparent negative predispositions to learning. This notion is supported by Burton (2008 [b]) and the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007), that often both alcohol and drugs are used to generate the courage necessary to commit crime.

The respondents started using drugs and alcohol for different reasons. According to Cutter et al. (2008), people who are suffering emotionally use drugs to escape from their problems. As in the cases of K, D, M and J, they apparently tried to self-medicate themselves out of loneliness, low self-esteem, unhappy relationships or stress. Some youths use drugs as thrill-seekers, some because they are curious and some, like C, because their friends do it, or they wanted the group to accept them, like in the cases of K and D (Cutter et al. 2008). K, D, and M had started by smoking dagga and then moved on to mandrax and tik. X started by sniffing glue, after which he followed the same route as K, D and M. C had only smoked dagga at the time the police arrested him. J abused alcohol only. Interestingly, similar to indications by Maphai (n.d.[a]; n.d.[b]) and Ratsaka-Mothokoa (2003), all of the respondents claimed that dagga was not harmful and most of them were also confident that they would continue to smoke dagga. However, Maphai (n.d.[a]; n.d.[b]) and Ratsaka-Mothokoa (2003) caution that the use of dagga does have a negative influence not only on the user's cognitive learning process, but also on the user's motivation to learn. This was echoed in the respondents' replies during the interviews. M told me that dagga made him feel high, "slow-buzz." K said dagga made him laugh. D said dagga did not make him aggressive and X said dagga allowed him to think. Dagga made C lazy and discouraged him to learn. K explained that mandrax was a lot like dagga, but it also made him feel numb and sleepy. All of the respondents agreed that tik was the most addictive drug of all and that it could kill the user. They were scared of it and all of them indicated that they were relieved that they had stopped using it while at the place of safety and that they would try not to smoke it again. They were of the same opinion that once they started using tik, it became their drug of choice. This corresponds with the findings of the Department of the Premier, Provincial Government of the Western Cape (2010) that addiction to tik was escalating. The respondents who had used tik experienced the same affects, as pointed out by Pretorius and Naudé (2004): they were hyperactive, fearless, aggressive, reckless and

irresponsible when they were high on tik. They used to stay awake for days and also did not get hungry. Because they could not sleep when they were on tik, they had to take dagga or mandrax to calm them down. They claimed that they would have done or paid anything to get their hands on tik. Plüddermann et al. (2007) explain that chronic tik abuse significantly changes the way the brain functions and that such changes are associated with reduced motor performance and impaired verbal learning. Tik abuse also leads to severe structural and functional changes in areas of the brain associated with emotion and memory, which may account for many of the emotional and cognitive problems observed in chronic tik abusers (Plüddermann et al. 2007). It is fair to assume that his lengthy addiction to tik had apparently halted the development of D's cognitive capacity.

According to the information gathered from their official files, four respondents' (K, D, M and X) parent(s) were using drugs and/or alcohol. According to Blue (in Stimmel & Bean-Bayog 1987) and Venter (2001), children of alcoholics and other substance abusers experience difficulties and suffer behavioural, medical, psychiatric, educational and emotional consequences. All the respondents belonged to dysfunctional families and most of these families suffered from the negative influence of alcoholism or drug abuse by one or both of the parents, which had hindered the mental and social development of adolescent members of the family, such as the respondents. K's incompetent mother used to squander the maintenance money she received from K's grandmother on drugs. She even lured K into smoking tik with her (he never disclosed this fact during the interview). His grandmother's history of drug abuse had led to the decline of her application to adopt Kyle and his sister, which left him in disarray. D's mother availed her house for drug business with many boyfriends coming and going. These detrimental conditions seemingly had a very strong impact on D's behaviour, as he imitated what he had witnessed at home: he lived an immoral life, got addicted to tik and would rob children at school and break into the school to find money to buy drugs with. M had to flee from his home because of an alcoholic father and domestic violence and many nights had to stay with friends. Typical a child of an alcoholic, M was always troubled and angry. He presented with the inclination predicted by scholars like Collier (1998), Brendtro, et al. (2002:x) and Kumpfer and Bluth (2004:675), that children of alcoholics are more prone to delinquent acts and substance abuse themselves. M had been involved in delinquent acts since he was very young and also started to use drugs. It is very ironic and sad that he had eventually fallen prey to substance addiction himself, as he despised his father so much for being an alcoholic (The Centre on Addiction and the Family n.d.; Blue in Stimmel & Bean-Bayog 1987; Venter 2001; Godsall et al. 2004; Werner & Johnson 2004). Although X despised his parents for being unemployed alcoholics, he could not break the cycle of addiction and got addicted to drugs, seemingly as self-medication from the hardships he had endured, as explained by Cutter et al. (2008). X admitted that his whole life centred on drugs. Nothing else mattered to him. He needed to find money to buy drugs. He did not care that what he was doing was wrong. He needed drugs to survive and would do anything to get it (Cutter et al. 2008). C's mother never

knew that he was smoking dagga. He would stay at his friend's house until the dagga had worked out and his eyes were not red anymore before he went home. Apparently, J had never experimented with drugs. He admitted that he had abused strong alcoholic liquor with adult friends at nightclubs. He even got into trouble when he was drunk.

According to Burton (2008 [b]), often both alcohol and drugs are used to generate the courage necessary to commit a crime. The respondents agreed that they would not have committed the crimes had they not been under the influence of drugs. The police arrested K for housebreaking and theft. D was an accomplice to a murder and the police arrested him for theft as well. The police arrested M for theft out of a motor vehicle and possession of suspected stolen goods. The crimes X committed included theft, malicious damage to property, theft out of a shop and housebreaking. The police arrested C for attempted murder. The police arrested J for armed robbery, murder and the possession of a firearm and ammunition. It is thus fair to assume that there existed a definite linkage between the respondents' anti-social behaviour and substance abuse.

It is important to reiterate that all of the respondents grew up in communities that are infamous for crime and violence. According to The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2007), some youths become involved in crime and violence because, in their communities, people fear and even admire those known as criminals, because they have money and power. Gangsterism is a way of life of many young men and even boys in such areas (see Section 2.5.3.4). Boys and youths like the respondents are extremely vulnerable and, because of their need to belong and because of the lack of proper supervision, they are easily lured into criminal gangs, as explained by Brendtro, et al. (2002:62) and Burton (2008[a]). Gangsterism affected the respondents in different levels of intensity. During the interviews, the respondents disclosed their different perceptions of gangsterism. K wanted to become a gangster like his older brother. He was even part of a "boy-gang" and apparently had shot a rival gang member. Hagedorn (in Watts 1998) explains that a man in prison earns his manhood by means of violence and he may not cry or show fear or pain. X was of the opinion that once you were a "number" (member of a prison gang), you would be safe and that you could get anything you wanted. From their narrated life stories, it seems apparent that K, D, X, C and J were familiar with the expectations and contexts of the gangster culture.

According to Burton (2008 [a]; 2008 [b]), children who are exposed to violence at school, or who associate school with violence, are likely to model that kind of behaviour. K, D and C used to get into trouble at school for fighting and then had to go to detention class in the afternoons. C was afraid to go to school because of gang fights in the area. Sometimes he could not go to school because of that. High school was not for him a place of safety where he could learn and excel, as

highlighted by Burton (2008 [b]), Katlego (2008), Rasool (2008) and the School Violence Reports (2008). According to C, there were daily fights on the school grounds. Some of the fights were very violent, including stabbing and shooting, and sometimes even fatal, as reported by Rasool (2008). From a young age, D exhibited gangster-like behaviour. He claimed that he had instigated gang-like fights on the playgrounds during breaks at school. He later found belonging within a group of older drug-abusing men and committed crimes like breaking into vehicles. He seemingly enjoyed the excitement, camaraderie or sense of power he experienced in doing crime (The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation 2007). X was an abandoned boy and had to function as a self-reliant “adult” since the age of 10. Although he apparently never belonged to a criminal gang, the risk factors in X’s life were extreme and had directed him towards an attitude of survival and criminality with similar youths, as explained by McMillen and Kaufman (1997), Arrington and Wilson (2000:224), Luthar (2003:529), Schonert-Reichl, (2003:3) and France (2007:30). Both J’s parents were brutally murdered by members of the community in which he had grown up. Although his aunt took care of him, he chose to find belonging in a group of older men and visited nightclubs and shebeens with them. It appears that the nine months he spent in Pollsmoor Prison had a very negative influence on him. Consciously or unconsciously, he had learnt prison-gang skills and started to apply it at the place of safety.

Burton (2008 [a]) and Liebowitz (in Katlego 2008) agree that victims of crime and abuse, especially children, internalise their emotions. In their minds, crime and abuse becomes a way of life and a normal and acceptable means of solving conflict. I would like to argue that, although the respondents had committed crimes, they were victims themselves. They were victims to the detrimental environments within which they had grown up and to the examples set by significant others and other members of the community. For instance, robbers killed J’s mother in front of him when he was 11 years old. His father was shot in the head three times because of taxi violence when J was 15 years old. Although he told me that there were people who came to the school to comfort him after the death of his mother, he never received proper counselling after his father had died. J got arrested for murder at the age of 15 years. M was victim to acute domestic violence and severe poverty. He could see no future for himself and was confident that he would sell drugs if he needed money. D had suffered from severe physical and emotional neglect and experienced harsh poverty. He was of the opinion that he would not be able to find a decent job because of his age and he claimed that employers expected youth like him to look for opportunities to steal and to rob. All the adults in his life disillusioned K. His father was in prison, his drug-abusing mother was a prostitute and his grandmother had abandoned him. X experienced unthinkable misery: his alcoholic and unemployed parents abandoned him since birth and he had to resort to a life on the streets since he was 10 years old. Apart from his aunt who could only take care of him until he was 10 years old, he had no significant others from whom he could learn morals and values. C was a victim of the gang-ridden community in which he grew up. He was scared to go to school because

of that and eventually, apparently incidentally, got involved in a gang fight himself because of his friends.

It is thus evident that the respondents' predispositions to learning were shaped by many structural factors, as explained by Small and Memmo (2004) and Biesta, as well as Tedder (2007). Except for J, who claimed that he never dropped out of school, all of them had attended school and had dropped out of school before they got arrested. All of them grew up in criminal and violent communities, which were not conducive to learning. Most of them experienced serious barriers to learning, which had lead them either to quit school, or to find mastery in areas other than schoolwork. All of them witnessed alcohol and drug abuse and some got addicted themselves. All of them witnessed and experienced violence and crime and all of them had adopted such lifestyles. Once they started to abuse drugs and commit crime, their focus shifted to mastering delinquent skills in order to be able to survive on the dangerous path that they chose to travel.

I conclude that the development of each respondent in relation to his predisposition to learning occurred within his individual contextual reality, which was influenced by structural factors reported on and interpreted in this section. The predispositions to learning of the respondents seemed to be negative in nature. For their predispositions to learning to change positively, I would like to suggest the following: K, M and X were in need of an environment which would offer them belonging, care and safety (Maslow 1954, 1996, 1998 & Brendtro & Du Toit 2005), along with the opportunities to exert their adult-like practise and decision-making (Bergevin 1967; Knowles 1970; 1978; 1979; 1984). D needed to rehabilitate from his tendency towards drugs. He was also in desperate need of care and guidance (Brendtro & Du Toit 2005). J seemingly would benefit from serious psychological intervention in order for him to get to grips with the death of his parents (Dryden-Edwards n.d.). It thus becomes clear that overwhelming structural factors have debilitated the respondents' inclination towards positive predispositions to learning.

#### **4.4 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I gave detailed information on the case studies with relation to the conceptual framework, which outlines this research study. The purpose of this chapter was to give these marginalised youths the opportunity to narrate their unique life stories and in doing so, provide for the manifestation of a better insight into their predispositions to learning. I put forward the research results, which I obtained by analysing and interpreting the data from the six respondents' official files, as well as from the individual in-depth interviews which I had conducted. I used direct quotations from the in-depth interviews to ensure authenticity and trustworthiness. I took the opportunity to move close to the respondents' life stories to be open to their feelings and emotions

and to be able to portray their stories in the most honest way possible. I tried to stay as close as possible to the original data from the interviews. I related the data found with scholarly literature on the different aspects covered in the study. When analysing and interpreting the data, I tried not to be judgemental, but to serve as vehicle for the respondents' voices to be heard.

In Chapter 5, I will reach conclusions and make recommendations based on the data presented here.

## **CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This thesis reports on a qualitative case study during which I tried to discover and understand the predispositions to learning of male youths who were awaiting trial at a place of safety (Western Cape, South Africa). The study focuses on the life stories of six individuals within a specific context as described in Chapter 1. The research question led me to investigate how these youths think and how they perceive themselves in terms of their experiences of and their capacity to learn. Learning from scholars like Merriam and Clark (1991), Holstein and Gubrium (in Seale et al. 2004), Shank (2006) and Bodgan and Biklen (2007), the emphasis of the research study is on the process rather than the outcome. I focussed on the discovering, in-depth understanding and description of the six respondents' narrated life stories in relation to their predispositions to learning, rather than the verification or explanation of facts. Therefore, the findings of this research study cannot be generalised to a broader population.

The respondents seemed to find themselves within the transition between different life stages (Levinson 1979). Their circumstances seemed to be beyond their control largely and they were seemingly left behind in a competitive world that had dramatic implications for their learning into adulthood (Merriam & Caffarella 1999). The respondents in this study had no obvious physical disabilities, but were, because of various reasons, excluded from mainstream education and had limited literacy levels. They were unqualified and impoverished youths who had supposedly given in to overwhelming anxiety (Goleman 2006) and turned to crime, which got them into conflict with the law. Bottrell (2007:610) stresses that it is difficult for young people to break out of marginalized positioning when it seems to be reinforced at every turn. On the face of it, the education system has failed to address these youths' basic literacy and learning difficulties, which contributed to their exclusion from access to education.

It is therefore necessary to learn from the respondents' life stories to be able to better understand their predispositions to learning and their learning needs and to be able to address it effectively and by doing so, contribute to the development of at-risk youths into responsible citizens (Rose & Gallup 2000; Cohen 2006).

### **5.2 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH REPORT**

As was described in Chapter 1, this study undertook to tell the life stories and the experiences and views shared by the six respondents to better understand their predispositions to learning.

Chapter 1 served as an orientation to the study, where I explained the research question, the relevance and purpose of the study, as well as the aim and scope of the study. In Chapter 2, I consulted the literature of scholars in the field for a better understanding of the concepts (see Figure 2.1) which formed the framework of this study of learning in young adulthood. Chapter 3 provided an explanation of the methodology used to conduct the study and to gather and analyse data. The methodology used to gather data relied on life stories gathered and analysed through narrative inquiry. Data was collected by means of the six respondents' official files, as well as in-depth personal interviews which I conducted with each of the respondents. The in-depth individual personal interviews gave the six respondents the opportunity to narrate their individual life stories (see Chapter 4). This approach gave me a glimpse into their personal contexts and their views and perceptions of themselves in terms of their learning experiences and predispositions to learning. During the interviews, the respondents were engaged in a synthesis of their past, present and future (Stroobants 2005). In telling his story, each respondent revealed or concealed himself and presented his story in a particular way, which provided me with the opportunity to discover the authentic person behind the story. Although all of them were awaiting-trial youths who came from similar violent and criminal communities, they were unique individuals. Each respondent presented his private logic or point of reference within his context through his life story.

In the previous chapter, Chapter 4, I reported on the case studies with relation to the respondents' predispositions to learning. I projected the interpretations against the concepts (see Figure 2.1 & Figure 2.2) which formed the framework of this study. The data I had gathered through interviewing the respondents, as well as through information that I had gathered from their official files, shaped these interpretations. I tried to stay as close as possible to the true account of the respondents' narrated life stories when I quoted from the interviews. One of the key challenges of my study was to reconsider the adult status of the respondents in terms of their learning needs. Strong emphasis was put on the unique contexts in which the respondents' predispositions to learning were shaped. In the rest of this chapter (Chapter 5), I will present my concluding thoughts on the study.

My research question (Section 1.3) was refined to: *What is the predisposition to learning of youth in a place of safety?* In my quest to find answers to this question, the research process provided me some insights. I learnt from the interviews that their experiences and the environments, within which they had grown up, shaped the respondents' predispositions to learning negatively. After I had studied and analysed the respondents' interviews and other data, I found the following similarities across the six life stories:

- a) all of the respondents seemingly enjoyed narrating their life stories and took pleasure in the special attention that they had received;

- b) all of them came from communities where drug abuse, poverty, violence and crime were common and all of them had abused substances;
- c) none of the respondents had competent parents, strong role models or significant others who provided adequate and sustained nurturance and guidance;
- d) the homes and environments within which they grew up were not conducive to learning and a culture of learning did not exist;
- e) they apparently did not receive the support they needed to be able to excel or even cope at school and all of them have dropped out of school;
- f) none of them demonstrated a natural inclination towards acquiring knowledge and skills which society would regard proper to become educated and responsible citizens;
- g) because of their evident barriers to learning, all of them had fallen behind their peers and none of them had a reasonable education-related goal that was realistic or achievable within their particular circumstances;
- h) all of them associated school with fighting, struggling, shame and failure;
- i) all the respondents agreed that they were not able to be self-sufficient at the time of their arrest;
- j) all of them knew a great deal about substances and the effects thereof;
- k) to most of the respondents it was important to learn the language and coping skills required within the gang culture prevalent in their communities of origin;
- l) their stories revealed persistent hardships including poverty, dysfunctional families, problematic substance abuse, barriers to learning, crime and violence and even periods of homelessness; and
- m) to all of the respondents, structures in their lives seemed to limit their agentic possibilities. Although these young men had exercised some levels of personal agency and had portrayed resilience and strength, they had seemingly applied these skills in detrimental fashion to enable them to survive within their challenging contexts.

These similarities in the six life stories are not generalizations related to trial awaiting youth, but provide a backdrop to understand the predispositions to learning of the six respondents in this study.

Gaetz (2004:428) and Bottrell (2007:611) agree that the difficulties of low-income families in making ends meet as well as the stresses and conflicts within families are manifestations of their not coping. Especially parental substance abuse and family violence are contexts of adversity faced by marginalized youth. Dealing with such adversities, youths like the respondents in this study are stoic in their acceptance of these adversities as facts in their communities. The

respondents in this study quit formal education and acquired coping skills which they needed to survive within their unique environments. Their behaviour and the strategies they applied were the results of their quest for acceptance by themselves and others (Bottrell 2007:613). Networks, family and kin are central to youths' lives, and act as a considerable resource for them as they navigate key life transitions. Considering that such networks are intrinsic to self-identity and to a sense of belonging (Boeck et al. 2006), it is understandable that the respondents experienced feelings of despair because of the rejection that they have experienced through the course of their lives (Brendtro et al. 2002).

However, according to Bottrell (2007:611), in dealing with marginalization, difficult circumstances and competing demands, youths' resistances can be regarded attempts to counter negative realities. At school and in the community, their resistance in protecting their reputation and chosen identity can be understood as acts of resilience (Moffit 1993; Wachs 2000; Werner 2000; Small & Memmo 2004; Werner & Johnson 2004; Brendtro & Du Toit 2005; Kitano & Lewis 2005). This also applies to their refusal to meet the requirements of mainstream participation that does not engage with or value their marginal life experience. Although they had reasons for resisting school and although their resistance could be regarded acts of resilience, they were well aware of the importance of education, especially its instrumental value to provide for work opportunities. However, none of them was academically successful students (Wachs 2000; Kitano & Lewis 2005) and their need to protect themselves against expected failure meant that they even had to retreat from aspiration (Bottrell 2007).

From the interviews, it seemed that the respondents experienced a sense of hopelessness (Goleman 1995; 2006): they seemingly realised that they were already too far behind their peers to make amends in terms of formal learning. Even though some of them indicated that they wanted to go back to school, it seemed that they had realised that it was not that simple. Whether this was because of poverty, poor parenting, socio-economic and emotional deprivation, substance abuse, criminal behaviour or simple delinquency, upon their admittance to the place of safety, they by all accounts realised that they found themselves at the end of the line. Therefore, their predispositions to learning appeared to be negative and spoke of resistance when compared to what society would regard proper. They needed to acquire knowledge and skills to help them survive in a modern age, which they apparently did not understand. Because they evidently could not cope with the demands of civic society, it appeared that they tried to assert themselves in referring to their experiential learning and acquired knowledge.

It is fair to assume that the respondents could have been steered towards success relative to their abilities if their barriers to learning were addressed early enough and if their social and economic circumstances could have been improved (Ripple & Luthar 2000). As this was not the case, an investigation of the learning needs of these marginalised and disempowered youths is warranted. It is important to acknowledge their dual child and adult status insofar as their learning needs are concerned (Lindeman 1926; Knowles 1970, 1978, 1979, 1984; Lynch & Chickering 1989 in Merriam & Clark 1991:20; Rossiter & Clark 2007), as well as the developmental stages within which they find themselves (Knowles 1970, 1978; Levinson 1979; Cranton 1994; Merriam & Clark 1991), where an individual could present both as a child and adult at the same time. From the information gathered through the interviews, it seems that the respondents may be regarded neither adults nor children, but find themselves between life-cycle phases and could be grouped as adolescents or early adults, a stage which Levinson (1979) calls pre-adulthood. It should also be kept in mind that life cycle phases overlap and are thus not limited to a particular chronological age (Levinson 1979; Cross 1981). Therefore, it is important to take into account that the learning needs of such individuals cannot necessarily be limited to a particular life-cycle phase (Knowles 1970 & 1978; Levinson 1979; Cranton 1994; Merriam & Clark 1991).

When one considers the evident troublesome past and the apparent bleak prospects of these youths, it is obvious that nothing can be done to change their history. As for the six respondents, it is probably too late for the findings and recommendations of this research study to better their future lives, as they have since been moved from the place of safety. It is therefore important to focus the research findings and recommendations on other youths like them who may still be helped if appropriate policy and practise could be developed and implemented.

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY**

The South African National Curriculum for schools caters for the general public, regardless of their circumstances or abilities (Western Cape Education Department n.d.). Such a curricular approach may not adequately address the needs of learners like the respondents in this study. Apart from M, who had attended a school of skills, the respondents did not come from schools for learners with special educational needs (ELSEN) and therefore were regarded suitable for mainstream schools. The Western Cape Education Department's policy on inclusive education holds that learners from all walks of life are to be accommodated in mainstream schools (Western Cape Education Department n.d.). However, such an approach may be detrimental to the education of learners who cannot cope in mainstream schools and whose learning needs are not met in such schools. The respondents could not cope in mainstream schools but did not receive the professional help and support they needed to help them overcome their barriers to learning either. They therefore became drug abusing school dropouts and ended up in a place of safety for awaiting trial youths.

At the place of safety, it seemed that the respondents found themselves in the predicament of having mastered different levels of proficiency in different learning areas. While in primary school, they did not qualify for admission to a school for learners with special educational needs. According to the social workers' reports of children and youths who had been re-admitted to the place of safety, youths like the respondents who had been in conflict with the law are often not readmitted to schools because of their expulsion from school and criminal records. In addition, Further Education and Training colleges (FETCs) only admit learners with a minimum of Grade 9 for the National Certificate (Vocational). Centres for adult learning may be an option in terms of the AET (Adult Education and Training) courses, but applicants need to be competent in passing the baseline assessment test and need to be 16 years or older (Adult Basic Education and Training Act 2000). It becomes clear that the current education system and policies do not serve learners like the respondents.

I agree with Baxen's (in Marindo 2008:217) argument that:

"... what is required is an education system that addressed the economic needs of the country (through skills development, for example), but also actively works towards producing citizens that value life, uphold human dignity and interact responsibly with the environment. An education system that is accountable would be one that prepares children and youth to take their place in society, while at the same time taking cognisance of the social drivers that militate against their optimal development and attainment."

According to Luthar (2003:545), it must be recognized at policy level that no person can live well, love well, or work well if his or her physical survival is in danger; they must receive emotional sustenance and support; and families should not need to struggle to meet the most basic needs of food, shelter, safety and education. Warren and Webb (2007) conclude that state actions, in part, actively construct personal dispositions. Percy-Smith and Weil (in France 2007:163), on the other hand, warn that:

"[p]olicy alone cannot bring about social change. Rather, the participation and empowerment of individuals as agents of change within the lived realities of their everyday lives is critical to the successful achievement of meaningful social outcomes."

Paulo Freire (1987) puts strong emphasis on social empowerment through adult education and advocates the individual's responsibility to contribute to the transformation, liberation and development of society as a whole. Rose and Gallup (2000), Michelli and Keiser (2005) and Cohen (2006) reiterate the importance of citizenship as a key outcome of learning, which comprises of the development of the qualities of a democratic society, respect for others, collaboration with others, regard for fairness and justice, concern for the commonwealth, as well as voluntary, active participation in society.

The South African Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996) stipulates basic education as a basic right of all people. The respondents also have a constitutional right to basic education, but are seemingly excluded from such civic participation, as there seems to be a lack of appropriate educational opportunities. The focus of policymakers may need to shift from *basic education* to *appropriate education* in meeting the needs of youths like the respondents in this study.

#### 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Knowles (2005) argues that adult life is a series of stages and transitions, each of which pushes the adult into unfamiliar territory, and each transition to a new stage creates a motivation to learn. Bergevin (1967), Perry (1970), Kohlberg and Turiel (1971), Loevinger (1976), Gould (1978), Knowles (1978), Levinson (1979), Cross (1981), Mezirow and Associates (1990) and Merriam and Clark (1991), acknowledge the importance of recognising the different life stages a person goes through. Throughout the thesis I have motivated the dual child and adult status of the respondents especially in terms of their learning needs. The respondents in this study fit the description of adult learners by scholars like Lindeman (1926), Bergevin (1967), Knowles (1970; 1978; 1979; 1984), Freire (1978), Cross (1981), Mezirow (1991), Cranton (1994), Rose and Gallup (2000), Michelli and Keiser (2005) and Cohen (2006) in that, before they had been admitted to the place of safety, they

- were self-directed to acquire knowledge and skills to help them survive (like working with money), although they may have had limited exposure to formal education; and
- acquired knowledge (like gangster language and codes) and skills (like fighting, trading and stealing) that they needed in their immediate environment.

At the place of safety these learners presented as adult learners in that they:

- brought their own unique experiences (negative and positive) to the learning situation;
- had current needs (like applying for an identity document), which determined their readiness to learn; and
- they benefited from the practical application of the skills and knowledge obtained in the learning situation (like learning how to make jewellery which they could trade).

I have argued that, while the respondents presented with adult learning needs, they also presented with childlike dependence and need for guidance. Innovative ways of merging pedagogical and andragogical approaches to learning may better serve the learning needs of youths such as the respondents in this study. Andragogy and pedagogy provide two ends of a spectrum. In the sixth

edition of their book *The Adult Learner*, Knowles et al. (2005) remark that a particular learner, regardless of his or her age or adult status, might benefit from both pedagogical and andragogical strategies and that it is the responsibility of the educator to facilitate the learning process accordingly. Knowles (2005:147) claims "... andragogy could be utilised in many different ways and would have to be adapted to fit individual situations." When one looks at the learning needs of the respondents in this study, it is fair to assume that in some cases the pedagogical strategy is feasible, while in other instances, the andragogical strategy would be more suitable. According to Knowles et al. (2005), it is important to note that, when learners enter into a very strange content area of which they have no previous experience and as a result do not understand the relevance of the content area to their life tasks or problems, the pedagogical strategy will be necessary. This form of learning will then have to be facilitated in an andragogical way insofar as it should lead the learners to take increasing responsibility for their own learning.

Adult learners' previous knowledge and experience form the basis of further learning (Cranton 1994). It must be taken into account that youths like the respondents already have accumulated certain knowledge and skills, and already have particular predispositions to learning. Their acquired knowledge and skills and their predispositions to learning play an important role in future learning and may include negative learning experiences that need to be addressed through the process of lifelong learning (Knowles et al. 2005). The individual's learning needs have to be identified and satisfied so that newly acquired knowledge and skills can be implemented immediately, as adult learners prefer to gain knowledge and skills that can be applied in their life situations (Cranton 1994).

According to Kerka (2003), youth considered at risk need the same things as other children and adolescents, like opportunities to learn and develop, guidance in making constructive choices, and help with specific problems or situations. Alternative programmes need a holistic approach that speaks to social, academic, psychological, and career-related needs. Werner and Johnson (2004: 715) suggest that any effective program should reduce the risk impact, reduce the likelihood of negative chain reactions, promote self-esteem and self-efficacy, and open up opportunities to the individual.

The data from this study, as well as the work of Lindeman (1926); Bergevin (1967); Knowles (1970; 1978; 1979; 1984); Kohlberg and Turiel (1971); Loevinger (1976); Freire (1978); Gould (1978); Levinson (1979); Cross (1981); Mezirow and Associates (1990); Merriam and Clark (1991); Mezirow (1991); Cranton (1994); Rose and Gallup (2000); Ovens (2002); Kerka (2003); Michelli and Keiser (2005) and Cohen (2006) guide me in making some recommendations for educational

practice in working with awaiting trial youths. I will categorize these as: (a) the learner; (b) the curriculum, and (c) the learning environment:

a) The learner:

The individual learner's unique predisposition to learning should be considered. Baseline assessment of the learner's acquired knowledge and skills should be done in a non-threatening manner. The learner's values and goals should be respected; his developmental stage should be identified and respected while he is regarded an adult learner, even if a more pedagogical approach may sometimes be warranted. The people involved in the learner's education and development should know and understand his or her experiences and learning processes. The learner should get the opportunity to identify his own learning needs and be part of drafting (and adjusting) his individual development plan.

b) The curriculum:

A curriculum should be designed which allows for multiple pathways and flexible programmes, which is suitable for learners who have dropped out of school and who are awaiting trial for different reasons and for different periods of time. The curriculum should be presented in a non-punitive manner, while a flexible approach of facilitating learning is followed to allow for learners to tap into their accumulated life experiences and previous knowledge and to enable them to direct their learning according to their individual evolving needs. Learning material should be appropriate and applicable to the learner's current and possible future needs and circumstances.

c) The learning environment:

Educators and other role-players should provide a welcoming and safe learning environment to all learners. A learner who has dispositional barriers to learning should not be compelled to participate in adult learning programmes, as he first needs to acquire a taste for learning by seeing that learning can be a positive experience. Once the learner leaves the place of safety, he should have experienced a sense of mastery and of a strengthened self-esteem. The learner should be granted the opportunity to be readmitted to a public school or other learning centres and once he has been readmitted to a public school or admitted to another learning centre, he should receive the necessary specialised support and help he might need.

Ovens (2007:27) reiterates the urgency for appropriate policy and practice to be developed and implemented. In addition, he warns that marginalized youths who have dropped out of school are not job ready after 400 student contact hours of instruction, because they do not have the literacy and numeracy skills, involving speaking, listening, reading, writing and understanding social and

power dynamics increasingly required when dealing with bureaucratic systems and schools. Therefore, the necessity of a suitable curriculum and effective facilitation of learning is indisputable.

## **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

During the research project, I sometimes thought about the necessity of future follow-up interviews with the respondents. My conclusion to this dilemma was simple: such an endeavour did not form part of the scope of this project because once the respondents leave the place of safety it would be very difficult and even impossible to conduct further interviews with them. I would, however, like to pose three broad areas of possible future research.

### **5.5.1 The journeys of youth after leaving a place of safety**

Similar studies could investigate the learning journeys of youth after leaving a place of safety. At present, the assumption exists that these youth seldom find their way back to formal education and that they seldom find decent employment, which then results in them being kept captive within their impoverished, marginalised communities. Future studies could investigate whether such assumptions hold true, and should explore ways in which such youth could be supported in becoming responsible and successful citizens.

### **5.5.2 Developing a suitable curriculum for awaiting trial youth**

There is currently no special official curriculum for awaiting-trial children and youth. It is therefore necessary to do research with regard to developing the best suitable and flexible curriculum to empower this marginalised group of people. Such a curriculum should have as goal to prepare these youths for self-reliant citizenship (Rose & Gallup 2000; Michelli & Keiser 2005; Cohen 2006). While doing so, the curriculum should also be flexible to be able to accommodate the differences amongst learners with regard to -

- their levels of intelligence (Cattell 1987; Lynam et al. 1993; Moffitt 1993; Luthar & Blatt 1995; Gardner 1999; Wachs 2000; Ungar 2001; Brendtro & Du Toit 2005 ; Kitano & Lewis 2005);
- their levels of maturity (Freud 1961; Bergevin 1967; Erikson 1963, 1968, 1980; Perry 1970; Kohlberg & Turiel 1971; Loevinger 1976; Knowles 1978; Clark 1991; Merriam & Clark 1991; Cranton 1994; Levinson 1979; Cross 1981; Brendtro & Du Toit 2005);
- their past learning experiences (including negative experiences) (Bergevin 1967; Cranton 1994; Merriam & Caffarella 1999; MacLachlan 2007);
- their accumulated knowledge and skills (Lindeman 1926; Knowles 1970, 1978, 1979, 1984; Lynch & Chickering 1989 in Merriam & Clark 1991; Rossiter & Clark 2007);

- their motivation to learn and individual special talents and interests (Gardner 1999; 2006);
- the relevance of the content to the learners' daily lives (Lindeman 1926; Knowles 1970, 1978, 1979, 1984; Lynch & Chickering 1989 in Merriam & Clark 1991; Rossiter & Clark 2007); and
- attention should be given to the relevance of incorporating computer-based learning, as advocated by Knowles (2005) where he claims that technology is one of the major forces shaping adult learning in the twenty-first century.

## 5.6 SUMMARY

In *The State of Population in the Western Cape Province*, Baxen (in Marindo 2008:216) notes:

“[e]ducation is often viewed not only as the bedrock of a healthy society but also as a medium for social growth and development. Healthy societies are said to be those that recognise the dual purpose of education, as both a response to, as well as the catalyst for, holding governments and civil society accountable.”

The societies from which the respondents come are not healthy. These communities are governed by crime, violence and substance abuse. Because of these negative tendencies, education is not a priority and the predispositions to learning of youths who grow up in these communities are not conducive to lifelong learning. Therefore, it appears that, in areas where social growth and development seem to be lacking, the cycle of antisocial behaviour may continue.

This study provided a glimpse into the life stories of six youths awaiting trial in a place of safety. Their life stories serve as witness to the shortfalls in current policy, practice and research influencing predispositions to learning in marginalised communities where Baxen's (in Marindo 2008:216) notion of education has not been realised. Finally, Desmond Tutu (in Brendtro & Du Toit 2005:42), calls for action:

“We must look on children in need not as problems but as individuals with potential to share if they are given the opportunity. Even when they are really troublesome, there is some good in them, for, after all, they were created by God. I would hope we could find creative ways to draw out of our children the good that is there in each of them.”

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