YOUTH DISCOURSES OF ACHIEVEMENT AT A SCHOOL IN CAPE TOWN

by

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby 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.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the views of thirteen youth at Victoria High School about what they regarded as achievement and how this influenced their lives and what they thought about their futures. The starting premise of the study was that all learners think about achievement. The goal of the study was thus to show how different learners connect this understanding of achievement with their respective aspirations and the kinds of social and schooling worlds they inhabit.

The key contribution of the study is the ways it links the social, cultural, and economic worlds of each of the thirteen learners to what they say about what they do and what they want to do, who they are and who they want to be, and what they think they do and what they think they want to do. The study shows that the life-worlds of each of the learners are significantly different yet the ways they go about making sense of that world are fairly similar. In that regard it is shown that the school, and what learners, parents and educators think it is and does, plays a crucial role in the sense-making process. As Berkhout (2008) notes, the different contexts that shape the lives of individuals are not simply external forces but rather are integral parts of their identity-making process.

The study used the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Arjun Appadurai to bring together a framework by which to understand what learners said about their worlds and their aspirations, as well to develop a narrative that showed the rich and complex ways in which learners engaged with their realities.

The study followed an interpretive qualitative approach to explore the issue of achievement and based its arguments on interviews conducted with thirteen youth between the ages of fifteen and seventeen years old. In this regard, a key finding was that learners approached the notion of achievement in developmental, cumulative, and progressive ways.

These views included wanting to be popular, gaining new knowledge, preparing for future material acquisition, developing skills to lead decent lives, acquiring happiness, developing the ability to overcome their challenges and circumstances, and gaining skills and recognition that set up their futures. Five staff members at Victoria High school were also interviewed for their views of the schooling context and the kinds of cultures and legacies that framed their practice.

ABSTRAK

Die tesis is gefokus op die denke van dertien studente van Victoria Hoërskool aangaande die nosie van prestasie, en hoe hierdie denke hul lewens beïnvloed sowel as wat hulle dink van hul toekoms. Die vertrekpunt van die verbande studie was dat alle leerders oor prestasie dink. Die doel van die tesis (daaruitvoortspruitend) was dus om aan te toon hoe verskillende leerders ŉ verband aanlê tussen hul beskouing van prestasie, hul aspirasies en die maatskaplike- en skoolwêrelde wat hul beleef.

Die kern bydrae van die tesis is die verbande wat gemaak is in die verbande studie tussen die sosiale, kulturele en ekonomiese wêrelde van elkeen van die dertien leerders ten opsigte van hul beskouing aangaande wat hulle doen en wil doen, wat hulle is en wil wees, en wat hulle dink hulle doen en wil doen. Die tesis toon aan dat die leefwêreld van elk van die leerders merkbaar verskillend is, maar dat die wyse waarop hulle betekenis gee aan hul leefwêreld tog redelik ooreenstem. In hierdie verband is dit getoon dat die skool, en wat leerders, ouers en onderwysers daaromtrent dink, ŉ kardinale rol speel in hul betekenisvormingsproses. Berkhout (2008) voer in hierdie verband aan dat die verskillende kontekste wat die lewens van individue vorm nie slegs eksterne magte is nie, maar eerder integrale dele van hul identiteitsvormings proses is.

Die studie maak gebruik van die werk van Pierre Bourdieu en Arjun Appadurai om ŉ raamwerk te ontwikkel om leerders se beskouinge van hul wêrelde en aspirasies te verstaan, sowel as om ‘n narratief te ontwikkel wat die ryk en komplekse wyses waarop leerders met hul realiteite omgaan, aan te toon.

Die tesis, en verbande studie, het ŉ interpretatiewe, kwalitatiewe benadering gevolg om die idee van prestasie te verken en het die tesis argumente baser op onderhoude met dertien leerders tussen vyftien tot sewentienjaar oud. ŉ Kernbevinding in hierdie verband was dat leerders die idée van prestasie op ontwikkelings-, kumulatiewe- en progressiewe wyses benader. Beskouinge van leerders in die verband sluit onder andere in, die behoefte om populêr te wees, die verkryging van nuwe kennis, voorbereiding om materiële goedere in die toekoms te bekom, die ontwikkeling van vaardighede noodsaaklik vir ŉ ordentlike lewe, die strewe na geluk, die ontwikkeling van die vermoë om hul uitdagings en omstandighede te oorkom, en die ontwikkeling vaardighede en erkenning noodsaaklik vir hul toekoms.
Onderhoude is ook gevoer met vyf personeellede van Victoria hoërskool om hul beskouinge ten opsigte van die skoolkonteks en die soort kulture en erfenisse wat hul praktyk informeer te bepaal.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to God for granting me good health during the research.

My deepest appreciation goes to my husband. His unconditional love and support helped me not only to believe in myself, and my ability, but also helped me enhance my curiosity, resourcefulness and affection for learning.

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1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The idea for this study emerged from a radio broadcast in late 2009 on which the release of the matriculation results in South Africa was discussed. Reflecting on the debate the broadcaster characterized the moment as ‘a time when achievers would rejoice as they set their minds on prospective university careers’ while for non-achievers ‘it was going to be the genesis of a life of would-be suffering, where they would swim in poverty until such time as they rewrote their respective matriculation exams to achieve better examination results’. What was particularly striking about the remark was that while achievement was characterized in a very particular and simplistic way, its utilization carried with it far more meaning than was acknowledged.

Moreover, the remark seemed to presume that non-achievers did not fundamentally think about achievement and its meaning. The deeper underlying questions that were *not* being asked was whether all students utilized the same understanding of what was referred to as achievement, and whether a varied understanding of the term possibly influenced the ways in which learners individually ‘performed’ or engaged with their schooling lives.

This thesis adopted from the outset the position that “achievement is more than simply student academic results”, as noted by the Professional Learning Exchange in the United Kingdom (*www.psea.org/uploadedFiles/Publications).* It suggests that notions of achievement are located in what learners aspire for and accomplish in their lives, and that what learners regard as achievable is complexly defined by their individual yearnings and desires and the particular social worlds that each of them inhabit.

The thesis’ two starting ideas are thus that all learners (irrespective of whether they did or did not attain in their schoolwork) think deeply about achievement, and that there is a complex inter-relationship and inter-dependence between notions of achievement and aspiration that frame the ways in which they (learners) think about their everyday lives (Marijoribanks 2003).

The thesis takes its cue from Ley, Nelson and Beltyukova (1996: 133-134) who, quoting Walberg (1989), suggest that aspirations are fundamental to understanding achievement because “they influence student learning and they prepare for their life choices” and that “aspirations provide the insight into what students think and feel about themselves, their school, and the roles they have within the school community". The thesis argues that if what learners desire differs, then it is logical and plausible that their notions of what achievement entails differ as well.

A starting position in the thesis is that young people are 'transcultural knowers' that are able to engage with and interpret their challenges and their desires in ways that often make them the main agents and driving forces behind what happens to them in their everyday lives (Swartz, 2009:4). It is suggested that learners possess the capacity to reflect on what happens in their lives in relation to how they think about the notion of achievement as a concept.

The thesis further asserts that schools are important structures within which learner achievement discourses play themselves out. It is argued that every schooling context in South Africa individually frames the ways in which respective youth play out their desires and aspirations, and that schools not only influence the ways in which learners engage with their particular environments and realities (and their behaviour and thinking in that regard), but form an integral part of their identity making processes. Berkhout (2008) has noted in this regard that schooling contexts 'externally' mirror how learners are categorized and classified and 'internally' reproduce particular expectations and criteria; that together shape the ways in which individual learners think about themselves and their association with others.

For the thesis the above arguments or positions shape the nature and focus of the study in very important ways.

1.2 CONCEPTUALISING THE STUDY

1.2.1 Rationale

The main purpose of the thesis is thus to better understand how achievement is understood and experienced within the everyday thinking and lives of a group of learners at one high school in Cape Town. The aim is to show what can be learnt and interpreted from the views of a chosen group of learners. It is hoped that this can add value to bigger debates about achievement within South African schools. I should note however that I do not try in any way to generalize the study's research findings in relation to the aspirations and achievements of other learners at the chosen school or, to those in other schools in general.

In having taught in a variety of contexts I have found in my experience that learners in different settings have quite different mindsets, aptitudes, and insights about achievement. In struggling with this issue as an educator I realized that this was probably even the case in one setting. It is this realization that led me to the focus of this study, namely exploring youth discourses of achievement in one high school setting. In terms of my desire to assist all learners in my classroom I have come to believe that learner understandings of achievement need to be better understood if schools and educators are to properly provide for their needs. I argue that the learner must shape the way we do things in schools and what they think about important issues like achievement is thus critical. In fact, it is this belief that also shaped many of the important conceptual and methodological choices that I have made in this study.

Importantly, the thesis explores the complex ways in which the agency of a group of learners intersected with the structure and history of a given high school, and locates this connection within current global and local debates about achievement and aspiration. The thesis bases its analysis on qualitative fieldwork (via interviews) completed with thirteen youth that attend Victoria High School in Cape Town on how they thought about, understood, and experienced achievement within their everyday lives and schooling. The thirteen learners chosen to participate in the study comprised of six learners from grade 9 and seven learners from grade 11. No selection criteria was employed other than that they attended the same school, were in the chosen grades, and were prepared to partake in the study. This reasoning was grounded in one of the study's arguments that *all learners think about achievement regardless of their school level of performance or the different achievement tags conferred on them*. The interviews were aimed at capturing the learners' individual understandings of the notion of achievement and how this related to their different aspirations and their future lives.

In that regard the main research questions that lay behind the overall study focus and the interview process are:

1) What is achievement in the perspective of the youth?

2) How do they frame their perspectives of achievement?

3) Why they think about achievement differently?

Victoria High School was chosen as the site of study because it had a long history of 'producing' learners that upon matriculating have played key and important functions within the city and its environs. Established in 1926 it is notable that the school was designated to serve learners designated as 'coloured' before 1994- for more than 68 years, and all but the last 17 years of its 85-year existence. This learner-base has not changed substantially since 1994 and the majority of the school's current learner population continues to be mainly from the communities or groups that were previously categorized as coloured (though there are large numbers of Indian and African learners. For the thesis, when they are used the terms coloured, African, white, and Indian refer to categories that were defined historically to identify various communities that made up the South African citizenry. These terms continue to be used in official state documents to describe and capture the needs of the various communities in South Africa (supposedly for redress purposes). Because of this the thesis employs the above terms but asserts that they are constructions of a past social structure in South Africa in which a hierarchical ordering based on race was inscribed into the fabric of everyday life, and thus they are not natural, stable, or static categories (Bray et al, 2010).

Notably, Victoria High School has a proud history and reputation of providing a high standard of schooling that leads to academic achievement. This has attracted learners from all over the Cape Flats to the school for most of its existence. Indeed, Victoria High School is a school to which many parents eagerly send their children hoping that getting good school results will serve as a springboard for future career opportunities, and thinks of itself as an organizer and designer of independent thinking and thought. The school asserts that their teaching has always been focused on getting learners to think about the bigger world around them and their place within it- rather than just 'achieving at school'. For the study, it is argued that the subjective forms of identity making within the school 'speak' powerfully to how individual learners engage with their schooling and their imagining of their individual 'achievement' at school (Berkhout 2008).

1.2.2 Key assertions

The thesis starts off with a simple idea, namely that there are clear links between school achievement and student aspiration. This idea is supported by much of the literature (Marijoribanks 2003) that highlight how aspirations are shaped by issues of social class, social context, and learner perceptions of what they think they can do, and frame the ways in which learners think about achievement. Chisholm (2004) and Fiske and Ladd (2005) both suggest for example that current statistics on the status of education in South Africa show a close correlation between the social location and class position of high school learners (especially those living in impoverished conditions) and levels of achievement at formal schooling.

Social class and the influence of social background on learner performance remain however difficult measures to understand within the schooling context in the twenty first century. Not only have social class forms changed dramatically in this century, but it has become almost impossible to work out within schools to which social class various learners belong given the ways in which global consumption habits have been internalized by many learners.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu is particularly helpful in better understanding the ways in which the social, cultural, and economic milieus of learners converge and intersect within schools to shape the ways they think about their futures. Bourdieu’s theories of field, habitus, and capital assist in addressing out the complex ways in which social class, social location, and economic status play out in the minds and thinking of learners as they set about achieving their individual goals. Bourdieu’s work thus offers crucial crutches by which to understand achievement and learner attitudes towards it.

For the thesis three key approaches towards achievement are identified and explored. Utilizing and engaging with the concept of cultural and social capital, the first approach that is evident amongst many learners that come from homes with high levels of intellectual and literary ability currently is towards happiness, enjoyment, and pride. In homes that have worked through the benefits and hardships of social success and witnessed its effects on their family lives, learners ironically sometimes adopt more cautious and nuanced approaches to the importance of schooling performance. Often there is a keen awareness in such homes about the fragility and futility of standards of achievement, especially where learners identify and interpret how other working family members have gone about achieving and how this has shaped who and what they are.

Secondly, in homes where there are low levels of cultural and social capital yet high levels of economic capital, learners invariably shape their aspirations in material ways, and seek to achieve at school in ways that ultimately bring material rewards. The notion that ‘money begets happiness and allows you to enjoy life and fulfill your every desire’ best characterizes such a disposition.

Thirdly, many learners often take ‘achieving’ at their formal schooling for granted and rather seek to excel at other levels of interaction, like sport, to gain emotional acceptance and social recognition within schools. Others prefer performing in relation to their religious and spiritual development, which gives them peace of mind and spirit to also do well at school. This points to situations where other influences and motivations are leading to learner success, yet only their schooling prowess is being recognized and acknowledged. Indeed, to better understand notions of achievement requires a very careful interrogation of the value of emotional capital and spiritual success to the overall development of learners.

Taken together, these approaches suggest that an important part of youth formations in the contemporary period is the need for learners to "project a desirable image to others", to always express their views on social status, and to "make visible the personal characteristics" that make up their (me) identity (Aakhus and Katz 2002, Jain 2008: 256).

1.2.3 Methodology and structure

The section below introduces the layout of the thesis, some key arguments, insights and contribution to the literature.

In the next chapter (chapter two) the literature review focuses on the growing research that has been done on understandings of achievement. Agarwal and Misra (1986:718) for example highlight that "the meaning of achievement is culture specific and mediates achievement efforts as in significant ways". This suggests that different learners with different home contexts and cultural traditions view achievement differently.

In chapter three the thesis engages with two main theorists Pierre Bourdieu and Arjun Appadurai. Bourdieu's theories of capital habitus and field are used in the study to explore how the social, cultural and economic milieus of learners at Victoria high school in Cape Town intersect to inform the way learners think about what they can 'achieve'. Bourdieu's discussion of the various kinds of capital that learners bring with them to school is crucial, for it allows the study to engage with how social class and social context intersect in Cape Town.

Bourdieu describes habitus as the mutually constituting interaction of structures, dispositions and actions in social life, whereby social structures and the embodied knowledge within those structures produce long lasting orientations and actions (Calhoun et al 1993:4). Bourdieu identifies four different types of capitals and suggests that all of them are powerful currencies that work in and across the relations of other fields (Bourdieu, 1986). With regard to his first type, cultural capital, Bourdieu (1997) identifies three forms, namely embodied (dispositions, sets of meaning and modes of thinking), objectified (access to cultural goods such as art, literature, newspapers), and institutional (educational or academic qualifications) capital. The thesis explored in this regard how learners thought about achievement in relation to their access to particular forms of capital and how they negotiated and positioned themselves within the school as they struggled for recognition and acceptance.

Importantly the thesis also employs Appadurai's notions of imagination and the 'capacity to aspire'. Appadurai (2004) notes that learner imaginations are very important and powerful in informing individuals how to take up a particular choice of action. Imaginations are critical because they stimulate aspirations. Significantly aspirations are associated with wants, preferences, choices and calculations. Once particular imagined worlds emerge in the minds of individuals, they attempt to create the means and yearning whereby to attain these goals.

The fourth chapter discusses the interpretative methodology employed and describes how the use of interviews led to particular forms of data collection and knowledge. The chapter also points to some of the challenges encountered during the research project. The chapter ends with a description of the research site, Victoria High school, as well as portraits of the thirteen interviewed learners.

Chapter 5 provides a narrative that engages with the views of the thirteen interviewed learners. It asserts that it is in the dispositions of the learners, internalized in a variety of contexts, that their approaches to their future lives are formalized, and through which their perceptions and views of life, and their life practices emerge (Bourdieu, 1984: 69). The chapter suggests that both the schools that learners attend, and the social spaces that they inhabit, inform the kinds of capitals and the dispositions that they internalize, carry with them, and use to engage with their life worlds (Bourdieu, 1996; Ball, 2006: 7). In this regard, the previous experiences of parents in navigating educational contexts, alongside the legacies and histories of the schools they attended, are deemed to play crucial roles in strengthening the capacity of learners to aspire (Appadurai, 2004), and the ways in which they approach their future lives.

Chapter 6 analyses what the 13 learners observed about achievement and aspiration, with particular reference to the highlighted literature and some of the noted contributions of Bourdieu, Appadurai, and (a little of) Yosso. The chapter focuses on analyzing what learners said about their lived and imagined worlds and how this was articulated in relation to the social and cultural influences that shaped each of their lives.

The thesis is brought to a close with a conclusion that highlights what the thesis set about doing and some key findings, as a way of suggesting the importance of the study and it's contribution to current educational debates.

1.2.4 Significance of this research

The key goal of the thesis is to challenge positions that assume that achievement at school is mainly a quantitative measure, and that achievement can be characterized or described according to what learners achieve or don't achieve in their formal schooling. The thesis suggests that the notion of achievement is a far more complex phenomenon than that captured by formal schooling performance, and argues that a more nuanced position to what learners presumably achieve could offer alternative ways for schools to understand how to connect learners to what they imagined for themselves in the future.

By showing a clear link between aspiration and achievement, the thesis highlights the many intangible aspects of achievement that frame the ways in which youth think about their lives in emerging global and local spaces, such as wanting to be happy, having an interesting career, being passionate about what they take on, and being a decent human being in an increasingly despairing world. These intangibles remind that aspirations in the current environment are not always materialistic and consumerist and that many learners have a fairly good understanding of their key challenges and dilemmas in the modern era.

The thesis thus points to the need for a more complex understanding of learner aspiration, one that accounts for elements of dreaming, imagination, and fabrication. In this respect, the work of Appadurai on the ‘capacity to aspire’ is particularly helpful. Appadurai suggests that people already ‘achieve’ something through imagining, since by dreaming they are able to conjure up different worlds and the kinds of capabilities needed to exist in those worlds. Thus, as learners ‘engage with’ their imagined worlds they develop some capacities and abilities to engage with their real worlds.

2 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Most studies of achievement in South Africa prefer a comparative and quantitative perspective, using instruments like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) to illustrate and benchmark the state of education in the country and levels of attainment in various areas (Billings 1997). These studies frequently adopt an instrumentalist approach to achievement and rarely, if ever, capture or engage with the qualitative and contradictory research aspects of achievement within schools (Lingard & Rawolle 2009 and 2010).

This seems to be a global tendency where, as Lewin (2008, 51) notes, goals with more quantitative definition are given greater prominence than those that require judgement, contextualization, and nuanced understanding. Lewin suggests that this has led to discussions about achievement invariably happening in environments where targets and set outcomes are favoured, and where targets and outcomes overshadow the difficult and contradictory educational elements of achievement debates.

Nonetheless, there are a number of studies on achievement conducted at the international level that have focused on its more qualitative and different aspects. A defining feature of such studies have been the ways in which achievement have been explored in relation to how youth express their goals and wishes in different social contexts. They emphasize that understandings of achievement need to acknowledge the role of age, generation, social location, and individual family experiences in shaping how different youth achieve. Most such studies further argue for a deeper and composite understanding of youth achievement in relation to social context and different youth aspirations.

2.2 ORIENTATION OF THE CHAPTER

In this chapter, I start off by highlighting aspects of two studies that were conducted in Australia and the USA. I do so to underline some of the key threads, conclusions and concerns that have emerged in qualitative studies that have focused on achievement elsewhere. I provide this summary here to alert the reader to my main approach to achievement and the kinds of issues that emerge from the literature that informs my study.

Also, the two studies contribute to the conceptualization of different parts of my argument in the chapters thereafter. The first study highlights how notions of achievement emerged in the form of particular kinds of ‘scripts’ at one educational institution on the urban fringe of an

Australian capital city, while the second study points to how the geographical (rural) context of one area of the USA shaped learner understandings of what they thought they could achieve.

In the Australian study Jessica Bok (2010) notes that learners at one education institution in suburban Australia demonstrated different and graded understandings of achievement, at a time in their lives where they did not yet have a main, or master ‘script’. Bok (2010) shows in her study how the different aspirations (shaped by the family background, age, and social positions) of four learners shaped their understanding of achievement. Crucially, the categories or ‘aspirational scripts’ that Bok outlines in her study are relevant for this thesis, and are expanded in later chapters and there employed as models with which to analyse and explain the collected data. Four ideas or categories, developed by Bok, are important for the thesis.

In her first category Bok (2010: 167) notes that students don’t always link achievement with educational goals per se, and that their aspirations with regard to ‘a good life’ (supposedly associated with good education) is often tied to other things as much as they are linked to hopes of later work or educational satisfaction. In her first category Bok highlights how student aspirations to not get involved in drugs and drink, to be decent and morally incorruptible, and to broaden their intellectual capacities with the goal of lessening future indecent behaviour, often shape their attitudes to learning and to achieving.

In her second category Bok (2010: 167) points out that a key part of achieving and learning was being happy. From interviews with both students and parents Bok observed the extent to which happiness and contentment shaped the ways in which learners thought about their futures and what they sought to become and be. Also, while many parents expected their children to attend school and ‘do their best’, they were often more interested in their children fulfilling their potential, using their gifts, and on being happy in their later lives.

Bok’s third category (2010:171) calls attention to how learner aspirations are frequently shaped by the dreams and difficulties of parents, and the observed struggles (in the home) that many parents had to overcome in their lives to both prosper and educate their children (Ball et al, 2002). She notes that children often aspire to become successful professionals or entrepreneurs to avoid the kinds of lives and problems that their parents have had to endure. Their approach to achievement is thus defined not by particular intellectual or vocational interests and abilities but by observed experiences and struggles (of parents) that they sought to avoid.

For her last category Bok (2010: 168-169) emphasizes learner pragmatism with regard to their achievements and learning, where learners achieve and work according to what they realistically think they could do and realize. For these learners there is no point in focusing on achieving at schooling if they are unlikely to study further in their lives, or they do not think they have the abilities of capacities to do so.

These four categories offer useful alternative ways of understanding notions of achievement at urban-based schools where learners originate mainly from lower socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds and where many learners are not generally expected to achieve. In this thesis Bok’s views of achievement are used as a springboard to show that understandings of achievement should include not only aspects of credentials, qualifications, and the material gains that can be made, but also the qualitative side where learners aspire for happiness and social acceptance.

In a second study with conclusions regarded as helpful to some of the focus of this thesis, Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) depict various discrepancies in the ways rural and urban youth aspire. They allege that school, home, and peer contexts considerably influence the way rural and urban youth go about their schooling and that youth living in rural or the outlying areas of cities generally have lower aspirations than their urban counterparts. This is supposedly linked to family and school environments that foresee and ascribe particular social and work positions for them. The value of their study lies in their (Chenoweth and Galliher, 2004) claim that youth in rural and outlying areas see themselves as “unable to fit into the college scene or lacking in intelligence or adequate grades for universal acceptance and success” and that this can be linked to parents’ intellectual and social capitals and the ways in which they brought up their children and influenced their aspirations. These conclusions are valid for the thesis as it specifically explores some of the history and social context of the school environment, as well as the role of parent and teacher expectations in the forming of learner understandings of achievement.

The aim of offering the above contextualization of two helpful studies is to show the kinds of links that have been made between achievement, aspiration and social context in literature located in a more qualitative paradigm. A further aim is to note that because most debates on achievement have focused on descriptions of ‘attaining’ and school results, studies that have looked at links between achievement, aspiration, and social context normally offer observations that use issues like social class, age, learner capability, and previous schooling in quite different ways.

The chapter below thus outlines various aspects of the achievement debate (and the attached literature) to show how discussions about learner aspiration, history, and social context gradually have become such critical elements within qualitative studies in debates about achievement. The first part of the chapter however highlights the various difficulties in defining achievement and considers some ways in which achieving has often been theorized in this regard. The section sets out to show how a variety of issues are normally brought together to describe achievement.

The chapter then moves on to a discussion of how aspiration is conceptualised and key links to notions of achievement and finally social context. The purpose of the various sections are to lead the reader through the various aspects of debates/studies on achievement (and aspiration) to not only show how they interlink but also to suggest why they have come together in the various literatures in the way they have. The chapter's main goal however is to broadly outline how debates about achievement, aspiration, and social context in the literature contribute to the thesis and its arguments.

2.2.1 How achievement has been mainly understood

Johnson (1992:99) defines achievement as "the traditional indices of the degree to which a student has encountered success in school. This may include school grade, grade point average, rank in class, scores on standardized achievement and aptitude tests and other scaled indicators used within the school setting to document and report level of academic progression". For Johnson, achievement is exclusively attributable to academic performance.

Gardner (1993) expands this notion and asserts that achievement is also about attaining excellence in all academic disciplines, both in class and in extracurricular activities. Achievement for him embraces all forms of activities in which individuals excel, which include sportsmanship, behaviour, confidence, communication, skills, punctuality, assertiveness, and creativity and novelty. In both scenarios achievement is evaluated according to external criteria and benchmarks.

Samdal, Wold and Bronis (1999:296) however challenge this approach and assert that achievement needs to be benchmarked according to individual ability and that because all students cannot attain top marks or grades, "achievement needs to be defined as when students perform optimally according to their own capability". In relation to this, Singhal and Misra (1994) caution that such a stance sometimes disadvantages such learners (setting the bar too low) and that the role of society in such a scenario in determining or shaping how achievement is understood, must be acknowledged.

Singhal and Misra (1994: 240) view achievement as “a function of more or less ephemeral social expectations that are embodied in what we call norms and argue that, in a very real sense, a social group often tells a person what to strive for as well as how to attain this end”. In such a view achievement is understood as a social expectation and obligation, and social norms make up an important variable in how achievement takes shape.

A crucial addition to such a view is that social norms are different for various societies and nationalities, and that cultural and national attributes influence how learners in different countries approach achievement. Agarwal and Misra (1986:718) remind us that the meaning of achievement is quite “culture specific and mediates learner efforts in different communities in quite significant ways”. They point out that different communities deviate also in their conception of the goals that generate feelings of achievement, as well as the means through which learners in such communities get to attain their goals.

This suggests that “the meaning of achievement not only differs by cultural, subcultural, and societal norms but also by age, gender, social class, and the type of context in which achievement is assessed” (Miller cited in Singhal and Misra, 1994:240). As such, the notion of achievement has multiple aspects that frame what it means for different individuals and societies. It is also notable that the meaning of the term achievement also depends on who the user of the term is, the objective for which it is used, and the context in which it is being used.

Importantly, while the literature used in the thesis could be regarded as quite dated (1990s), very little has been written of late that outline as clearly the main issues as the older literature. In any case, the purpose of looking at the literature was mainly to highlight key debates that serve as a background with which to view current youth notions of achievement.

2.3 SOME WAYS IN WHICH THE TERM ACHIEVEMENT HAS BEEN THEORISED IN THE LITERATURE

As noted above, an important part of conventional conceptualizations of achievement has been the extent to which the role of individual learners and their agency in their own academic performance have been highlighted. In excelling in various activities individuals are seen as taking the main and primary role in their own achievement, whatever the context.

In line with such a focus, achievement has been theorized in a variety of ways. Covingtone (1984) identifies three theories of achievement by which individual learner attainment has been explained in this regard. These are the learned-drive theory, the cognitive attribution theory, and the self-worth theory. For the thesis, the benefit of knowing a bit more about these theories is that notwithstanding their favoring of a particular (individualistic) understanding and approach to achievement, the three theories highlight the importance of the family context (and what happens in the family) to achievement performances, as well as the power of individual learner agency in issues of attainment. These issues are further, and differently, theorized in chapter three where the social and cultural aspects of achievement are explored and analysed in greater depth.

In a first theorization of achievement (learned-drive theory), it is seen as a consequence of the conflict within individuals between striving for success and a fear of failure. According to Atkinson's theory (1957), individuals that positively resolve this conflict had learnt how to do so in childhood where they developed the propensity to choose well and make good decisions (Atkinson cited in Covingtone, 1984:6). Child rearing practices were therefore considered vital in influencing learner behaviour, skills and competences. Crucially, the learned-drive theory conceded that children all had different achievement levels, but noted that those learners that worked within the limits of their abilities tended to do better because they had been shown how to focus on achieving at the activities that they were best suited to. As such, good childhood rearing practices cultivated in learners a positive and pragmatic self regard that assisted them all in their pursuit of success and reminded them about the probable rewards for their efforts. Covingtone (1984: 6) suggests that this pragmatism eliminated scenarios where learners chose either too easy or too difficult tasks that then led them to the very failures and poor record of achievement that they were trying to avoid. (Covingtone, 1984:6)

In a second theorization of achievement, Weiner et al (1972) argued that learners achieved when they worked out the causes of their successes and failures and applied the lessons they learnt from such experiences to future tasks. According to the cognitive attribution theory, successful learner achievement was less about learners' emotional response to success or failure and more about how they cognitively understood what had happened and applied their minds to using their understanding to their advantage. In such a scenario, ability and effort was as important to success as luck and the ease or difficulty of the task (Weiner cited in Covingtone, 1984:7). A key part of the cognition attribution theory was the idea that individuals who failed when they had not exerted effort often remained optimistic of future success (when they exerted effort) and that the recognition of failure upon the exertion of effort often led to learners becoming pessimistic of future achievements. According to this theory, achievement levels could be increased when learners were taught to identify where and how they succeeded or failed.

A third theorization of achievement focused also on the individual's self-perception of causality but tried to derive a meaningful re-approachment to the previous two theories. Unlike the cognitive attribution theory, the self-worth theory posited that a key consequence of approaches that sought to avoid failure was the sense of worthlessness and social disapproval that it harvested (Covingtone, 1984:8). A key component of the self-worth theory was thus its emphasis on individuals' knowing their various abilities (and self-worth) and being able to accordingly define pathways for themselves. In this theory inability (at all its various levels) was seen as the prime driver and cause of failure (Covington & Beery 1976).

For the thesis, what the above theories highlight are the complex, multiple and often partial ways in which the notion of achievement has generally been understood, and the dangers and limitations of explaining and theorizing about achievement strictly in relation to individual effort and ability; especially in examples where it is viewed mainly as a deficiency (in deficit terms).

Importantly, in all the explanations and theories of achievement offered above there is a clear acceptance of learner subjectivity in thinking through what they wanted and how they thought it could be achieved, as well as a recognition that a variety of contextual conditions frequently played a role in how and what learners achieved, or sought to achieve. What this suggests is that there are a variety of unknown variables that open up quite different pathways for various individuals when they think about achievement. It also reminds everyone that the variables in themselves are never evenly distributed or applied (Appadurai 2004).

2.4 ELEMENTS NORMALLY HIGHLIGHTED IN DISCUSSIONS ON ACHIEVEMENT

Studies that engage with issues of achievement normally highlight factors such as age, social class, individual capability, and the kinds of life experiences that learners have been exposed to during their lives. These factors interlink at the meso, macro and micro levels of everyday life in very complex ways.

The age of a learner is firstly thought to play an important role in how achievement is taken up. For example, Agarwal and Misra (1986) note that younger learners normally set themselves quite low goals of achievement and that as they grow older they amplify their targets. Agarwal and Misra (1986) assert that not only do learners generally have different approaches to achieving, but that children at different ages approach the issue differently. Achievement, they argue, should thus be seen as a developmental and fluid process across each learner's lifespan and not be deemed an inevitable or inert outcome.

However, Area (2003:220) notes that "when students begin school there are also already large differences in achievement because of the social class backgrounds of learners". Area (2003) suggests that the age of learners intersects with social class in key ways where the development of different learners is linked to "the level of parental involvement, their class position, and the social and cultural resources that their social class yields" (Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley 1990:79).

Brailsford (2005) argues for example that a key influence on individual learner development, and thus achievement, is their access to basic human needs such as food, shelter, housing, and medical attention at an early age. Where learners of certain ages don't get access to these basic needs, they falter in their development and thus cannot achieve at the same levels as those that do. "Poverty", according to Brailsford (2005: 575), "strikes such children at their very core and can be directly linked to their later poorer academic performance". Brailsford (2005) observes that poverty operates at two levels, namely in the inability of parents to provide their children with the kinds of material and physical support that they need, as well as parents' subsequent lowered expectations given this failure to assist.

Brailsford (2005) further argues that associated with poverty that the social class background of learners (a second key factor) plays a critical part in their later performance, and that the minimal leisure and family time that working class parents spend with their children regularly influence their achievements. Working class parents are generally perceived to have poor educational skills, relatively lower occupational prestige, and limited available time or disposable income to supplement and intervene in their children's schooling (Lareau, 1987). They are also regarded as providing particular kinds of role models for their children in the kinds of jobs they do, their educational levels attained, their incomes, and the kinds of residential neighborhoods in which they live. Most working class parents are often regarded as being mainly casual workers and engaged in routine work, which limits their job choices and job safety. For them achievement is thus primarily about securing a job to earn a living.

Poorer neighborhoods are also seen to encourage collective socialization processes that shape the types of role models that working class learners are exposed to outside their homes (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997:91). Adults that don't work are then seen to provide poor role models for working class learners in terms of the structured environments and norms that they need around them in order to achieve (Ainsworth, 2002: 119). Furthermore, the language used by working class adults and learners is regarded as having a significant bearing on the achievement of such learners. Working class learners frequently either don't fluently speak the language that is used as the main medium of instruction in schools (mostly English), or do so via a mixture of dialects that prevent them from grasping hidden aspects of the curriculum and the attached learning (Reddy, 2006: 104).

In contrast to the above representation, middle class parents are generally regarded as occupying professional jobs associated with job security and mobility. Their occupations and financial positions supposedly allow them to provide their children with educational supports such as study rooms, computers, dictionaries, atlases, calculators, books, and extra monies for food, extramural classes, and educational tours (Downey, 1995). This availability of cultural resources, exposure to a particular form of social status, and the experience of middle class parents to stimulate the intellectual progress and achievement of their children, according to Johnson (1992: 108), fosters "a climate that supports the development of cognitive abilities, as well as satisfaction in doing cognitive work and the development of healthy personality characteristics that facilitate academic development". Ainsworth (2002: 119) observes that often in neighborhoods where most adults have steady jobs and serve as good role models behaviors and attitudes that are conducive to success in both school and work are fostered; to the extent that education is valued, schools norms are adhered to, and learners work hard to achieve their set goals.

Within the above social class is shown to be a key factor in studies on achievement, though it is explained in ways that seem to 'blame' learners for their socio-economic status. The studies generally depict achievement according to something like Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where individuals from the higher economic class are described as being more attuned or disposed to achieving at higher levels (given their better developed social esteem and self actualization), while the lower economic classes are supposedly focused on lower order achievements given their need to survive and secure sustainable livelihoods. Debates about achievement in such studies are often set up to show some individuals as focused on the acquisition of knowledge and learning that leads to societal progress, and other individuals preoccupied more with material and mundane everyday things. This is further discussed later in the thesis.

Murray and Mason (1997) observe in the above regard that there is a third key factor - namely the social context of the school - that helps accentuate how many learners approach achievement. Learner achievement, they suggest, must be understood as also tied to the school context, and the class sizes, levels of teacher expertise, and the levels of resources available (Chisholm and Holmes, 2005: 2). Learner perceptions of their school context, and how it operates in their daily lives, are deemed critical in informing the kinds of beliefs, attitudes, and forms of self definition that learners adopt at school (Cart 2009). In such a situation learners may thus regard achievement as doing better than they were doing before, improvement in a particular area of work, gaining entry to a sports team, excelling in a sporting code (Tagle 2003), or simply meeting a particular goal that they had set for themselves, whatever its level or purpose in schooling terms. Alternatively, other learners could approach achievement as the completion of a course or obtaining a certificate, reaching a high level of performance that led to formal employment or access to higher learning, or the complete mastery of a set of skills as proof of having achieved. McDonnell (2007) suggests that such an approach to achievement - as additive and cumulative - allows learners in the same school and social context to be treated as individuals with different capabilities, desires, goals, and learning experiences.

Indeed, by treating achievement as both a goal (product) and a means to a goal (process), many studies have begun to capture the interconnectedness of skill mastery, competition, social recognition, group solidarity, personal ambition, individual interest, learner subjectivity, and different identity forms in how learners approach achievement (Agarwal and Misra, 1986), and have begun to show how learners often speak back to their schooling experiences and their imaginings of achieving at schools (Berkhout 2008).

Whether correlated simply as high scores, grades, rankings, percentages, skills, effort, improvement, progress and certification, or linked to learners' home context, age, social class, schooling context, role models, and access to particular levels of development, technology and learning, debates about achievement reveal the term and concept to be always complex, and deeply multifaceted.

It is argued in the sections below that the concept of achievement could perhaps be better understood by exploring its conceptual links to learner desires and aspirations. For that reason, the sections initially look at various conceptualizations of aspiration before examining key ways in which they intersect with debates on learner achievement.

2.5 CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF ASPIRATION

Johnson (1992:99) suggests that “aspiration is denoted by the personal aims, goals and objectives toward which each individual directs seeking behaviour”. Quoting Quaglia and Cobb, Walberg and Greenberg (1996:179) define “aspirations as the learner’s ability to identify and set goals for the future while being inspired by the present to work toward those goals”.

These two views suggest that aspiration is a concept that both stimulates and establishes the amount of effort that is to be exerted. Aspiration thus serves as a key measure for individuals, both for what they learn at school (inspiration) and how they map this learning in ways that create pathways (ambition) to what they seek to achieve in life (Quaglia and Perry, 1995). In this regard, Gutman and Akerman (2008) assert that aspiration can be seen as both a predictor and a product of individual ability, personal attribute, socialization, and experience.

Importantly, learners of different ages have different levels of aspirations. Thus, “aspirations tend to decline as children mature based on their previous experiences and choices and as a response to their growing understanding of the world and what is possible therein” (Gutman 2008: 1). Aspirations are also not necessarily individually or internally-bound or framed. Caplon (1995:351) notes that while aspirations reflect a state of mind that motivates individuals, it is frequently shaped by the expectations of others, most notably parents, teachers, and fellow peers. In the former regard, Chen and Lan (1998) concede that the wants of parents often have a powerful effect on learner aspirations, citing evidence where high achieving learners regularly came from families that had elevated aspirations and expectations for them.

Furthermore, aspirations do not have a simple linear progression. Rather, it is subject to the ebbs and flows of an individual’s life and often changes over time in response to the influence of peer group pressures, and an individual’s own expectations on the basis of their gender, race, and social class experiences. Invariably, the learners that realize their aspirations are those that are determined and steadfast, that are confident and believe in their individual visions and abilities, and whose desires influence their learning and guide their choices (Bajema, Miller and Williams, 2002:6).

2.6 LINKING ASPIRATION TO ACHIEVEMENT

There is little doubt that aspirations greatly influence individual learning and how learners prepare for their various life choices. “Aspirations provide the insight”, according to Ley, Nelson and Beltyukova, 1996: 134), “into what students think and feel about themselves, their school and the roles they are meant to fulfil within the school community”. Indeed, it is how individual learners bring their prospective imaginings into the present (Appadurai, 2004: 67). These imaginings are inspired and fuelled within them via feelings of hope and constant self-assurances that they can succeed.

As with learner achievement, learner aspirations differ significantly according to factors such as social class, parent occupations, parental income, social networks, role models and places of residence. These factors shape in important ways how learners think about and aspire within their individual contexts and lives and ultimately define how they position their individual goals, and what they achieve.

There exists a paradoxical relationship between achievement and aspiration. On the one hand, individual aspiration serves to guide learners about what they seek to achieve, and provides inspiration to many learners to push themselves and to exert the necessary effort to succeed, and achieve. On the other hand, the inability to achieve or succeed at something or the realisation that the resources or finances needed to pursue them is lacking, often leads to learners re-assessing their initial choices and goals, and re-aligning their expectations.

With respect to the above, this complex interplay between achievement and aspiration is closely regulated by the social context and everyday factors that shape and mark the lives of individual learners. This role of social context in shaping how learners aspire and achieve is discussed below.

2.7 SOCIAL CONTEXT AND YOUTH DISCOURSES OF ACHIEVEMENT

The term social context refers to how individuals understand, interpret, and use their various living and social conditions. Social context does not however merely refer to a material form. Rather it is a term that also endows individuals with particular tastes, capitals, and dispositions that nurture a particular form of aspiration, and achievement.

Oakes (1989) notes that social context can be defined as the various facets of the overall socio- economic environment in which a person or a group lives, which includes the family and the extended kin group, the caste hierarchy, the economic conditions and class relations, the religious beliefs and practices, and the social demographics of the region. This definition by Oakes implies that social context refers to the environment in which an individual lives, is educated, and which involves people and institutions that he/she interacts with.

However, given that individuals are involved at various times with a number of different institutions and environments this further suggests that individuals are frequently confronted by a number of different social contexts. As Dey (2001) notes, social contexts vary depending on individual location, the identities of nearby people, and the resources available. This makes each social context unique and influences individual behaviour in different and diverse ways.

For the thesis, the above suggests that the home and school contexts of individual learners shape youth understandings of their lives differently. It also emphasises that structural and contextual conditions/elements in each environment (such as the nature of local neighborhoods, the level of instability within it, the type of school attended, and the kinds and dispositions of learners within them) differ in relation to each other (in the life of a single individual), and also differ in relation to the various contexts (and elements) in the lives of other individuals (Bourdieu 1977).

2.7.1 The social context of the home

The home lives of learners are invariably shaped by the different forms of family structures and forms. In contemporary society learners may come from homes where there is for example a married mother and father, a single or divorced mother, a single or divorced father, a remarried mother and remarried father (with their respective husband and wife), or be in the custody of a sibling, an aunt of uncle, or a grandparent(s), or in foster care. In each of these familial forms there exist different expectations, values, beliefs, cultural forms, levels of support and education, and access to financial and physical resources. Individual learners that come from different forms of familial structures thus have different lifestyles and social orientations, and think about life and its opportunities in very different ways. In that respect, various social spaces lead individuals to adopt different aspirations, achievement goals, and approaches to life.

Moreover, the socio-economic situations of individual family homes (and the financial capital of respective parents) often push learners into quite different relationships with their respective education. For example, some working class parents that don’t have the necessary finances to provide for their children’s schooling may not always expect much from their children in terms of school achievement, while other working class parents may try to compensate for their ‘inadequacy’ by having overly optimistic expectations for their children (Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley 1990:82; Kao 2002), hoping that this will spur them on to succeed. On the other hand, some middle class parents that have the necessary resources to assist their children may choose not to invest in their children's futures, while other middle class parents may invest disproportionately (to their income) in the education of their young. In all such situations the willingness of parents to invest or not invest in the education of their children often shapes in crucial ways their relationships with the respective schools and their children's educational development.

Different families also have quite different social networks. Middle class parents often have the kinds of social networks and institutional links that provide their children with better opportunities to gain access to jobs, college or university admission, or to move easily within the mainstream economy (Noguera 2003), while working class parents normally rely on their current employers to also provide temporary work to the children when they enter the world of work. In current economic and job climates these latter working class work dependencies on employers have virtually disappeared.

It is suggested that the access to aspects of culture and social refinement within homes is inevitably informed by the social class backgrounds of parents. In homes where there are high levels of interest in reading, literature and other art forms, it was normally found that the parents not only read and attended concerts regularly but that they owned library cards and put aside special monies to service these activities (Morrow 1983). Furthermore, Mohile (1987) notes that the amount of reading and discussion in the home environment directly influenced learner achievement with linguistic competence in the home assisting learners in crucial ways.

Finally, Wilson (1996) claims that the physical location of residential homes greatly influences learner engagement with schooling and reflects the social class of their parents. He notes that "neighborhoods where most adults have steady jobs foster behaviors and attitudes that are conducive to success in both school and work. Therefore the children in such advantaged neighbourhoods are more likely to value education, adhere to school norms, and work hard because that is what they saw modelled for them by the neighborhood adults". Wacquant (1996) suggests that in neighborhoods where adults had limited time to assist or influence the lives of learners, learners often fare badly at school because of the limited choices they have had to spend their time constructively.

2.7.2 Social context of the school

There is little doubt that different schools crucially shape the ways in which learners aspire and their understandings of achievement. This is unsurprising given the deeply unequal societies that learners live in and the distinctively disproportionate educational sites that rich learners from rich and poor homes are given access to. Hargreaves (1999: 125) observes that processes of knowledge creation and utilization within different schools are often heavily influenced by the ways in which availability of funds, the social class dispositions and attitudes of parents, and the political and social clout of different parents intersect with a particular school ethos and the organizational competencies and capabilities present in the school.

Indeed, it is the established ways in which certain schools connect the above challenges that allow them to develop greater competitive atmospheres that promote academic achievement. In this regard, levels of school discipline and their encouragement of learners to read, do their homework, and to engage in different kinds of learning, are often said to strongly affect how learners achieve at such schools.

While Adler, Kless and Adler (1992) suggest that such ordered, competitive, and achieving environments can be linked to particular forms of regulated school leadership, qualified teachers, positive teacher attitudes, competitive curricula, plentiful resources, and being located in less stressful and challenging neighborhoods, it is significant that no matter what the context of the school, teacher behaviour, ability, and experience are always key factors in the ways in which learners achieve (Darling-Hammond 1999).

Thus, it is not only the physical location of the school or the kinds of environments that schools create for their learners that shape the ways in which learners approach achievement. Rather, as Schmidt notes, it is the kinds of experienced and dedicated teachers at the various schools that often determine what learners learn and achieve. It is their ability to manage the instructional space of the school, to motivate learners, and to develop the particular pedagogical practices pertinent to the needs of their particular school, that lead teachers to fulfill a crucial (if not most important) part of the social context of each and every school (Entwisle, Kozeki, & Tait, 1989).

2.7.3 Why social context matters in debates on achievement (and aspiration)

Were educational attainment to be treated simply as an outcome of individual exertion, there is little doubt that social classes that have access to greater finances and cultural forms that facilitate learning would enjoy considerable advantage in navigating the education system through a combination of knowledge, resources, strategies and networks (Raffo, Dyson, Gunter, Jones, Kalambouka & Hall 2009).

Earlier in the chapter it was noted however that individual achievement is shaped by a variety of cultural and national attributes that influence both how learners conceptualise achievement and also generate within them how they feel about achieving. It was further noted that the meaning of achievement differs for learners not only according to cultural, subcultural, and societal norms but also by age, gender, social class, and the type of social and physical context they live and learn and in which achievement is assessed (Miller cited in Singhal and Misra, 1994:240).

Arjun Appadurai (2004) has observed in this regard that while all learners aspire in similar and even ways (where working class learners desire for things in the same ways as more affluent and powerful groups), their capacity to aspire is crucially shaped by social, cultural, and economic experiences and these are not evenly distributed or accessible. Appadurai (2004) suggests that aspiration (and achievement) should thus be treated not as an individual trait but as a cultural capacity that comes together in different ways in the social, physical, and educational environments in which learners live. These inform how they cope with and move forward in their lives. To be sure, social context plays a crucial function in shaping learner aspirations and their understanding of achievement. Social context operates through the ways in which attached communities and families set ‘standards’ for themselves and their children, their personal histories, their available role models, the types of jobs that various family members have, and the opportunities available (in terms of jobs and life choices) within these environments.

Given that a variety of social contexts shape the lives of individual learners (Johnson 1992: 105) it is necessary to capture the different variables in each situation in order to understand how each individual makes sense of their achievements. Murray and Mason (1997) observe here that issues of race, social class, gender and geographical location, as well as student ratios in different schools, and the kinds of teacher expertise therein, play critical roles in giving shape to the meaning making of individual learners.

In the thesis below it is questioned how low educational aspirations lead to learners not expecting educational or later economic success (Kao & Tienda, 1998), how cultural concerns or traditions or skepticism about the value or utility of education often inform learners to not achieve, how these frequently influence learner decisions more than even economic deprivation, and how uncertainty about the future sometimes results in learners underachieving and not believing in the benefits of learning because this invariably does not translate into status, jobs, or upward mobility in their communities (Crane, 1991; Fordham & Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Massey, 1996; Ogbu, 1991; Wilson, 1987, 1996). It is suggested that the belief that "education is by and for other people and is likely to let them down" (DSCF, 2008: 2) is very persuasive and should not be underestimated in such debates and questionings.

Having provided the ways in which some studies have differently captured or defined various elements in debates about achievement, aspiration, and social context, the chapter reminds that adopting a view of achievement that characterizes learners as lacking aspiration, willpower, intellectual ability, or the necessary set of learning skills to succeed, provides a particularly deficient outlook on the topic. By drawing attention to the complex relationships between socio-economic background and life world experiences that inform individual learners and their families' dispositions toward schooling at one school in Cape Town, South Africa., the thesis thus hopes to offer a non-deficit theoretical and conceptual framework by which to view achievement. It is to such a theoretical framework that the thesis next turns.

3 CHAPTER THREE: THEORISING ACHIEVEMENT AND ASPIRATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I broadly outline how the work of three theorists, most notably Pierre Bourdieu, Tara Yosso, and Arjun Appadurai, assisted me in working with the concepts of aspiration and achievement. The main purpose of the chapter is to provide a theoretical background and conceptual platform (for the rest of the thesis) with which to later engage and connect to youth understandings and experiences of achievement.

The chapter's starting assumption is that education systems, policies, and thus schools serve as key mechanisms that reproduce and regulate the kinds of access learners get to education and what they expect to do with the education they receive (Reay, David, and Ball, 2005), and that this is shaped and influenced in important ways by social and cultural factors in the home and the classroom. The chapter argues however that how learners think about their future lives and the kinds of things they can achieve cannot be understood simply in relation to 'what happens to them'. Rather, the ways in which learners think and act in such situations reflect in complex ways how learners mobilize their previous experiences, and the things they have learnt (their accumulated history), to navigate their paths through life.

The chapter argues that the ways in which learners imagine and articulate their aspirations offer important insights into what they think they can achieve and their contemplation of what it means to them (Bok, 2010: 164). It asserts that learners develop 'maps' according to individual information and experience (that they draw from their home life, community life and schools) that they employ to think about their futures. In that regard, the chapter notes that some learners have more experience and assistance in reading their individual maps since members in their communities, families, and those that they encounter in their daily lives, routinely share this knowledge (how to read a life-map) with them (Appadurai, 2004: 69).

How different learners think about education and achievement, it is suggested, requires the combination of the cultural capital, social class, and everyday social factors in their lives to be better understood (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 87). The chapter thus sets about showing, in two sections, how the different theories of Bourdieu, Appadurai and Yosso assist in grappling with the various issues and dilemmas that shape the lives and achievements of individual learners.

Bourdieu’s concepts of field, habitus and capital offer a theoretical framework and way of thinking about the relationship between economic and cultural issues in the lives of learners and the ways they think about achievement. His concepts also help affirm that an individual’s life events “cannot be understood fully except in relation to the social context in which the action occurs” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu (2004) shows for example how economic capital and social class background enable certain practices and experiences that learners translate into embodied dispositions and capacities (cultural capital) over time. This leads to various learners negotiating different social spaces and schools differently.

Bourdieu’s theory of habitus also further illustrates how internalised social structures and dispositions are unconsciously developed from an early age and given particular form in the lives of individuals by being reproduced through their everyday experiences (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990, Bourdieu 2004). Various upbringings and social interactions entail that learners develop different attitudes, dispositions, and value systems; that depend on the various social networks that individual learners can call upon and also what is possible for them in their lives. This produces diverse understandings of achievement as well as unequal familiarities on how to ‘navigate (different) social spaces (Moore, 2008: 108).

Tara Yosso (2005) asserts that although education can be a powerful instrument of change it invariably also reproduces cycles of inequality that limit the agency of individual learners. In the latter regard, power is maintained in society via forms of capital that ensure the social mobility of dominant groups while limiting the admission of others to the acquisition and learning thereof. However, Yosso (2005: 76) argues that the value of unacknowledged capitals that are abundant in working class communities – such as community cultural wealth – need to be recognized if education is to become transformative in working class communities and the ways in which their aspirational, linguistic, social, navigational, resistant, and familial capital intersect, is to be better understood. For the purposes of the thesis, the chapter focuses only on Yosso’s account of familial capital.

Similarly, while Appadurai (2004) similarly explores how social context structures learner engagement with schooling, he focuses in more detail on the individual’s ‘capacity to aspire’. He emphasizes the need to see learners as all having particular and different desires for their futures; desires that are not restricted by social, cultural, economic, or intellectual capitals. Appadurai (2004: 69) points out that the ‘capacity to aspire’ is shaped both by social, cultural, and economic experiences and the availability of navigational information in their everyday life, as well as by what learners’ desire and want in their future lives. He suggests that treating aspiration as a cultural category (where learners focus on practice, repetition, exploration, conjecture, and refutation) rather than an individual attribute is an important device with which to view and engage the kinds of differences in everyday life and understanding that inform what learners achieve (Bok, 2010: 165).

By focusing on what learners imagine and dream about for themselves, often beyond their capability and social reality, Appadurai's (2004) work implies that as learner aspirations differ so do their notions and experiences of achievement. Appadurai's central premise is that "it is only in imagining beyond a tangible, experienced and engaged reality that individuals demonstrate a "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai 2003:52). These aspirations, according to Appadurai, are never simply individual but rather are always formed in the "thickness of everyday life" (Appadurai, 2003).

3.2 SECTION A: THE CONTRIBUTION OF PIERRE BOURDIEU

Pierre Bourdieu has written extensively about education and everyday life. His primary contribution to the field of education has been his critical engagement with the nature and dynamics of power relations in everyday social life and in the realm of education, where he has highlighted how privilege and inequity is reproduced within modern societies and how structural constraints and unequal access to institutional resources intersect with social class, race, and gender constructs in society (Lareau 2001).

At the individual level, Bourdieu (1986: 15) has noted that in order to understand how humans as 'interchangeable particles' connect on a daily basis and think about their lives, the ways in which the social, cultural, and material converge for each of them need to be better understood. Bourdieu employs three key concepts to explain this, namely field, habitus, and capital.

3.2.1 Field

The concept of field, according to Bourdieu (cited in Lingard and Christie, 2003: 322), is that of a "structured social space and force field that contains people who dominate and people that are dominated". Within these contained spaces, enduring relationships of inequality exist alongside daily attempts to challenge or transform such spaces. A field is thus "simultaneously a space of conflict and competition in which participants vie to establish monopoly over the species of effective capital in it" (Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:7).

Using the metaphor of ‘a game’, Bourdieu refers to a field as the given boundaries within which combatants contest according to given sets of rules. Using the example of school performance, Bourdieu applies the ‘game metaphor’ to outline how learners compete to achieve qualifications using their individual capitals - in a space where the school was a field that played an active refereeing role in controlling, regulating, and distributing the various capitals on display. The school fulfils this function by framing and legitimizing the particular knowledge that is considered important for the reproduction and replication of a particular and dominant societal view, and often discriminates in favor of those who know how to play the game and win the prize, and exclude those that don’t know or who don’t follow ‘the rules of the game’ (Tranter, 1994: 6).

Bourdieu observes that a number of fields can be in operation at one time and that different actions take place within each of these fields of interactions - with continuing inequalities in relationships and with different struggles to control the resources available. Interestingly, in all fields, those that have ‘gained’ access to and control the key resources are deemed to have achieved. For the thesis, a variety of fields (home, school, classroom, the playground) operate to inform how the learners think about achievement. Each field has a historically, politically and socially defined context in which learners, their friends, their families, and communities are differently positioned to behave in ways that respond to the logics of power that maintain the structure of the field that they inhabit (Thomson, 2008b:70).

Notably, Bourdieu depicts a field as the embodiment of the ‘rules of a game’ as well as the site wherein the struggle to control these rules takes place. With regard to the latter, there are often cases where individuals resist “the forces of the field with their specific inertia; that is their properties which exist in embodied form as dispositions or in objectified form in goods and qualifications” (Bourdieu, 1984:110) and achieve despite their restrictive environments.

Also, each field has its own system of valuation and practice (Bourdieu, 1993 cited by Horvat 2003:8). This implies that different fields have their own unique constitutions, situations and interests that shape the way in which the youth aspire and think about achievement in those fields. Thus, different kinds of dispositions and aspirations within families and communities shape the kinds of accomplishments that individuals achieve within their respective fields. For the thesis, the positions of learners within their respective fields, it is argued, are defined by a combination of learner habitus and the appropriate capitals that they have, are able to access, and that they utilize to navigate their lives (Calhoun et al, 1993: 5).

3.2.2 Habitus

Habitus can be understood as a system of “lasting transposable dispositions rooted in early familial socialization” (Parsons, Adler and Kaczala, 1982). Holt (2008: 228) asserts that the habitus acquired in the family is perhaps the key root from which other habituses, such as that in the school, draw upon. Importantly, individuals take up different habituses and often reorganize them as they interact with the different environments of their everyday lives.

In this regard, learners contain within themselves both their past and present understandings of their place within social structures as well as the dispositions that mark out their various social positions (Bourdieu, 1990b: 82). Thus, if a learner has for example tasted success or failure in the past this would fashion that learner’s perception of achievement and what they can do in their futures. Conversely, failure to achieve may often lead to disillusionment and the development of alternative views of what constitutes achievement.

Bourdieu (1990b: 77) notes that the habitus is a system of particular dispositions that lead to certain practices or regular behaviour, and to learners behaving in particular ways in given circumstances. While individual practices are mostly unpredictable or difficult to predict the concept of habitus highlights how particular cultural orientations, personal trajectories and the ability to play the game of social interaction shape learner thinking and applications (Calhoun, LiPuma and Postone, 1993:4). Understanding the individual’s strength and weaknesses impels the individual to aspire and achieve in line with his or her capabilities.

Bourdieu (1990c: 46) further emphasizes that youth brought up in different contexts and circumstances invariably adopt different habituses, deportment, preferences and expectations. What this suggests is that for learners that come from homes where they have access to computers at home, as well as to other cultural activities and forms of technology, that this broadens their knowledge base and predictably leads to them doing better at schooling than those that don’t have such access. The concept of habitus thus depicts in stark ways how dominant relations in society are reproduced via the habitus and the everyday practices of learners (Holt, 2008:233). It also reflects particular social class expressions not only of differences and status distinctions amongst learners but also of the ranking of individuals and groups according to their levels of achievement and aspiration (Parsons, Adler and Kaczala, 1982).

Bourdieu (1990: 1987) suggests that the habitus is a kind of transforming machine that leads communities to “reproduce “the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively unpredictable way, and in such a way that one cannot move simply and mechanically from knowledge of the conditions of production to knowledge of the products".

For the thesis, the assertion by Bourdieu that the organizational cultures of schools serve as a particular kind of (institutional) habitus that can be linked to wider socio-economic cultures, that through various processes schools and their catchments often mutually shape and reshape each other (Reay, David, and Ball (2001) has relevance.

Of further relevance to the thesis is the idea that "habitus can be transformed through a process that either raises or lowers an individual's expectations; that implicit in the concept of habitus is the possibility of a social trajectory that enables conditions of living that are very different from the initial ones" (Reay, 2004:433). Thus, it is argued for example that when a learner's parent is promoted or comes into extra monthly funds the increase in salary and subsequent living standard is also most likely to lead to learners getting access to better physical and material resources, thereby improving their likely aspirations and levels of achievement. The same logic applies to a situation where a parent loses a job or money. Ball (2001: 8) highlights in this regard that the reality of the current world order is such that social boundaries have become 'imaginary planes' or "flames whose edges are in constant movement oscillating around a line or surface". In such a situation the habitus of individual learners may change within a very short time period and alter learner understandings of achievement and their future lives. Habitus establishes the behaviour of individuals in particular fields, and learner understandings thereof often narrow the focus of learners on achievements that they can 'realistically' aspire to and achieve according to their particular capabilities.

As such, habitus is "built upon contradiction, upon tension, and even upon instability" (Bourdieu 1990: 116) that is not merely about the smooth incorporation of static social structures (Lingard and Christie, 2003:321) but rather involves learners "perpetually thinking about, challenging, or even reconfiguring the co-ordinates according to which they live".

According to Horvat (2003) the notion of habitus thus provides a useful mechanism to uncover learners' subconscious, internalized sense of accessibility to educational opportunity and the processes of improvisation that they undergo within the confines of their social realities. If a learner has little or no access to certain opportunities this would limit their chances of successfully achieving their goals. In this regard, Horvat (2003) asserts that learner habitus is a byproduct of family and individual history that connects learners to aspects of their social class background, the social context in which they grew up, the aspirations they were exposed to, and the capitals that they possess or have developed. Bourdieu (1986) asserts that the habitus of individual learners is perpetuated by the amount of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital such an individual possesses.

3.2.3 Capital

For Bourdieu (Lingard and Christie, 2003: 324) inequality occurs within schools when schools 'misrecognise' the relationship between the habitus of learners from their various backgrounds and the habitus implicit in the school curriculum and the pedagogies of schooling. He suggests in this regard that social class positions then afford differential access to 'ways of knowing' about the world (e.g. market knowledge, lifestyles, communication and interactional styles) thereby creating different patterns of educational privilege and inequality (Archer and Francis 2006:32). Bourdieu suggests that learners are propelled forward in their schooling by the kinds of privileges and 'capital' that each of them have access to.

The reproduction of educational inequalities can thus be seen as a product of the uneven distribution and deployment of forms of capital between different social groups and unequal encounters between the habitus of working class and middle class communities. Educational inequalities are produced and maintained when more powerful groups are able to secure access to valorized resources. For example, middle class families may draw on greater amounts of economic, social and cultural capital, and thus be enabled to maximise their options and choices and secure the most desirable and privileged educational pathways for their families" (Archer and Francis, 2006:31). Such middle class families would also have access to higher levels of educational and social mobility as their contact with the kinds of resources that lead to success are higher. Bourdieu (1987) suggests that learners become well aware of the relationship between social positions and possible lifestyles and often begin to anticipate probable and realistic educational and occupational outcomes for themselves (Marjoribanks, 2002:8). Capital is thus a form of power within any given field.

Capital, according to Bourdieu (1986: 15), is thus "accumulated labour in all its materialized and embodied forms, that when appropriated by private individuals enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour". Capitals classify individuals in particular institutions, to the extent that those with capitals are fortunate to continue holding onto social advantages while those without capital are constrained and restricted from forms of progress and success. Bourdieu asserts that capital exists in four forms, namely as economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital.

Economic capital

Economic capital refers to financial resources and assets. This is a capital that is instantly exchangeable for money and privilege and is quite evident and visible. It is also a capital from which other capitals often draw their purpose. Bourdieu points out that the potential of cultural and social capital to be transformed into economic capital provides a forward-moving logic to the different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986:25). It explains, he argues, why many parents believe that investment of time and effort in education will result in the necessary increase of cultural capital and knowledge that should ultimately give their children (learners) economic power.

Access to economic capital alone however does not guarantee access to privilege or power. Rather, social mobility (and control over mobility) is a resource with which not everyone has an equal relationship (Skeggs, 2004:49). While financial prosperity is an absolute requirement for social mobility, it is mainly derived from a combination of capitals and access to power positions within society. Both issues result in asymmetrical understandings of achievement.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is "the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition and skills that is passed from one generation to the next" (Bourdieu 1977). It is the "embodied dispositions (within learners) towards cultural goods and practices as well as to formal qualifications that work as a currency and access to a variety of cultural goods" (Lingard and Christie, 2003: 24). Cultural capital refers to resources such as high-status knowledge about art or music that serves as access to power for an individual. It can also be understood as the social mannerisms that have high status value within dominant societies (Horvat, 2003) and includes those tastes and habits acquired by individuals as they grow up in different family and school settings. Cultural capital is also what learners acquire via discussions between themselves, their parents and members of the community on cultural, political and social matters as well as from the books they read (Marjoribanks, 2002).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argues that cultural capital is a means of social reproduction and that it transmutes the effects of social origins to school performance, thus conveying intergenerational class advantage where learners from privileged families are socialized to a lifestyle that confers upon them privilege and opportunity. Cultural capital is the vehicle by which background inequalities are translated into differential academic rewards, and that in turn lead to the maintenance and legitimization of the social process. Katsillis and Rubinson (1990:270) describe this process in the following way: "the higher the social class of the family the closer the culture it cultivates and transmits is to the dominant culture and the greater the attendant academic reward".

Bourdieu (cited in DiMaggio, 1982:190) further contends that cultural capital often consists of familiarity with precisely those cultural forms (art and music) that schools do not actively teach but that the elite value. As such schools are not neutral institutions and privilege the preferences, attitudes and behaviors that the "dominant class" would like to see emphasized, values and mastered (DiMaggio, 1982:190).

It is argued in the thesis that access to, and embodiment of cultural capital leads to diverse understandings of achievement. In that regard, Lamaison and Bourdieu (1990) note that cultural capital comprises of three forms, namely embodied (dispositions of the mind and body, sets of meaning, and modes of thinking), objectified (access to cultural goods such as art, literature, newspapers, instruments), and institutional (educational or academic qualifications), and that these are given legitimacy in schools by those that are already dominant therein (Bourdieu, 1997).

Each of the three types of cultural capital is differently linked to the issue of achievement. Embodied cultural capital hinges on the dispositions that learners have towards their educational lives and their futures. It entails the kinds of meaning that learners make in given situations that shape the attitudes, preferences, perceptions and values that they attach to their work and other school activities. For example the way they approach their school work with regard to the frequency that they do their homework, issues of punctuality, and commitment to learning, all influence the ways in which youth think about achievement. Also, learners from affluent family homes are often more likely to be exposed to tastes, habits and mannerisms that stir up intellectual growth, and thus later yield good educational credentials. Bourdieu (cited in Lareau, 1987:74) notes that “the cultural experiences and dispositions in the home influence the ways in which learners adjust to school and how they transform cultural resources into cultural capital”.

Objectified cultural capital refers to the exposure that learners are given to items like computers that provide them with access to technology and knowledge and also broadens their cognitive skills. Objectified cultural capital is thus closely connected to the social class background of learners in that middle class learners are more likely to benefit because their parents can easily afford to buy such items. This availability of objectified capital increases the opportunities for such learners for higher levels of achievement. As such objectified capital positions learners in accordance to their access to class privileges, such as being able to go on trips over weekends to museums, archives, cultural shows, and book launches, and provides them with a broader and wider perspective of life. This influences how they achieve at school.

Institutional cultural capital inevitably confers particular characteristics and powers on individual learners. Where learners attend school, the quality of learning that they get access to, the kinds of resources available, and the social factors within schools that inhibit or facilitate learning, do influence their approach to achievement. This is particularly so in schools that are renowned for their learners achieving academically and that head-hunt the best qualified teachers to uphold this reputation. Soudien (2004) notes that schools that serve communities with mostly middle class backgrounds invariably ‘feed off’ the economic power of their learners’ parents and stand a greater chance of higher levels of educational achievement given their ability to develop well resourced environments that are conducive to learning.

In the end, within schools the qualifications of teachers, their confidence in class, their experience in teaching particular subject knowledge, the availability of teaching materials, and the resources they can within schools to teach, influence in quite significant ways the ways in which learners approach achieving.

Social Capital

Social capital is that form of capital linked to social networks and relationships (Lingard and Christie, 2003: 324) and "is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of institutionalized relationships or mutual acquaintance and recognition'' (Bourdieu 1985:24). Furthermore, Bourdieu (1986:22) asserts that social capital is "the product of investment strategies, individual and collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing the social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term, and creates the conditions whereby such a relationship can become durable, sustainable and institutionally guaranteed".

Developing Bourdieu's concept of social capital Coleman (1990: 302) defines it as largely a hidden-hand 'by-product' that 'inheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons'. For Coleman (1990) it is a unique resource that is generated from social relationships and provides value to individuals by producing critical networks that allow them to develop and progress (Putnam, 1995).

Notably, social capital consists of a number of 'norms and effective sanctions' (Bourdieu, 1997: 85). Having been given access to information that enable them to act in knowledgeable and rational ways, and by adhering to a sustained set of norms of approved behaviour, learners are socially controlled to follow particular social conventions - and even sanctioned where necessary. Social capital actively underpins in this way the ways in which cultural and economic capital connect.

Putnam (1995) identifies three models of social capital that learners sometimes access in their respective social spaces, namely bonding, bridging, and linking. Bonding social capital describes the strong bonds (or social glue) among group members such as close friends or family members. It is when networks predispose individuals to eschew experiences that further build other forms of social capital and also precipitate some change (Raphael- Reed et al, 2007). Within bonding learners utilize established social networks to develop nuanced notions of achievement. Bridging social capital is characterised by weaker, less dense, but more cross-cutting networks (social oil). These refer to business associates, work acquaintances, friends from outside everyday social circles, sports and other social groups, and friends of friends. Linking social capital is defined by the connections that are made between those with differing levels of power or social status. These links could, for example, include those between the political elite and the general public or between individuals from different social classes (Putnam, 1995).

A good example of how social capital operates would be “neighborhoods where most adults have steady jobs, foster behaviors and attitudes that are conducive to success in both learning and work, and in such advantaged neighborhoods have children that are more likely to value education and adhere to school norms, as well as work hard because that is what they see modelled for them by neighborhood adults” (Ainsworth, 2002:118). More specifically, in such situations, “privileged groups benefit from, and enjoy, a greater synergy between their own life-worlds and the norms and values of key dominant societal institutions such as the education system, that then also helps them to move more easily and maximize the possibilities on offer within particular contexts” (Archer and Francis, 2006:32).

Conversely, in impoverished neighborhoods “children are disadvantaged because the social interaction among neighbors tends to be confined or capped to a limited set of skills, styles, orientations and habits that are not linked to individuals or groups that have power in society, nor are guaranteed to lead to positive social outcomes” (Wilson, 1996:63).

Social capital thus provides members with the backing of collectivity-owned capital and ‘credentials’ that entitle them to a particular form of credit - in the various senses of the word (Bourdieu 1987:248-249). It may also give them access to connections that lead to better opportunities than in the past, either in terms of getting a job or promotion.

Where social capital impinges on learners’ notions of achievement is when they resort to making familiar choices linked to familiar locations - based on the strengths of particular connections and affiliations. Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1995) note for example that both parents and learners often prefer familiar links when they exert influence to open up opportunities, encouragement and support for their children and friends. By achieving such beneficiaries gain directly from the social capital of such familiar networks (Holland et al, 2007: 99; Lareau, 1987:73). This reminds other learners that don’t benefit about the power of social standing and what they need to think and do in this regard, namely that those with social capital invariably have better privileges, opportunities, resources and networks that position them to achieve differently.

Symbolic capital

Bourdieu observes that symbolic capital operates when the situation of learners (such as above) seems to them all to be the 'natural order of things' (Danaher et al, 2002: 25). Citing Bourdieu, Moore (2008: 108) suggests for instance that when learners misrecognise the 'actual arbitrariness of values in symbolic fields and unknowingly accept their subordinate position as part of an unconscious response to the structure of the field', a form of symbolic violence occurs in which subordinate learners become complicit because they don't perceive their subjugation in that way. Notably, in such situations learner views of what they can achieve remain significantly different for dominant and subordinate groups in society. As a form of capital, symbolic capital is apparent when it is recognized as legitimate and powerful in a relationship of knowledge within a particular field (Lingard and Christie, 2003: 324).

Emotional capital

In addition to the above capitals noted by Bourdieu (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic discussed above), the thesis suggests that two further capitals can assist one to theorise and understand learner understandings of their respective life-worlds. In this regard, Reay and Nowotny's concept of emotional capital is important, as is Yosso's concept of familial capital.

Reay (2000:572) regards emotional capital as that generated within the affective relationships of family and friends and encompasses the emotional resources that family members pass on to those they care about. In this regard, Reay suggests that women and mothers play crucial roles within families and relationships in the time they devote to them, the care they take and the skills involved in rearing children, and the amount of time, emotional energy, care, concern, love, and affection that they expend to assist others. Emotional capital thus constitutes the knowledge, contacts and relations, as well as the access to emotionally valued skills and assets that are available within social and family networks (Allat, 1993: 143). Importantly, emotional capital of which patience and commitment are key components, is a support structure that is developed and nurtured over time.

Zembylas (2007:452) notes that emotional capital heavily influences the formation, acquisition and use of human capital within families as it facilitates personal, social, and economic well being. It also serves as a resource that allows individuals, families, and institutions to be more effective in achieving common objectives. As a support for social and cultural capital, the prevalence of emotional capital, argues Zembylas, helps explain why human capital formation, accumulation and exploitation is so different across the lives of various individuals.

The demands of running households and bringing funds into households play an important mediating role in the amount of emotional resources available within homes. Often families that struggle to secure the necessary funds to keep them financially afloat don't have the time or the emotional space to assist other family members. Zembylas (2007) notes that this leads to frustration, a lack of confidence, negative attitudes towards schooling, and high levels of depression that shape in fundamental ways the resources available at home to support learners in their learning. Fataar (2010) refers to this as the weak nodes of learners' aspirational terrains that shape their attitudes towards achieving.

According to Wilkinson (1995) it would seem that emotional well being is more easily achieved in circumstances of privilege and economic security. Illouz (1997:52) cautions however that because emotional deficits are also frequently found within middle class families, it is only within families where an emotional and verbal habitus of intimacy is evident that middle class families have higher levels of emotional well-being. As such, emotions do not reside in subjects or objects but are produced, circulated and capitalized.

Furthermore, emotional capital connects individuals to their larger communities via the various events that they partake in and by serving as a source of collective action and a place of profound belonging (Zembylas, 2007:454). Within the school emotional capital is most often expressed through the circulation of emotional resources amongst teachers and students where social and cultural capital is transformed into stronger relations within the classroom and the formation of empowered feelings, emotional norms, and affective economies amongst the school community (Colley).

Familial Capital

Yosso (2005:79) describes familial capital as "those cultural knowledges nurtured among familial (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition". This form of cultural wealth includes a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to embrace a broader understanding of kinship (as "extended family"). The concept includes immediate family members (mother, father, brother, sister) as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents, and friends.

Yosso (2005) suggests that learners gain from kinship ties through the development of an emotional, moral, educational, and occupational consciousness about the importance of healthy family connections to their individual development. Familial capital is thus considered as the investments or resources possessed by families that consist of cultural, human, and educational capital (Williams and Dawson; Cummins, 1998). Within this definition, youth understand ‘achievement’ in relation to what they learn from their immediate families and community networks.

Notably, the isolation of individuals, observes Yosso, is minimized when families become connected with each other around common issues and when they realise that they are not alone in dealing with their various challenges and problems (Yosso, 2005:79). Thus, for the thesis the notion of familial capital pertains to understandings of ‘achievement’ in the ways in which learners embrace and imitate aspirations held, nurtured, and championed within family circles.

3.3 SECTION B: ARJUN APPADURAI THEORY OF ASPIRATION

Arjun Appadurai(1996:54) has observed that even in the “meanest and most hopeless of lives, the most brutal and dehumanizing of circumstances, and the harshest of lived inequalities”, the play of the imagination has become a critical liberatory and emancipatory tool for people everywhere. While he concedes the continued dominance of forms of cultural and social reproduction in modern society as noted by Bourdieu, Appadurai (1996: 45) asserts that people have certain agencies, choices, and capacities associated with their imaginations and their “capacity to aspire” that they utilize in creative ways to rethink their pathways through life. He asserts that individuals in the contemporary world seem able to move forward in life in the most dreary of situations only because they can continuously dream about better lives (notwithstanding these dreams rarely materializing for impoverished communities).

That said, being ‘able to imagine’ requires both a vision of the future and a plan to get there; something that Appadurai (2004: 84) describes as aspiration (the wants, preferences, choices, calculations, and plans of individuals). In that regard, he notes that aspirations are never simply individual but are rather formed in the ‘thickness of social life’, to the extent that aspirations have come to serve as important navigational tools and beacons of possibility for individuals across the modern world.

As aspirations are determined in relation to everyday living and to the people that surround individuals, aspirations tend to reflect similar desires found amongst those that inhabit common spaces or zones. Aspirations, observes Reay (2001) are inevitably inspired and informed by people with the same life experiences and similar levels of social mobility. Reay (2001: 69) suggests that individuals aspire in ways that oscillate between loyalty and exit. In the former category individuals aspire in ways similar to their peers. In the latter category individuals aspire in ways that are quite different to their peers based on their realization that their desires and goals were probably implausible.

Appadurai (2004: 68) further claims that the relatively rich and powerful invariably have a more fully developed capacity to aspire, especially given their bigger stock of available experience of it being converted into reality. He notes that they are often in a better position to explore and harvest diverse experiences of trial and exploration in relation to their aspirations, and can pursue possibilities and options because they have the material goods and immediate vehicles to do so. By the same token, "where pathways do exist for the poor, they are likely to be more rigid, less supple and less strategically valuable" (Appadurai, 2004: 68). This is mostly so because the capacity to aspire by the poor, like any complex cultural capacity, needs to be practiced, repeated, explored, constantly conjured, and refuted- activities that they often are not in a position to do.

For the thesis, the chapter argues that 'the capacity to aspire' is a crucial capability that enables learners "to read a map of a journey into the future" (Appadurai, 2004: 76), and is something that is improved every time it is exercised. Appaduari (2004: 81) contends in this respect that by regularly exercising the capability to aspire, individuals are able to change the terms of recognition under which they operate.

Learners struggle to make sense of their lives and possible futures, and it is through considering aspiration as a cultural capacity, instead of an individual motivational trait, that the effects of the unequal distribution of social, cultural, and economic capital on their capacity to aspire can be better understood (Bok, 2010: 164). In a world plagued by poverty and murkiness yet imbued with lots of possibility, it is often through their aspirations that some learners are able 'to drag the future into the present' and in so doing cobble together commonsensical pathways and strategies that allow their dreams and desires to be realized or achieved.

3.4 SUMMARY

By highlighting the key and relevant theoretical contributions of Bourdieu, Yosso, and Appadurai, this chapter has provided the main ideas around which the discussion of how youth take up different notions of achievement will be analysed. Bourdieu's theories of capital, field and habitus has pointed to how learners in schools are positioned to understand and engage with achievement in quite different ways using different forms of capital, while Appadurai's concepts of imagination and aspiration highlight how different individuals are able to navigate difficult lives by mobilizing a variety of dreams and other capabilities to help them achieve, albeit not always in the areas that dominant authorities or communities expect. For the thesis, while described very briefly and used in a very limited way, Yosso’s views of familial capital are important in that they show how perceptions of ‘achievement’ are linked to the ways in which learners embrace and imitate aspirations held, nurtured, and championed within family circles.

All three theorists remind that learners are not passive recipients that engage in their schooling and the objectives provided for them in uncontested ways. Rather, learners actively think about what achievement means to them and invariably plot pathways, albeit sometimes in unrealistic ways, to where they seek to be in the future.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As noted in chapter 1 the goals of the thesis was to better understand how achievement is perceived and understood within the everyday schooling lives of a group of learners at one high school in Cape Town, and what could be learnt and interpreted from this.

The thesis based its analysis on qualitative fieldwork completed with thirteen youth that attend Victoria High School in Cape Town, where learners were asked about their thoughts, understandings, and experiences of achievement, their aspirations, and what they hoped to accomplish in the future. Victoria High School in Cape Town was chosen as the site of study because it had a long history of 'producing' learners that upon matriculating have played key and important functions within the city and its environs. Given that the school was established in 1926 for coloured learners (I discuss issues related to this later in the chapter) it was felt that the complex and challenging school history and context, as well as current internal debates and contestations within the school, could offer useful insights into debates about achievement.

In this chapter I describe the research design, methodology, and methods used in the study. The purpose of the chapter is to justify the rationale for the study and to explain the research decisions that were made in order to engage with the study's main research question, namely 'how do nuanced youth dispositions and aspirations and the quite different nature of their various life contexts (school and home) intersect with how they understand and approach achievement at school?'

Given that the study focused on the views and understandings of a particular group of learners at a chosen school in Cape Town, a further purpose of the chapter is to introduce the reader to how the researcher engaged with the research site and participants. In this regard, the chapter offers a view of the school and the participants by introducing the reader to detail about the identities of the thirteen study participants and about Victoria High School and its history. Neither the school name nor the names of participants are real.

4.2 QUALITATIVE APPROACH OF THE STUDY

As the chosen research focus was on the viewpoints of learners about achievement at a selected school, the study identified four key areas around which to engage with the research question. These included conceptualizations of achievement, aspiration, social context, and the sociological categories traditionally used to explain social life (class, race, gender, geographical location, culture etc). The reasoning for this approach was that the four areas provided different ways with which to examine how learner identities were shaped and formed in schools, and the ways in which individuals imagined themselves, their achievements, and what they expected to do in their future lives.

The first challenge for the study was how to define and explain the various concept areas in a coherent and logical way - given their contested and complex nature - and how to capture the different ways the concepts and terms are considered and used in the literature. In this regard, it was decided to rely on the voices and stories of the learners (and some educators) to develop a story that drew together a common (coherent) approach to the various concepts. It was argued that through the telling and retelling of the story of achievement the learners' views would provide direction and focus on what achievement and aspiration meant in their lives and spaces (Conle, 1999: 13). Clandinin, Pushor and Orr (2007: 21) suggest in this regard that such an approach or "inquiry is a useful way of understanding experience, where the inquirer enters the matrix in the midst of experiencing, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both social and individual". Furthermore, Scott and Morrison (2006: 131) note that "social actors negotiate and make meaning as they go about their activities in the world" and that researchers using such a qualitative approach should focus on the individual and his or her interpretation of the world around them to make sense of their meaning making (Cohen et al (2000: 23).

Given this focus on the stories of learners and educators about a specific issue, namely achievement, the study followed a qualitative interpretative paradigm. Van Rensburg (2001: 16) notes in this regard that such a paradigm is most appropriate for the research of individuals or small groups where the objective is "to understand the subjective world of human experience and, so to speak, to get inside the research participants' heads and understand from within" (Cohen et al, 2000: 22).

Moreover, the paradigm was "valuable in providing rich descriptions of complex phenomena, tracking unique or unexpected events, illuminating the experience and interpretations of events by actors with widely differing stakes and roles, giving voice to those whose views are rarely heard, conducting initial explorations to develop theories, and to generate and even test hypotheses and move towards explanation" (Sofaer 1999:1101). For the study, it was felt that this approach would both give voice to learners whose views were not often recognized or considered and provide a rich description of a quite complex issue or phenomenon.

The qualitative research approach, as Sofaer (1999: 1102) observes, also helped “understand the context of events alongside the events themselves” and allowed for meaningful explanation of a variety of youth aspirations and perceptions of achievement rather than using conventional definitions of the concepts.

4.3 HOW THE STUDY UNFOLDED

The first research task was to engage with the nature and dynamics of the topic and to ascertain whether there was a relevant international and national literature that could be used to support the study’s rationale. In this regard it was found that the issue of achievement was a very topical concern in many countries (USA, France, Australia, Japan, United Kingdom) and that there was a variety of approaches, insights, and preoccupations in the available literature on how it could be researched. Once this task was completed, the next challenge was to find a school that was willing to partake in a study on achievement. A key criterion that needed to be fulfilled in this regard was that the school had to be willing to allow learner participants to unconditionally talk about their views of achievement, and that it would not limit learner inputs for fear of what it may say about the school and its accomplishments. In the latter regard there were a number of further developments that led to the choice of school for the study.

4.4 CHOOSING THE STUDY SITE

It was originally presumed that finding a site for the study would not be a problem as firstly, the school would be completely anonymised and that nothing in the thesis text would give any clues about the school’s identity, secondly, there would not be any imminent danger to the reputation of any school given the limited focus and rationale of the study, and thirdly that any school approached to partake would be keenly interested in learning more about how their learners thought about achievement and their futures. It was anticipated that the bigger challenge would be how to justify the choice of school once a few had indicated their interest.

After visiting a few schools in the Stellenbosch and Winelands region and presenting the project and its rationale to them, it was quickly discovered however that most schools in the region were deeply suspicious of such a study and were not willing to allow an outsider access to do research at their institutions. School after school turned down applications to do the research there. The researcher initially thought that it was her outsider (foreigner) identity status- her being a Zimbabwean- that worried the institutions and made them uncomfortable with her doing a study there. The researcher may also perhaps have been seen as someone who would not understand the complex dynamics of individual local school contexts in the region. Or it may have been that the controversial nature of the topic ‘achievement’ made principals (that were approached) anxious about the goal of the study and what it could achieve.

Whatever the reasoning, it was subsequently decided to adopt a more pragmatic approach and ask colleagues, fellow students, and academics to assist in securing interviews with principals inclined to listen to the project proposal, and possibly be favorable to such a study. It was also decided to try closer to Cape Town as principals might be more amenable and open-minded there. The reasoning for this approach was that if school principals were going to deny access to their schools they needed to, at the very least, listen to the request and ponder its merits and demerits. Surprisingly, this approach yielded success very quickly. After interviews with principals at two schools in Cape Town had also been negative, the subsequent interview with a school principal in the central municipal district of Cape Town led to the school at least considering the request to do the study there.

After a long discussion with the relevant school principal and a follow-up talk on the telephone, the principal noted that he had consulted his senior management team and members of the school governing body about the potential merits of such a study and that all had agreed that the study could proceed once the necessary formal clearances from the Western Cape Education Department and the full school governing body had been secured. The researcher subsequently approached the relevant authorities and bodies and received the necessary formal clearances from the WCED, education district office, and school governing body (appendix A, B and C) to conduct the study and to formally approach the designated school to arrange the study. The researcher then set about learning more about the school and its rich history and reputation. The idea was to use this knowledge of the site and its social context to inform the design of the study and how to address its key research questions.

By this time much had been learnt about the school’s history and its operations, about the schools’ culturally and socially diverse student body, about the large number of learners that travelled great distances every day to get to school, and about the small number of school learners that lived in the surrounding neighborhood. It was found that the school’s learners came from a variety of suburbs scattered across the city and that they travelled great distances to school every day based on the belief that the school would contribute to their educational and subsequent work success. This convinced the researcher that the school would ideally suit the kinds of questions being explored in the study.

The last formal preliminary stage of the research process was then to apply for ethical clearance from Stellenbosch University. This was a particularly daunting process, but one that highlighted key challenges that had to be addressed to circumvent possible risks to the study and its participants. The study began once this (formal) approval was given.

4.5 KEY RATIONALE OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Given the decision to conduct a qualitative study that explored the viewpoints of learners at one school about achievement and its role in their lives and thinking about the future, the main challenge in the study was how to ensure that participants understood that the focus was on achievement and its implications for them, and not their school results or how well or badly they fared at schoolwork. The study was keenly interested in interviewing learners irrespective of whether they did well at school or not. The focus was on their individual points of view about achievement and thus any learner volunteer could partake in the study. At no stage did the study expect that its findings would be generalisable. The main goal was to problemmatise the issue and nature of achievement by showing what a variety of learners say about it.

4.6 RESEARCH METHODS

4.6.1 Interviews

In the study the research methods used were primarily interviews. Fraenkel and Wallen (2000: 59) note that the main purpose of the interview is to elicit some in-depth understanding about a selected topic or subject. Also, interviews encourage participants to develop their own ideas, feelings, insights, expectations, and attitudes about a topic (Opie, 2004: 111).

With the focus provided by the research objectives, interviews generally help to develop information and insights and act as important data collection carts with which to navigate the research process. Interviews further allow a form of flexibility that enables participants to project “their own ways of defining the world” (Cohen et al., 2001:269).

More importantly, Miller (1995) suggests that interviews are useful in that they create face-to-face scenarios where participants are able to display the full range of their communicative skills – verbal and non-verbal- and to then make meaning thereof. As Rubin and Rubin (1995) observe, interviews enable all participants to view life from a circle - from all angles, with different versions of one incident- thus allowing participants to explore new areas and discover and unravel new intriguing puzzles. In this study, the interviews therefore provided a lens to the meaning making processes of learners, and also served as a means for active collaboration (and knowledge making) between interviewer and interviewee (Orb 2000).

4.6.2 Limitations of interviews

Notably, the interviews were not value-free environments and a variety of power relations played themselves out therein. As such, the interviews were cautiously handled and organized, in terms of timing and location of interviews, and various power dynamics were carefully considered and planned for.

Cohen et al (2000: 121) notes that both interviewers and interviewees alike bring their own, often unconscious experiential and biographical baggage with them into the interview situation. They add that researchers, through human interaction with the participant, invariably also have some influence on what participants say, and therefore on the collected data. For that reason, it was important for the researcher to build up a bond of trust with the research participants.

For the study, this was a particularly difficult task as the researcher lived in Stellenbosch and had to drive almost 50kms into Cape Town to conduct the interviews at the school. The researcher was also a foreign national (Zimbabwean) and it was difficult to build a rapport with learners and educators that were accustomed to interacting with locals, and who were generally distrustful of individuals that did not experience or understand the experience of the township. Time limitations attached to the completion of the study also made it difficult to develop such bonds of trust. To alleviate some of the bias associated with this problem, the researcher regularly spent entire days at the school, sitting in the staffroom (just a few times), in the playground, attended and in the garden to demonstrate that she was an accepted member of the school community and through her visibility to gain some measure of approval amongst participants. Much effort was made to ensure that learners did not associate the researcher with educators (or even as a parental figure) as this had the potential to skew what learners shared later on.

With the permission of participants, all interviews in the study were voice recorded. This was a worry for the study as according to Opie (2004: 112) the purpose of the interview is to get participants “to say what they think and to do so in greater richness and spontaneity” and taping interviews are not necessarily conducive to developing such an environment. Despite this concern, it was decided to record all interviews and to have them transcribed so that the discussions could be replayed a few times and analysed. Misinterpretation could thereby also be avoided. All interviews were conducted in English, as the researcher could not speak or understand Afrikaans or isi-Xhosa. While this was not too much of a problem as the school was an English-medium school, for many of the learner participants their home language was not English.

4.6.3 What interviews focused on

During interviews learner participants were questioned about what they thought achievement meant, what achieving entailed, their various aspirations and desires for their futures, what they regarded as important in their lives, and where they saw themselves in the future. They were also asked many questions about their home lives, the major influences on their thinking, their role models, their travels to school, their experiences at school relating to achieving, and what they thought about expectations of achievement within the school environment. All interviews were roughly one-hour sessions. Two interviews were conducted with each learner.

Interviews were also conducted with some staff members of the school. The idea was to complement the collected data with how educators ‘practiced’ the concepts. The staff members were questioned about how they as professionals crafted notions of achievement into the school’s everyday activities, what they generally expected from a variety of learners in the school, and how they worked with often contrasting and contradictory views of learner achievement within such a confined location. In the interviews with learners the focus was on drawing out different learner understandings of what achieving meant to them, while in interviews with staff members the focus was on understanding how a particular understanding of achievement was operationalised within the school’s ethos and practice, and what the educators thought about the effects thereof.

In the analysis of the transcribed interviews a set of codes were established to break down the data that emerged from the various questions, to look in detail at key emerging characteristics, and to focus on “discovering the whole rather than the sum of parts” (Scott & Morrison, 2006: 33). Coding the interviews was also useful in linking the (interview) questions and collected data back to the larger research problematic of the study.

4.7 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Given that the focus of the study was on learner viewpoints of achievement, interviews with learners constituted the greater part of the fieldwork that was undertaken. However, as many of the learners' understandings of the study's focus were shaped and influenced by the school itself and the educators therein, five staff members were also interviewed to include some institutional perspective.

4.7.1 Learners

Thirteen learners were interviewed in the study. The original plan was to interview about 20 learners across all school grades. This was later amended to 6 learners in grade 9 and six learners in grade 11.

This amendment was made because it was felt, given the nature of the topic, that learners of different ages understood matters of achievement differently and also had quite different aspirations. Learners in grade 9 were just starting to contemplate and realize how achieving at school factored into their overall life schemes, while learners in grade 11 had by that time firmer understandings of the implications of achievement for their future lives. Also, when permission was sought from the principal he advised that grade 8's were perhaps too new to the school environment to usefully contribute to the study, and also that he would not allow any grade 12 to partake in research work given their need to focus on their studies in their final year of school.

Once the fieldwork process was completed seven learners in grade 9 were interviewed, along with five grade 11 learners. Of the thirteen learners that were interviewed four were male (3 in grade 9 and 1 in grade 11) and eight were female (4 in grade 9 and 4 in grade 11). The average ages of the learner participants were fifteen years old for the grade 9's, and seventeen years old for the grade 11's. Four of the 12 learners were muslim while 8 were Christian (this aspect is further explored in chapter 5 in relation to issues of culture and belonging).

With regard to how the learners were chosen, it was felt that the nature of the topic was such that there was no need to develop a representative sample of any kind other than to try to get an equal representation of males and females. Since every learner is unique in terms of their individual life situations and their different views on what achievement meant to them, the choice of learners was based solely on the fact that they were learners in grade 9 and grade 11 that were prepared to be part of the study and to be interviewed. Educators in the two grades were asked to announce details about the study in class and ask for volunteers. All learners who forwarded their names to the educator to indicate their interest were then introduced to the researcher. The researcher met with them individually and explained what the study was about and then gave them consent and introductory letters to take to their parents. All such meetings were done on an individual basis to protect the privacy of those who agreed to partake in the study. Learners who returned with signed consent forms were then admitted as participants to the study. Each learner also had to give his/her assent to partake in the study. The researcher initially secured consent letters for 16 learners but four learners either did not come to the scheduled interviews later on or dropped out after an initial interview or discussion (and were thus regarded as no longer interested).

4.7.2 Educators

Four staff members were interviewed for the study. The rationale for interviewing them was to capture their individual viewpoints about achievement and how they thought this came across in the classroom and in the school's learning ethos. Long standing staff members were targeted given that the secondary objective of interviews with educators was to generate a greater understanding of the school's history, its predominant preoccupations and missions, how achievement was captured in the school's functioning, and detail about recent changes in the school's development. In the end, many senior educators were not available (too busy) or were not interested. However, after being given access to the staffroom and explaining to some staff members the purpose and rationale of the study during informal discussions, the researcher was able to secure interviews (using a snowballing sampling technique- one member recommending another) with four staff members.

The staff members that were interviewed in the study included two members of the school's management team, and two educators (science and language,). Information gained from these interviews was augmented by information gathered about the school's history and aspects of achievement attached to this. The majority of the information gathered about the school's history can however also be found on the school's website (www.victoriahigh.co.za).

4.8 ISSUES OF CONSENT, ASSENT, AND SOME ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are a fundamental part of every research process and needs to be dealt with through the entire duration of the study - from start to completion, as well as afterwards (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 170). According to Cohen et al (2000:123) the main ethical issues involve issues of "informed consent, confidentiality and privacy, and the various implications for participants in being part of the research process".

The matter of ethics is important as it sets out to avoid uncomfortable situations for all participants and is a crucial mechanism to protect the interests of all and ensure that no harm is caused to anyone (Scott & Morrison, 2006: 88). It is when consideration of research ethics is not fully adhered to, notes Tuckman (1994: 13) that embarrassment, hurt, and a deeply negative effect on participants can result. Perhaps the single most important obligation in a research process is to protect the anonymity of research participants and to keep research data confidential (Cohen et al, 2000: 61).

It is thus obligatory for all research studies to get participants to sign consent (and assent) documents and to give their full permission. Alderson (2002) notes that the process of gaining the permission of individuals for a study allows individuals to 'inwardly digest the information they are given and the request made to them, to weigh it up in light of their personal values and priorities, to waver between opposite options, and to gradually gain the resolve to make and stand by a risky decision'. In this regard, Mahon et al (1996: 150) remind that learners are quite capable of deciding whether or not they wish to be involved in research and that parents often too such decisions without consulting their children. Thus it was important to get signed consent forms from parents as well as signed assent forms from learner participants, where they formally agreed to be part of the study. In the latter regard the assent form was an influential empowering tool for learners.

Qualitative methods promote a high degree of trust between researcher and participant and it is the responsibility of the researcher in research studies not to abuse a trusting relationship, or to cause harm to participants. The main purpose of both the consent and assent processes was thus to remind all that the researcher is responsible for keeping the anonymity of participants throughout the research process and the reporting, and ensuring that no harm of any kind came to them.

Importantly, both processes need to be based on full and open information. Christians (2005: 144) observes that research participants need to be informed about the nature and consequences of the research as well as the fact that just as they voluntarily agree to partake in the study they can also withdraw from the study at any stage in the study. Besides providing personal contact details, the researcher also needs to advise participants, with attached details, that they can contact a third party at any stage, someone whom they could get in touch with (like the supervisor of the researcher and the university research office) should they require further information about the study or want to complain about the research process.

In the study consent and assent documents were obtained for each of the research participants. As part of the various agreements all interviews were treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality and complied with the required ethical procedures, as is explained in the section below. It was agreed that all personal data collected and subsequent presentation of that data, as noted by Christians (2005: 145), would be fully concealed behind the screen of anonymity and that pseudonyms would be created for all participants, as well as for the school itself. All details provided in the thesis about learners and the school has been anonymised to protect participant identities and interests.

4.8.1 Issues of privacy and respect

A key concern in conducting interviews with participants was to organise convenient venues and times to allow all participants the opportunity to fully exercise their agency and voice. The school provided a quiet, secluded, yet safe classroom where interviews could take place in the afternoons. A key problem in terms of actually organizing interviews, however, was that the researcher did not live close by and could ill afford to come to interviews if learners were not at school or unavailable for their scheduled meetings. Thus, in agreement with the researcher and educators, learners identified an educator at the school that was part of the research process and whom they felt comfortable, should they have needed to confirm their (un)availability on days of their scheduled meetings. This arrangement was in the end not needed as learners either came for their scheduled interviews or organized alternative dates and times. Some learners preferred sometimes to be interviewed during long intervals during school time, especially on days when they needed to get home urgently. This arrangement was entered into, and allowed, by both the school and the researcher as the majority of the learner participants lived more than 20 kilometers from the school and relied on public transport in the afternoons to get home.

Notably, an important element of the research was to treat and recognize the learners as competent witnesses of their lives and fully capable of voicing their views. Butler (1996) and Mayall (2002) both remind that learner views must also be respected for the standpoints that were individually taken, and that these needed to be taken account of during the interviews and well as after the fieldwork was completed and the data analysed. The issue of respect was thus a critical part of the study and its findings.

4.8.2 Some further ethical reflections

In terms of the interviews and the research process a critical issue of protection was how to focus participants on the study's objectives and not allow them to discuss matters that were not necessarily pertinent to the study. Caution needed to be heeded in the kinds of personal detail that learners shared (when describing social contexts and home life for example) and what the researcher had to put in place to deal with this information and discussions. Where such detail was provided, the researcher ensured during the data analysis phase that it was either not used or edited in ways that could not bring harm to the learner.

A further concern in the study was how to approach the information and stories provided by the participants. In this regard, Back (2007: 164) notes that "many people have questioned the validity of data produced in interviews on the grounds that it cannot be assumed that the accounts correspond to the truth outside of the truth telling". For the study, all interviews were regarded as valid accounts or interesting stories regardless of whether they could be 'lies' or deemed to be 'inaccurate'. The study followed Back's (2007:164) view that "the shape of a lie reveals something interesting about the teller's moral universe".

Participant views were accorded the necessary respect notwithstanding whether their views could be fabrications or not. This approach was based on Dillabough and Kennelly's (2010:4) observation that" the story of being young invariably forms the object of representation rather than the identity of the young person". Dillabough and Kennelly (2010: 4) embraced the idea that "youth narratives encode and recode human time" and in doing so "the story of youth selfhood often operated between truth and fiction, myth and legend, and between the objective and the subjective". The main research tactic was to listen to participant stories in all its complex and contradictory ways and to utilize the participant viewpoints to generate a narrative about achievement at one high school in Cape Town.

4.9 WHOSE AND WHICH NARRATIVES WERE BEING TOLD?

For the study it was important to treat learners as 'transcultural knowers' who were able to think about and engage with their daily challenges and desires in ways that made them key agents in what happened in their everyday experiences (Swartz, 2009: 4). It was reasoned that learners actively engaged with notions of achievement based on their home contexts, relationships in their homes and communities, their desires for the future, and their interactions at school that informed how they experienced schooling. Also, their reasons for attending Victoria High School and what they thought the school contributed to their futures was deemed a critical part of their meaning making. For that reason it was important for the study to provide the reader with more in-depth insights of who the learner participants were as well as to give the reader some sense of the school and its history. In the sections below the reader is thus introduced to Victoria High School and its history, followed by detail of the thirteen learners that partook in the study. The inserts are intended to make the thirteen participants and the school more real to the reader. Both the school name and the names of the various learners are pseudonyms.

4.10VICTORIA HIGH SCHOOL

The school, according to Soudien (2007: 34), is perhaps the most significant arena where a child gets the different kinds of knowledge that it needs to become an adult. At school the learner gets the abstract knowledge of reasoning, the social knowledge of how to have relationships, the practical knowledge of how to do things, the personal knowledge about what and who they are, and the general knowledge that they need to navigate their everyday lives. While the family and home is crucial for shaping a learner's values, it is the school that works with the range of every learner's potential. It is also in the relationship between the home, people, and the school that the process of identity making leads to particular learner identities coming about (Soudien, 2007: 34-35).

In suggesting that schooling is a complex social process, it needs to be noted however that learners in schools are not passive receivers of what happens there. Bray et al (2010: 203) note that it is the circumstances, relationships and attitudes at home and in local neighborhoods that affect learners' everyday experiences of school and their educational decisions they take. And it is in the social interaction of learners in school that leads to a particular school-learner identity being developed that shapes the learner's developing personhood, the learner's sense of well-being and the decisions that every learner takes about the formal education he or she receives.

This study claims that the nature and history of Victoria High School plays, and has traditionally played, a crucial role in determining how learners think about achievement. In the sections below the chapter explores some of the history of the school to show how particular ideas and stances about achievement became part of the school's ethos. Using the voices of some staff members the chapter then questions which aspects of the current situation may inform how learners think about achievement

4.10.1 The inception of the school

Like many schools in Cape Town, Victoria High School had a particular and interesting beginning that makes it quite distinct from other high schools. It was established in 1926 at a time where racial segregation had not yet taken on its official racist apartheid form, yet at a time when compulsory education and state provision was confined to learners deemed to be white (according to links to an European birthright). The school was established on a dairy farm and started off very small with a double storey building and three farm stables. The latter was renovated to specifically house the three grade 7 (standard 5) classes.

The school was established due to pressures from the local residents. Educators and parents in the area were concerned that the provincial government was turning a blind eye to the needs of their children and that of the local community. They complained that their learners could only attend school as far as grade 6 (standard 4) and that a senior primary school needed to be built. Adhikari (1994: 118) notes that education for learners from communities regarded as coloured lay at that time in the hands of the churches that simply did not have the resources to provide a proper or adequate service. The mission and mosque schools in the area surrounding Victoria High School battled even to provide education up to grade 6. It was this demand from parents and local educators that led to a number of protests about racial and educational disparity in Cape Town.

Adhikari (1994) notes that it was educators that drove this call for equal education across the whole of the Cape Town. They felt that the provincial government treated them differently to educators that served white learners. They complained that educators in mission schools were burdened by having to collect school fees, have regular church bazaars, concerts, and fetes in order for the school to run efficiently. Some educators even contributed some of their salaries to help the school provide for learners. Government schools (for white learners) by then were not burdened with these responsibilities.

The demand for the establishment of a senior primary (high) school in the area initially met with a lot of resistance. In fact, instead of listening to the protests, the provincial government went to great lengths to break up the protests by even declaring the area surrounding the school a ‘white group area’. This happened at a time where the group areas act had not been officially written. Also, even after the provincial government acceded to the demand to establish the school, it continued to work behind the scenes to close down the school. One rationale was that if learners were not allowed to stay in the area and there were adequate schools closer to where they stayed, that they would then attend those schools. If the numbers of learners attending Victoria High school dwindled enough, it was thought, the school could be closed.

From the late 1930s the actions and protests of the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) and the African Peoples' Organisation (the APO) across the Western Cape were also becoming quite effective, to the extent that the provincial government started resorting to banning and transfer orders within schools and communities**.** All of these orders had little effect. Parents and educators stood firm and brought about a political and social consciousness that forced the provincial government to take their demands for higher schooling more seriously. For Victoria High School despite most learners having to by then (because of being forced away from the area) travel great distances to get to the school, the measures simply strengthened its resolve to service their attending learners. At that time learners from all over Cape Town that desired to study further than grade 6 were given access to the school. These included learners that would after 1948 become designated as coloured, African (black), and Indian (Adhikari, 1994). It is an approach that is still evident in the school's current enrolment.

Importantly, the operation of the school was informed after 1948 by its formalization as a school that served coloured learners. This led to a period of politicization that informed both the teaching and learning of educators and learners and culminated in many educators being sanctioned or forced out. Because the main issue being disputed was that learners at Victoria High school were not inferior, educators spent a lot of time and effort developing a pedagogically sound curriculum. Their motto in that period, according to Wieder (2001: 158), was that "we want thinking people". The overall atmosphere at the school was one of opposition to apartheid, but also an independence of thinking (Wieder, 2001: 159). Educators and learners were involved in a philosophy of new ideas, it was said, and the development of a culture and ethos of critical thinking. In that period the notion of achievement focused on how to develop independent thinkers who better understood and connected to the world around them; learners that wanted to be active citizens that were aware of their rights at all times and circumstance. It is a culture that remains a cornerstone of what the school is about. A member of school management, Mr. Williams, noted in 2010 that the "school has always focused on the idea that you are only one person in a collective, and what you do, what you achieve in life, and what you eventually qualify to work in, you must always do your best and it must have some kind of social significance. Learners know that the school expects them to put back in one way or the other into the group that nurtured them to the point they were".

From the 1950s and the entry into a phase of repression and punishment the school began to take on a different approach to social change. In that period the first woman school principal in South Africa was appointed at the school. She continued to promote the development of independent thinking and a focus on learning for the good of society. At the time a number of educators were arrested and jailed for their community and political work. This would normally have had an enormous impact on any other school. However, Victoria High School was able to recruit a number of their old learners to come teach there, and continue the kind of teaching and learning that was always the hallmark of the school. It was this kind of sustained focus on critical and independent thinking at all costs that allowed the school to overcome the kinds of pressure that it was put under during apartheid.

From the 1980s, with the switch to a tricameral parliament-type of civil representation and greater access to previously inaccessible spaces like universities and colleges, learners began to focus on achieving academic results that would get them into positions of power. The school also began to take the development of a ‘thinking curriculum’ far more seriously and spent much time developing programmes that not only provided learners with good content knowledge but also a more-rounded critical knowledge base. The key difference from earlier periods was that more learners were keen to study at university (and were getting into them) and thus in the balancing of critical thinking with cognitive (knowledge base) learning it tilted towards the latter. Management team member, Mr. Williams, observed in 2010 that “there was a strong push at one time towards the 1970s and 1980s where learners were keen on becoming doctors. It was seen as the pinnacle of all success and the highest thing one could become. It was almost like a declaration of defiance because at that the school system, the government of the time, and the societal system all worked against that happening. So you had to fight to get there. Many times, when you achieved the goal it became like a declaration of war”.

It is this spirit and tradition of defiance and determination that has characterized what happens at Victoria High School. Through every phase of its development it has remained true to a particular conception of achievement and excellence – one based on the development of the thinking learner and the commitment to ‘giving back’ to society and local communities through the application of the attained knowledge to everyday problems. In the period 1926-2011 this focus on excellence has led to good academic results as well as the production of a corps of learners that have shown their critical thinking prowess and their appetite to serve society in the best ways they can.

The above discussion has highlighted how the history of the school and the traditions it has built up has always had a particular understanding of achievement in mind; one that emphasizes critical thinking and political understanding. It was also noted however that over time achievement came to take on a quite different form and meaning within the structures of the school, as well as within the school’s ethos. There were almost many contradictions in the stands that they school took. The chapter reminds that the contingency of historical moments and the challenges that emerge at such time have always shaped the ways in which the school has gone about doing what it does. When this intersected with home and community contexts that were becoming increasingly volatile and unpredictable, striving to achieve took on a form that reflected the powerful cocktail of home, school, and individual dreams and shaped what learners thought they would become (www.victoriahigh.co.za).

4.11 LEARNER PORTRAITS

The section below provides detail about the learners that partook in the study. The purpose in providing personal detail and more intimate descriptions of the thirteen learners is to emphasise how different each of them were, along with the quite different social, home, familial, and community contexts that shaped their individual lives and decisions (Cole & Knowles, 2001: 10-11). In keeping with the contention that all learners, irrespective of how well they do at school or where they live, think differently about achievement, the portraits include one of an exchange student that studied at Victoria High School in 2010 as well as an immigrant learner that lives in Cape Town but his parents live in Congo.

The portraits are also intended to provide individual images of the learners so that the reader can connect to each of their thinking and lives when discussed in chapter 5. Cole & Knowles (2001:10-11) suggest in this regard that “a representation of the human experience” of the thirteen learners draws the reader into the “interpretive process”. It invites the reader to themselves make “meaning and judgement” based on their reading of the portraits and the later discussion of their viewpoints on achievement. The thirteen individual portraits are presented in alphabetical order.

ABDULLAH

Abdullah is a thickset and talkative grade 9 male learner. He adores rugby and would like nothing better than to play professional rugby in the future. He is a friendly, personable, and very likeable individual who jokes and laughs all the time. Abdullah comes from a fairly stable Muslim middle class background and his family does not struggle financially. Both his parents are educators, as is his married sister. One of his two brothers is a qualified engineer working for a company in Cape Town, while the other is studying engineering at the University of Cape Town. He thus comes from a home life where education is revered and where doing well at school is seen as ultimately leading to further study and a professional career.

Abdullah does well in his academic work at school and is actively assisted in this regard by his parents and siblings. Given his experiences with being an asthmatic, he envisages that he will one day become a medical practitioner and invent a cure for asthma. Being an asthmatic however has not diminished Abdullah's zest for playing rugby (or other sports), to the extent that he plays in the first team of a local rugby club and is a member of a number of other sporting teams. Abdullah is driven to school and collected every day. He lives with his parents in an area about 15kms from the school.

ALIYINZA

Aliyinza is a bubbly grade 9 female learner that lives with her parents and her two siblings in a big home in the township of Gugulethu, more than 25kms from the school. Her parents are self-employed and operate a number of lucrative businesses. This takes up all their time and keeps them occupied till late every evening. Aliyinza is the first-born child and is expected to assist her parents outside of school hours doing chores and also helping in their many businesses. She does all the house chores (cooking, ironing, cleaning), assists her younger brother and sister with their homework in the evenings, and also keeps track of the accounts for her parents' businesses. She also calculates and completes the pay-slips for employees of one of her father's businesses every weekend. This requires her to rush home immediately every Friday to do this.

Unlike most teenagers Aliyinza does not have much time to relax and enjoy school and home life. She also has very little time available to study or complete homework and assignments. Because her parents have businesses to run Aliyinza is expected to get to school on her own. She thus wakes up early every morning to catch a bus to school. The trip takes about 45 minutes. In the afternoons she cannot partake in any cultural or extra-mural activities given the pressures and time it takes to get home and because she needs to be at home when her brother and sister finish school.

Aliyinza struggles with her academic work. Her parents foresee that she will one day do medicine at university. Aliyinza is pragmatic about this and hopes to rather study in a profession that suits her abilities and the skills that she has developed (like accounting) - as long as it provides her with the required funds and the material wants that she needs in her future life.

JANINE

Janine is a poised and grounded grade 9 learner who lives with her aunt and cousin in Lotus River. For all intents and purposes Janine is an orphan since her mother died many years ago and her father lives alone in a retirement village in Bellville. Her elderly aunt treats her like her own daughter and generally spoils her. Financially the family struggles monthly to get by on the pension monies that her aunt receives, monies that her father has provided, and the wages of her twenty-three year old cousin who is employed as a beauty salon. This roughly allows them to afford their everyday goods and needs. Janine has an elder brother that works for an electronics firm at NI City. She hardly ever sees him, and he does not assist her in any way.

Janine lives in a home where members cannot help her educationally (her cousin works and her aunt is quite old and frail). Her aunt does however pay for her extra tuition in mathematics and physical science. Janine dreams of attending university in the future and becoming a poet or a physiotherapist.

Living in a home where her cousin is hardly at home and her aunt sleeping often, Janine is allowed to go out regularly and even to stay out late. She enjoys mixing socially and goes often to the movies, bowling and dancing. Janine has a friendly and jovial personality that attracts people to her. Although she struggles in her schooling she adopts a positive attitude at all times and always sees the brighter side of things. Janine travels alone to school daily by public transport.

KHANYISWA

Khanyiswa is a self assured, hardworking, and easy-going fifteen-year old girl. She is the youngest of four children and lives with her parents in a large home in Gugulethu. Her parents are self-employed (they own a funeral parlor), her eldest sister works as a relation consultant at a bank, and her elder brother and sister are students of engineering (college) and law (Unisa) respectively. The family lives a comfortable economic and everyday social life.

Khanyiswa does not do well in her schoolwork and attends extra tuition classes in mathematics, physical science and accounting over weekends at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Despite her siblings being university students she does not ask them for assistance when she struggles with her schoolwork, preferably the assistance of school friends and extra classes by educators at the school. Although she does not fare particularly well in her grades, Khanyiswa hopes to do medicine one day and to open her own practice. She regards learning as a means to an end, namely to succeed in ways that eventually will leave her financially secure.

During holiday periods she is a regular employee of the Cape Town branch of Wimpy. Her father encourages her to have a part-time job and drives her to work and back to ensure her safety. Khanyiswa travels to school every morning with her sister and returns home with public transport. She enjoys the latter as this gives her the opportunity to socialize with her friends.

LESLEY

Lesley is a strong-minded and purposeful male grade 11 learner. His parents divorced at a young age and both have since remarried. He initially lived with his mother and brother but when she remarried he went to stay with his father, who was married to an educator employed at Victoria High School. While he continues to visit his mother and her family on a regular basis he is rapturous about his home life with his father, who takes him on many outings like fishing and hiking, and his stepmother, who originates from the United Kingdom.

Lesley travels together daily to school with his stepmother and lives a fairly privileged middle class life. He has access at home to amenities like his own computer, game stations, an abundance of reading material, and also other electronic goods that enhance his learning. Also, his father and stepmother daily assist him with his homework and assignments.

Given his upbringing in a household where only English is spoken (on account of his stepmother’s nationality), Lesley struggles with the language of Afrikaans. He does not regard this as a concern as his stepmother intends to return (with Lesley and his father) to the United Kingdom in 2012 to live there. Lesley is looking forward to this experience and expects to complete studies in the UK that lead to him becoming an information technologist. His dreams of the future encompass living a decent and prosperous life that includes expensive cars, a big house, and frequent travel. Schooling is regarded as the main means to this end.

LYDIA

Lydia is a gentle and pleasant grade 11 learner. She is an only child, but her parents divorced when she was young and both have since remarried. Lydia lives with her mother, who has two stepchildren from her second marriage. She rarely sees her father and stepmother and occasionally visits them during holidays.

Both Lydia’s mother and stepfather have professional careers. Her mother is an educator. While her stepfather is an important role-model in her life, both in reminding her constantly about her responsibilities to her family and to herself and in working hard and conscientiously, Lydia mainly looks up to her father's sister as the kind of example she would like to follow in her life. Her aunt is an accountant and is exceedingly wealthy. She is married to a prominent soccer star and has a lavish lifestyle. Lydia hopes to live a similar existence when she becomes an adult.

Lydia views education as merely a springboard to a better life. She believes however that schooling teaches learners how to set targets for themselves and that in fulfilling these targets learners are able to develop particular skills and abilities. While she does not do well at school, Lydia likes to work towards the targets that she sets for herself and is very pragmatic about what she is able to accomplish. She believes that even though her goals are not set very high, those targets that she does set and then achieve clearly shows what she is capable of.

Lydia lives about 10 minutes (in driving distance) from school. She travels by either bus or taxi to school every day.

MICHELLE

Michelle is a bashful, mindful and respectable young lady. She lives in Mitchells Plain and travels daily about 2 hours to and from school. She only uses public transport (bus). Township life plays a big role in shaping Michelle's relations with friends and family. She does not mix with youth that live in her area and feels generally isolated and alone.

Michelle's parents are divorced. She lives with her mother and brother. Her engineer father has remarried and lives close by in Mitchells Plain, continuing to support and provide for her family (albeit in limited ways) every month. She rarely sees or visits her father. Her mother works as a supervisor at a school for the disabled and earns a meagre salary. Her family struggles to make ends meet every month.

Michelle further also struggles with her schoolwork and concedes that she will probably not study further after her schooling is complete. Given the family's struggles Michelle cannot go for extra classes and has accepted that she must simply struggle along at school. She sees schooling as a vehicle to improving her social status, but is mature and realistic about how this happens. She would like to become a choreographer or artist and loves the performing arts, but believes that the best thing going forward would be to become an air hostess.

NADIA

Nadia is a shy, passive, and hesitant seventeen year old learner that reveres values like integrity and obedience. She is devout Muslim and dresses in ways that show this. She lives with her parents and one sister in a rented home in Rylands. Her mother works in a clothing shop at a local primary school while her father works at a pharmaceutical company in Durbanville and travels long distances to work each day. The family struggles to make ends meet but ploughs most of their income into paying for Nadia and her sister’s school needs. This includes tuition classes for physical science after school and over weekends. Nadia does fairly well in all her academic subjects, except physical science. Nadia and her sister also attend religious classes (muslim school) every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon for about 2 hours.

Nadia travels to school every day using a taxi that ferries a number of other learners in her area to Victoria High. Nadia sees schooling as something that is necessary but not the most important route to living a successful life. She aspires to live a dignified and respectful life bound by religious principles and believes that success will come from this. In terms of dreams she also yearns for material things and popularity but feels that there are also ways other than further education to attain these.

NUMAZULU

Numazulu is the only child of parents that have never married. She is talkative and outgoing and has been in the custody of her maternal grandmother and uncle, who live in Khayelitsha, from a tender age. Her mother works as a till supervisor at Pick ‘n Pay in Khayelitsha, while her father drives a taxi ferrying learners from Khayelitsha to Mitchells Plain. Her father is married to another woman and she rarely sees him. Numazulu comes from a home life that really struggles to get by.

Numazulu wakes up at 5 o’clock every morning so that she can catch the 6am bus to school. It takes her roughly 90 minutes to get to school. She arrives back home every afternoon after 5pm. She travels the distance to school because she firmly believes that attending Victoria High School offers her the best education that will provide her more opportunities in her future life. She aspires to studying financial management at the University of Cape Town.

Numazulu is a weak student and struggles to get her grades up. She cannot afford extra tuition and relies on her educators giving her extra lessons after school and during break time. However, because of the distances she has to travel she cannot stay after school later than 3.45pm. Numazulu is very sociable and lives to be with her friends, spending most of her free time with them. She fashions her life and desires on Karabo the star of a local television soapie called *Generations*, and perceives money as the source of all happiness. She dreams of having a car one day and living in one of the more affluent suburbs of Cape Town.

PATINA

Patina is a vibrant and intelligent grade 11 learner, whose parents (whom she adores) are successful professionals and play an important role in her life. Patina is also a deeply spiritual child (she practices the Hindu faith) and believes that yearning for material things is the problem for most of her fellow students. She is a grounded person, who has a deep sense of responsibility towards other people, but who realizes that the nature of life and society around her is ambiguous and contradictory.

Patina lives a comfortable life. Her father is an education circuit manager while her mother is a qualified nurse at a local private hospital. She has one sister, who studies accounting (honours) at the University of Cape Town. Patina lives close to the school and uses the public bus to travel the short distance to school bus every day.

Patina does exceptionally well in her schoolwork and is also regarded by educators and learners as a person with natural leadership abilities. She fulfils many leadership roles in the school and sees this as a responsibility rather than as something gained at school. Although she is a top student in her grade and could easily get into the medical faculty at UCT, Patina would prefer to be an educator or journalist in her future. Her understanding of the role of education in her life is that it is a fundamental part of her growth as a human being and thus needs to be lived and not achieved.

Patina is bold and adventurous and enjoys resetting the boundaries that frame her everyday life. She believes that she can conquer whatever goal she sets for herself. For her attending school is about gaining a sense of happiness and intrigue in her life, where she learns new things to better herself as a human being.

PETER

Peter is an athletic, tall and muscular seventeen year old learner who hopes to attend university one day and play soccer. Peter’s father works for a company in Rondebosch, his mother is a primary school educator in Woodstock, and his elder brother works for Vodacom as a salesman. He hardly sees or spends time with his brother.

Peter is an avid environmentalist and spends all his free time at home watching environmental programs on the television and reading articles about how gases are destroying the planet. He hopes to do environmental studies at university one day, though he also would like to be a soccer star.

Peter's parents drive him to school and fetch him every day. They spend a lot of time and attention on him though they struggle to help him with his schoolwork. Peter stays after school on many days to get extra tuition from Victoria High educators. While he does okay in his academic work, Peter sees doing well academically as important only to go to university.

Peter perceives society as very unequal and says that education seems to be the only weapon to change and elevate an individual's position in life. He would like sport to be given the same recognition though.

PRINCE

Prince is Congolese and lives in Cape Town. His parents have businesses both in Cape Town and the Congo, where they spend most of their time. Prince lives with his three siblings in Cape Town. All of them are either working or studying at UCT. They are a close knit family and his brothers and sister work closely with him by creating an environment of reading and studying. His siblings shape his understanding of schooling and family.

Unlike his siblings Prince is more interested in a vocation and wants to do graphic designing or drawing (or computer science at university). He believes that through hard work, determination, perseverance, respect, and decency that he will achieve what he seeks in life

His brother takes him to school and collects him every day. With everyone contributing in some way Prince's family manage to live a fairly comfortable life and are able to access materials and goods that assist them in their studies and growth.

ULRIKE

Ulrike is a German exchange student that attended Victoria High School in 2010. Her mother is Polish while her father is German. They, along with her sister, live in Germany. Her father is a German police officer and her mother works as a translator (Polish to German).

Ulrike is an outstanding academic student and will attend university in Germany once she completes her schooling. She intends to study journalism and wants to travel extensively. She came to Cape Town on a scholarship in 2010, the award for which she had to work tremendously hard to achieve.

Although Ulrike's family lives a comfortable lifestyle in Germany she struggles to find acceptance because of her predominantly Polish upbringing. This has led, according to Ulrike, to her realising that education and money is meaningless unless it is linked to and brings some kind of purpose to her life. Ulrike claims that helping others, considering them, and making them happy are what drives and motivates her and that she will have succeeded in life if she was thought of as a benefit and a help to others. Ulrike lived with her host family in Grassy Park and was taken to school and collected every day.

4.12 CONCLUSION

The above life portraits are provided to assist the reader in better grasping the description of what learners say about achievement, and its analysis, in the next chapters.

This chapter has described the research and writing process that was followed in setting up the study, conducting the fieldwork, and completing the analysis of the data collected. The reader was introduced not only to the research design and the methods used to collect the data, but also provided a window into the world of the school site and the lives of the learners that participated in the study. In relation to this it was shown that there were a number of ethical considerations and challenges that needed to be addressed and how the researcher set about dealing with that. In the following chapter (five), the reader is introduced to how the learners describe and relate their views of achievement at Victoria High School to influences of their home lives, their individual aspirations, and their dreams of the future on their understanding of achieving.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: HOW YOUTH VIEW AND EXPERIENCE ACHIEVEMENT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for the story below, of how 13 learners viewed achievement at a high school in Cape Town, comes from Paul Willis who suggests that “young people generally respond in chaotic and disorganized ways” to changes in contemporary society, but that they always do so to the best of their abilities and in relation to “the actual possibilities of their lives as they see, live and embody them” (Willis, 2005: 461). Rather than viewing learners as “passive and manipulated young consumers”, Willis (2005: 462) argues that learners derive meaningful importance and identity from the “plethora of electronic signals and cultural commodities” available to them in their everyday lives, and that these help them make meaning of what they seek to achieve.

The chapter asserts that it is in the dispositions of learners, internalized in a variety of contexts, that their approaches to their future lives are formalized, and through which their perceptions and views of life, and their life practices emerge (Bourdieu, 1984: 69). It further suggests that both the schools that learners attend, and the social spaces that they inhabit, inform the kinds of capitals and the dispositions that they internalize, carry with them, and use to engage with their life worlds (Bourdieu, 1996; Ball, 2006: 7). In this regard, the previous experiences of parents in navigating educational contexts, alongside the legacies and histories of the schools they attended, play crucial roles in strengthening the capacity of learners to aspire (Appadurai, 2004), and the ways in which they approach their future lives.

The chapter starts off by highlighting how school and home contexts and rituals shape notions of achievement, after which it then explores the views of 13 learners that attend Victoria High School. Notably, the two main observations of the chapter, with regard to how learners think about achievement at Victoria High School, are that learner attitudes and dispositions to education, schooling, and their futures are very heterogenous and varied and secondly that, notwithstanding the grim outlook that most educators and policy officials have for many of them, most learners remain quite hopeful and optimistic about their futures.

It was notable that no matter how individual learners viewed achievement, within each of their views and standpoints there was a firm belief and expectation that formal schooling was the main route and process to them reaching their individual goals and aspirations. Schooling was, as described by Bray et al (2010: 203), an important socialising process that linked what they were, hoped for, and desired to be in their everyday lives to the kinds of identities and senses of well-being that they took away from their school experiences.

5.2 HOW THE SCHOOL SITE POSITIONS NOTIONS OF ACHIEVEMENT

Given the nature and history of schooling provision in Cape Town, a key decision in the lives of all learners is which school a learner attends. Historically learners and their parents have been able to choose (across geographical space) which school they hoped to attend in Cape Town. Apartheid and a variety of other processes (whether that be political, social, or cognitive) then shaped how learners gained entry or not into particular schools in particular neighborhoods. In the end though, which school learners ended up at did (and do) depend to a large extent on the desires of the parents, the wishes and abilities of the learners, and the criteria and requirements of the individual schools that were applied to (Soudien, 2007).

Whereas some parents had significant expectations of certain schools in the ways they could assist their children in furthering their education after matriculation, other parents did not necessarily anticipate such a scenario and sent their children to schools based simply on the environment and learning cultures that their children would be exposed to, on where they as parents were employed (for convenience), and on where they as parents attended school when they were young (Bray et al, 2010: 205).

With regard to Victoria High School many parents have historically regarded the school as an important springboard to learners getting into university or some form of further education. In that regard, this perception of Victoria High School has been important both for how learners and parents thought about achievement and how they have engaged with their various aspirations in relation to the school. In the sections below attention is drawn to how some staff members at Victoria High School view achievement in relation to the school’s legacies, and what they say about how the school constructs a particular understanding of achievement for learners.

5.2.1 Perspectives on achievement at Victoria High

Victoria High School has a history of producing learners that do well academically both in their school results and subsequent educational achievements. The school has contributed a large number of learners that have gone on to university and secured reputable positions and professions. This reputation has historically led to large number of learners from all over the

Cape Flats attending the school. Importantly, given the physical resources of the school and its lack of sports fields and other such amenities, learners mainly want to attend Victoria High

School management member, Mr. Goosen (interview X, 2011), noted in an interview in 2011 that the main focus of the school has traditionally been to prepare learners for life after school *by giving them a quality education. He observed that:*

> *The type of curriculum that we offer at the school is a very challenging one but yet it is broad enough to give pupils fair opportunities to compete with the best. Parents focus on us because we are meant to be strong in terms of science, but for all the years that I can remember - and this is my 30th year in the school - we have always given our pupils the opportunity to develop very strong academic backgrounds and to prepare them for that. And so they have been able to compete and access many different career fields. Yes we have a tough curriculum, and it's not like having all these other easier subjects to deal with. It is quite challenging but I believe our students get quality passes because of it.*

Another staff management member, Mr. Williams (interview Z, 2011) observed that:

> *At this school we do place high emphasis on academic achievement and success, but it's not the only way that we measure achievement because we have different kinds of children that come to this school and they grow in different ways, achieve in different fields, in different areas. So yes, we have children that achieve as sportspeople or find some kind of success on sporting fields or arenas and you the child that works in societies and achieves degrees of success and prominence in that, but in the end the weight of the emphasis at Victoria High School is certainly on academic achievement.*

In that respect, learners that have attended the school have all known that the key focus of the school, its main aim was:

To work towards achieving excellence and that is what we preach- it is our challenge to learners. In terms of the students' aspirations I can say that in many cases pupils don't get that; that we mainly prepare our pupils to access institutions of higher learning. I must say that when we say that we are a successful school it is because we have pupils who perform and have performed outstandingly at universities. And they did not only get one degree they went beyond that and completed further studies at those institutions. It is on the basis of that I can say we are successful and our students are achieving, (interview X, 2011).

Being a designated Dinaledi school has, according to staff member Mrs. Abrahams, created a particular perspective in this regard. She noted that *“our focus on academic achievement is led by our maths and science provision. Learners that enroll at this school have to take up the subjects or else look for an alternative school. We don’t do maths literacy for instance. You have to do pure maths”* (Interview T, 2011). In that respect the focus on academic learning at Victoria High School in the current period is framed and perpetuated by the Western Cape Education Department, which has applauded the school over the years by awarding it several certificates for producing excellent maths and science results; a recognition of academic results that has maintained a particular reputation and outside perspective of the school.

However, having said that, it is notable, as observed by Mrs. Benjamin (Interview R, 2011), that the school’s reputation of academic excellence exceeds the current era. She pointed out that:

> *This school has always produced good results. My uncle told me that in his class almost everyone proceeded to UCT and are presently doing well in life. If you check the school records you will find that the school has continued to do well academically over many decades and that is why some students travel long distances to attend and get to this school. Although the school doesn’t have up-to-date facilities like most ex-model C schools it competes very well with such schools at the academic level.*

From the above there is little doubt that Victoria High School has shaped in very important ways learner and parent perceptions of what it is and does. As a school it operates as a ‘field’ described by Bourdieu as historically, politically and socially defining how people are differently positioned as agents to behave in particular ways, and how it has developed a logic of power that has not only maintained the structure of the field that learners and educators (and parents) have come to inhabit over many decades but, it seems, has also shaped their behaviour in key ways (Thomson, 2008b:70). In that regard, learner views of achievement captured in the thesis need to be understood in direct relation to the school, its curriculum, its reputation, and its institutional cultures developed over time.

Mr. Williams used the analogy of a river to describe the kind of ‘field’ that Victoria High School is. He noted however that while the dominant culture of the school had always been its main vehicle of success, the ‘wildness and unpredictability’ of the river ensured that the school was also always open to issues of inclusivity, critical thinking, and contestation.

> *One of the things that we do is we say to children that irrespective of who you are, where you come from, or what you want, this is who we are. When you come to us, you must come to us with your eyes open, knowing that we are not going to change to what you are or what you want. It is you that will need to make the adaptation to what we are and what we want, the collective body. I tell them that Victoria High School is a big river with many little streams flowing into it all the time. The river doesn't change and divert in the direction of the streams. It is the streams that divert and change in the direction of the river. We also tell them though that because it's a big river with many key social and educational values and goals that there is space for all to grow here*, (Interview Z, 2011).

5.2.2 What learners say about their parents' choice to enroll them at Victoria High

Aliyinza asserted in 2011 that *"my parents chose this school because it had better resources than the ones in Khayelitsha and also because it produces good results year after year. My parents told me that they would rather spend a lot of money for me to travel to this school because that is good for my future"* (Interview B, 2011). This was also the case for Michelle, who observed that *"when I was at primary school my mum always said that I had to go to Victoria High School because it had better education compared to other schools in our area-which are all actually going down"* (Interview G, 2011). For Patina it was also about attending a school that was probably *"the cheapest in our zone but which competed very well with the other expensive and good schools"* (Interview J, 2011).

Indeed, in interviews with the 13 learners it was clear that most learners attended the school because of its academic reputation, as described by Khanyiswa and Lydia below:

> *I didn't want to be at this school but my parents` chose it for me because of its popularity and great academic achievement. They are pleased by the excellent results and as they want me to be a doctor they believe that the school will give me the necessary education to qualify to go to the University of Cape Town* (Interview D, 2011).

> *My grandmother always told me (before she died) that she wanted me to come here. She always admired the school for producing good matric results and successful students. I came to this school because when you apply for a job they ask for results and the school does that. My teachers always tell me to work and get good results so that I can qualify to go to university* (Interview F, 2011).

On the other hand, a number of other variables also influenced why learners attended Victoria High School. Lesley noted for example that he attended the school *"because my stepmother teaches here and she knows what it can do for me. She told me the school had a good history* *of high-quality results. It was also very convenient for me because we could travel together to school" (interview E, 2011). Peter attended the school because it was the "family school".* He pointed out that *"both my parents and brother attended this school and are now doing well in life. So I am happy to be here and I hope I will also swim in the great achievement that the school maintains"* (Interview K: 2011).

This did not come without some personal concessions for some learners. Prince noted that he wanted to attend a school where he could continue playing cricket and develop his sporting skills but that his parents insisted that he focus on his academic (and economic) future. Coming to Victoria High School, Prince noted, was a challenge since:

> *The lack of equipment and adequate staff for sport at this school is a challenge because at my old school, in primary school, I used to play cricket and we had a lot of practicing equipment like nets. Since I came here for high school there isn't something like that so I spend less time on sport with less facilities to practice. I'm just forced to do my homework in the eight subjects I'm studying. It seems that I have to simply do well in all my subjects and go to university* (Interview L, 2011).

In the above sections the chapter briefly showed how the school context, and the way the school was perceived, framed learners' understanding of why they were attending Victoria High School. It is argued below that their individual understandings of achievement were framed by the ways in which this perception connected with other contexts, factors, and influences in their home lives.

5.3 HOME CONTEXT AND HOW IT INFLUENCES THE WAYS IN WHICH LEARNERS UNDERSTAND LIFE'S LESSONS

Soudien (2007: 34) has noted that the family home played a crucial role not only in shaping a learner's value system but also produces the kind of environment from which learners internalize and absorb key life lessons. In this regard, from interviews with learners at Victoria High School it was observed that factors such as socio-economic status and lifestyle, experiences of difficult life developments, marital status of parents, hardships endured by family members over their lives, and the nature of family relationships, influenced how learners engaged with their school lives in very particular ways.

For example, Nadia (Interview H, 2011) spoke about how her parents struggles with "putting food on the table" and always focusing on her welfare, alongside their strong religious beliefs and exemplary guidance, had provided a steeliness to the way she approached life and the lessons she took from others. She noted that

> *My family respects this school because of its history and its many achievements and although the school is under-privileged they remind me that it produces good results because of that experience. At the school we don't have certain facilities, our science labs are such that every learner can't have their own equipment like most schools, and we don't have what other schools have like three fields or five tennis courts and two swimming pools. But you know what? If you believe and you are truthful and you struggle through things then when you achieve it feels even better* (Interview H, 2011).

Janine noted that *"losing my mother at a early age and having my father stay so far away in an old age home highlighted for me how important it is to focus on being a good person"* (Interview C, 2011). She observed that the interests and attentions of family and friends had become even more important in her life because of her not having her biological parents around. Janine asserted that the most important home lesson that she carried with her was the need to be generous, more tolerant, and helpful. This was what she had taken from the love and attention of her ageing aunt who treated her like her own child and who taught her that through difficult life developments she could still be okay and even be a better person for it.

Numazulu reminded that the marital status and the nature of parental attention crucially informed how learners understood their future lives (Interview I, 2011). She pointed out that in a large part of her life she had lacked parental love and guidance due to her mother and father never marrying and her being left to live with her grandmother at a very young age. Because of her grandmother's age she did not get assistance with schoolwork at home, nor did she get the attention that a "daughter wants from a motherly figure". She also struggled with the fact that her father lived close by and was married to another woman but she rarely saw him. Furthermore, the fact that her mother worked as a supervisor at Pick 'n Pay and rarely was off to spend time with her made Numazulu want to be independent and rich later in life. *"I want to make a lot of money in my life as this will make life easier and bring happiness"* (Interview I, 2011).

Patina and Ulrike similarly spoke about how maternal struggles in their family homes had had an important influence on how they viewed life. Patina related her aunt's experience of having left school after grade 5 because her grandfather couldn't afford eight children being at school and needed some of them to work. For her it was important to plot your goals in life and slowly work towards them, depending on the personal challenges you had to overcome.

Because her aunt had overcome her adversities, Patina believed that focusing on strengths and developing skills that made one go forward had made her treat her schooling differently (Interview J, 2011). Ulrike further noted that her Polish mother's struggles to be accepted in Germany had taught her "determination and a belief in the human spirit" (Interview M, 2011). "What one does in life is attained through hard work. This is not passed down from one person to another. It is a lesson you have to learn for yourself. You must provide the direction and effort and the lesson I learnt from my mother was that doing good for others and believing in something will always bring benefits to you" (Interview M, 2011).

Home life, argued Lydia (Interview F, 2011), was also about how much you learnt from the different adult figures in your life. Lydia's parents divorced when she was still young and then each remarried. This means that Lydia has four adults in her life that give her different pieces of advice and different forms of attention. Her challenge, said Lydia, was often working out what advice to take and what to ignore. She lived with her mother and stepfather and thus she tended to heed her stepfather's advice much of the time. *"But he focuses a lot on telling me not to follow peer pressure and fall pregnant. He tells me not to mix with children in our neighbourhood as they are bad for me. So I spend a lot of time inside and I clean up and cook. I focus on the things I have control over"*. Lydia's mother is a schoolteacher but does not spend much time helping her as she also has many (younger) stepchildren, while Lydia's father, a taxi driver, has no time for her at all and "mostly scolds and moans with her" when he sees her. This reminds her, she says, to take a realistic approach to life, to be aware of her shortcomings, and to "prepare herself to accept whatever happens as long as life improves".

From the above it would seem that learners have adapted, often in quite ambiguous ways, to the kinds of extended family and communal structures available to support them, and that notwithstanding their individual experiences they each carry important life and home lessons into school with them. These lessons are derived not only from the different social forces that produce the kinds of family lives that they have access to, but also from each of their predispositions and life views. In the section below, learners relate the key role models in their lives, and the influence of these individuals on their approach to schooling.

5.4 ROLE MODELS AND EVERYDAY LIVING

According to Kasser (2003: ix-x) "if we hold our eyes open we will see that the world is filled with opulence, luxury and material excess. Most of the world's population is growing up in winner-takes-all economies where the main goal of the individual is to get whatever they can for themselves, to each according to his or her own greed. Within this economic landscape selfishness and materialism are no longer seen as moral problems but as cardinal goals of life. Vast numbers of us have been seduced into believing that having more wealth and material possessions is essential good life. We have swallowed the idea that to be well, one has to be well-off first. And many of us consciously and unconsciously, have learnt to evaluate our own being and accomplishment not by looking inward at our spirit or integrity, but by looking outward at what we have and what we can buy". In the section below this pessimistic view of youth is questioned with regard to the kinds of role models that learners find important and the reasons each learner offered for what they took away from these individuals. It is argued that whereas role models are traditionally understood to come from the home or close community life, in the current environment learners tended to be more open-minded about whom or what to modelled their lives on, and how this influenced how they approached schooling.

The power of the media and television personalities seem to play important roles in this regard. Numazulu (interview I, 2011) referred to her future as "very bright" with a "big house and a mini cooper and lots of money". When prompted she asked*:*

> *"Do you watch generations? Because if you did you'd know about Karabo. She's a businesswoman who has money, her own car, and is famous. Like her everyone will know me. I like the way she is and I will be like her - in charge, very rich and successful. I see her as my role model but first I have to go to UCT, get a scholarship and study business and marketing management for three or four years. Then I will follow in her footsteps and become very rich and successful."*

Not all learners however were drawn to television personalities based only on their material success. Peter (Interview K, 2011) spoke about his television role model being an environmental activist "that made a movie about gasses that was destroying the planet". Peter noted that *"I want to be like him, fighting for the environment, writing lots of articles and doing movies, and yes, being popular and rich because of it"*. In the same way, Michelle was drawn to television choreographers not because of their fame but based on how they were able to live their dream, perform in front of millions of people, and perfect their art. For Michelle, her role model was successful, but in her profession and as a person that was willing to work hard to get where she needed to be (Interview G, 2011).

Some learners were also drawn to successful people that they spent time with in their everyday lives. Khanyiswa (Interview D, 2011) observed that:

> *I see myself in ten years time doing wonders, just like my sister's friend who is a doctor. I want to surprise people like she did. She didn't have much when she was growing up but she tried to make the best out of her situation. She just was focused on her work and was determined to succeed. She now has a beautiful car and house.*

Others like Patina were more confident about their own views and experiences. Patina noted that "*no, I don't have a role model, or rather I don't have one person specifically. I take different qualities of different people to guide me about who I want to be. So I don't just follow one person. It's like this person has very good way in which they live and I take it from them. It's like this person works the hardest, then I take that from them*". This demonstrates her independent thought and her ability to take from her everyday experiences lessons that can assist her in her schooling.

Contrary to what Kasser (2003) noted above, learners' engagement with their life-worlds did not always lead to them being materialist or being seduced by what was readily accessible or available to them. In describing their role models learners highlighted not only that their traditional exemplars had changed significantly in recent times but that even when they continued to be parents, learners tended to take from them quite different lessons and examples.

In fact, even when learners acknowledged that their parents were their primary role models, they noted that their parents did not serve as traditional or homogenous (familial) examples. Indeed, while Abdullah, Lesley, Ulrike, and Aliyinza noted that one of their parents did play an important role in how they viewed the world, they offered significantly different reasons for why they thought so. For example, Abdullah noted that his father was his role model because of the great hardships he had undergone, travelling great distance and enduring enormous difficulty to make a life for himself in Cape Town, whereas Lesley admired his father for making a success of his life and "being able to enjoy the fruits of his labour" (Interview E, 2011). Similarly, while Aliyinza wanted to be an "*independent woman like my mom and aunt, doing their own things on their own time without ever allowing anybody to distract or bother them*, Ulrike looked up to her mother because she continued "*doing things to the best of her ability despite facing enormous difficulty*" and strife, that even though "*she did not have much, she continued to believe in doing right and doing it properly*" (Interview M, 2011).

For the thesis it is important to note that it is how learners linked the nature and legacy of the school, why their parents sent them there, and the kinds of home influences and role models that shaped what they expected to achieve there, that defined how they then understood the notion of achievement and applied it at school. It is to this that the chapter next turns.

5.5 LEARNER NOTIONS OF ACHIEVEMENT

When asked to provide brief definitions of what they viewed as achievement, the 13 learners offered a variety of responses, all of which also differed somewhat in relation to how it is traditionally defined in the literature. In this regard, Agarwal and Misra (1986:718) have asserted that it is often the "conception of goals that generate feelings of achievement and the means through which learners will try to attain those goals". How learners conceive their futures thus significantly shape how they define achievement.

In terms of definitions provided by learners, some learners noted on the one hand that achievement should be thought of in relation to what learners could or couldn't do, or something that was fairly tangible and measurable. Patina (interview J, 2011) pointed out for example that *"I know of a boy that was in my class at primary school that did very badly in class but he could work on a car and he could do things with a car that none of us could. He could put pieces of a car together without any fuss. For me, he achieved because he could do what other people could not"*. Similarly, for Lesley achievement was about setting some goals and slowly working towards attaining them. Lesley (interview E, 2011) noted that *"I think achievement is when you struggle in the process of getting somewhere but the important thing is that you finally get what you want to be. It can be any goal like losing weight, doing well at school sport, or anything else you can think of"*.

Khanyiswa (interview D, 2011) spoke about achievement as;

> *What a person gains. It mustn't be something given. It must be something that they earn from their personal experiences and their own skills. Of course achievement has to do with great determination to get this or that. But I don't think achievement should be about marks only, because some people can achieve without marks". Aliyinza (Interview B, 2011) suggested in this respect that "a person achieved when they developed the skills that they could successfully use in life.*

On the other hand, many learners defined achievement as something a bit vaguer and "in the process of being made". Michelle described achievement as *"something that a person thinks he or she can do or is able to do, as well as what he or she wants to do"* (Interview G, 2011). It is when a person makes his or her own goals and is not told by others what to do and when the goals are not just one thing or in one area. People have to gain something, whether that is something they attain or just learning about what it is they want".

Ulrike (interview M, 2011) defined achieving as

> *That thing that you get when you want something for your personal life or that is important for you, and you work hard to reach your dreams. For example I wanted to come to South Africa. So I had to do many things to get a scholarship to come here, come live here and experience the culture of South Africa. There are some students who come to South Africa and they had their parents pay a lot of money for them to be here. For me I did not want my parents to pay. I wanted to reach my goal on my own. For me that is achievement. Achievement should bring happiness and contentment even if you don't have money and even if you don't perform in what others set out for you. But I think achievement is also only attained in relation to other people. Achievement has to benefit not only yourself but others as well. That is when you can say you have achieved.*

In a similar manner Abdullah (interview A, 2011) described *"achievement as doing the best to your individual ability but must be something that brings you joy so that when you look at the thing you never regret getting there. I also think achievement is something that must be shared. It must be something that you are proud of and that others are also proud of"*. For Prince (interview L 2011) *"achievement is something that you set out to do and you really work hard to get it. It is not what you achieve but how hard you strive and how much time you put into something before you get there. I don't think achievement is necessarily getting what you initially planned for. As long as there is a positive change in your life, then you have achieved"*. In that regard, Peter (Interview K, 2011) referred to achievement as when *"one successfully overcame one's challenges; that because people have different challenges, socially, economically, academically and so on, achievement thus meant different things to different people and happens at different times for each of them"*.

Patina summed up the quite different approaches and views of achievement when she noted that achievement as a concept used by most people was very limiting and stereotypical, and that in order for it to be valid or useful it needed to be understood in relation to the different kinds of emotions that learners experienced in their everyday lives. She asserted that:

> *In today's society a lot of people put too much pressure into achieving. Most of the time, it's not what people can achieve or want to achieve, but what they are meant to*

> *achieve. This puts a negative spin on achieving and causes learners not to achieve and to be very negative about who they are. In today's society we set standards for people who are unable to meet those standards and then they get lost along the line. We need to change our mind on what achievement is all about. To me achievement is not determined by the amount of money you have, or the type of car you drive, or how well you do at school. To me, that is not achievement. Achievement rather is doing something that you enjoy, that brings you happiness, and that makes you proud. Achieving is when you feel joy in your heart, like when you're helping others* (Interview J, 2011).

In the above quote Patina emphasized the additive and cumulative aspects of achievement, pointing out that by treating achievement as both a goal and a means to a goal captured the interconnectedness of skill mastery, competition, social recognition, group identity, personal ambition, individual interest, and learner subjectivity that learners often struggled with in school (Agarwal & Misra, 1986).

5.5.1 What learners found important in achieving

While all learners connected achievement in some way or the other to money or material happiness, they spoke about achievement mostly as the means whereby they could reach their greater abstract goals. These included securing conditions like confidence, pride, happiness, satisfaction, respect, unselfishness, and helpfulness.

Patina (interview J 2011) observed for example that achievement was important to her because it would give her the material means that would allow her to fulfill her dreams. She saw for instance her good relationship with her parents as the skill that she could use to build up good relationships with others and to connect with other learners from different backgrounds. *"Getting good grades will help me attain a university degree and help me collect the monies that I need to not only take my family on a tour of Europe, but will also help me communicate better with others and contribute to our society"*. However, for Patina achievement gave her "confidence and the hope to do better". *"Once I achieve goals I become proud of myself and it is this pride that allows me to take many leadership roles and to get people to see me as a leader"*.

Numazulu (interview I 2011) asserted that *"what I find important with achieving is that it gives me satisfaction. Achievement is deeply personal and you can achieve as much as you* *want as long as you are determined, and you put in effort. For me achievement is about getting things done that lead to me being popular and influential”*.

For Aliyinza (Interview B, 2011) achieving was also about gaining respect, both for herself and from others. *“Achievement will make me a different person from those not achieving. It will make me a more acceptable member of the society. People will respect me and I will be very popular”.*

Patina (interview J 2011) suggested in the latter regard that *“achievement makes you unselfish because once you are recognised for what you can do you are more willing to share what you have achieved with others”*, whereas Khanyiswa (Interview D, 2011) saw achieving as becoming more socially acceptable and a means whereby “people notice a person and what they can contribute”. For Prince (interview L, 2011) as well achieving made him adventurous, where he wanted to experiment to come up with something new, and where he could not be lazy because he wanted people to have a higher opinion of him.

For Abdullah (Interview A, 2011) achieving wasn’t about getting the good grades, or winning something. Rather it was about being recognised as being capable of doing something.

> *I can honestly say that when I came to achieve in life was when I managed to be selected in the Primroses under-16 rugby team. That is what I always wanted more - even more that my good grades. Yes, I want to be counted as someone who contributed to the world and as someone who did not live an ordinary life. But getting into the rugby team will always be a big achievement to me.*

In the end though, for most learners achieving was important because it acquired for them the kinds of benefits and prestige that led to a higher form of living or experience. Peter (interview K, 2011) described this as *“getting a better title, where people talk about you and like to be associated with you. Achieving then is good because it makes you different from others in the ways you talk, what you eat, places you visit, where you stay. Generally it makes you feel better than others who have not achieved “*. Lydia (interview F, 2011) regarded achieving as a way of getting to be in charge, to the kinds of promotions that would allow her to be upwardly mobile and socially successful.

With regard to the above, achievement was about attaining a variety of things and was framed by what each learner wanted for himself or herself in a future life. As is asserted below, learner views or definitions of achievement were fundamentally enmeshed within the aspirations of individual learners.

5.6 ASPIRING TO ACHIEVE OR ACHIEVING TO ASPIRE?

"Aspirations provide the insight", according to Ley, Nelson and Beltyukova (1996: 134), "into what students think and feel about themselves, their school and the roles they are meant to fulfill within the school community". Appadurai (2004: 67) suggests that it is through the capacity to aspire that individual learners are able to bring their prospective imaginings, inspired and fuelled by feelings of hope and self assurance, into the present. He noted that while different learners invariably had different aspirations - separated by issues like social class, parent occupations, parental income, social networks, role models and places of residence - each learner did however aspire within their individual contexts and lives and this ultimately defined how they positioned their individual goals, and what they sought to achieve in their lives.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter however learners often respond in "chaotic and disorganized ways" to what they experience in their everyday lives. These responses are often ambiguous and contradictory as learners try to make sense of the "actual possibilities as they see, live, and embody them" (Willis, 2005: 461).

This was quite evident in learner responses to questions about what they aspired to be, how they linked this to their individual achievements, and what they think their achievements to date will lead to in the future.

5.6.1 What learners aspired for

The desire for material and consumer goods was most noticeable when learners spoke about their aspirations. This is partly informed by a social environment that repeatedly reminds learners about what they can't have when they don't succeed. Kasser (2003: x) refers to this as "society repeatedly telling us that money and possessions will make us happy, and that they are significant goals for which we should strive. So we often organize our lives around pursuing them".

Numazulu (interview I, 2011) described how she desired to be *"a very rich accountant with all the freedom and popularity that this brings- like my icon Karabo*". She noted that the absence of any real family financial support meant that *"I will have to succeed on my own and reach my dreams. I really want to be popular"*.

Nadia (interview H, 2011) saw her "future as very bright" where she would lead a decent life "like my parents" but would also experience what it was to be rich and to have a beautiful house and a car". Nadia claimed that:

> *After finishing school I want to study, preferably at UCT because it's the closest, and do something like medicine or pharmacy or some type of therapy. I have a great interest in a job that has something to do with the heart, kidneys and lungs. And when I finish my studies I will work for a little bit, then get married, and stay at home with my kid until he or she turns four or five.*

For Lydia (Interview F, 2011) "*making it big as one of the most famous ladies in Cape Town, and earning from a high paying job"* would give her the money to "really enjoy life". Lydia noted that:

> *I imagine doing very well in life. I want to first study accounts at UCT. Then when I'm a professional I will live a happy life. I won't be staying in Lansdowne anymore once I qualify. I want to have a very beautiful house in Rondebosch. My house will have a swimming pool, two lounges and two carports; one for me and another for my husband. I will have one child and I hope to have a baby girl. I just want to be very rich, having a lot of money and afford whatever I want in life (interview F: 2011).*

Abdullah (interview A, 2011) and Lesley (Interview E, 2011) similarly noted that having beautiful houses and motor vehicles were big parts of their life ambitions. Abdullah observed that "*I see myself being a very successful person in life. I want to be very educated and do better than all my family. I want to become a pulmonologist. I would also have two holiday houses along the coast. I want to build my house in our yard next to my parents and drive the latest Audi. I also want to get married and have a happy family*". Lesley asserted that he would succeed in his studies in information technology and would then go and work in the United Kingdom. *"I will be successful such that I will buy a good car and a beautiful house, and fly often to South Africa and visit my mother, brother and relatives. I want to lead a good life without any worries because I will be educated and have money".*

Other learners were a bit more circumspect and measured in their descriptions of what they aspired for. Michelle (interview G, 2011) noted that:

> *There is something that I wanted to be, but it's like because of my financial situation I can't go to do that. I wanted to be a choreographer and study at a school of arts and then I teach other people to dance and other styles and things. I have a huge passion and love for music. It does not matter what type of music. In our house there is not one type of music, it's like there are a lot of different types of music. But I keep being reminded that there are no jobs for that, that I will struggle to succeed and so now I'm actually changing my mind and thinking about being an air hostess where I can earn lots of money to pay for my further studies and then succeed.*

Peter (Interview K, 2011) similarly noted that he did not think of the future in "dreamy ways" because *"life didn't work that way. I take life as it comes, good and bad. I think sometimes that I may want to be a historian, but we'll see about that"*. Ulrike (interview M, 2011) and Prince on the other hand were clear that although they didn't know what the future held for them that they wanted to pursue careers that fitted in with who they were. Ulrike noted that *"I want to do journalism because of its power. I enjoy telling people what is happening in the world. I also like writing and I would like to know many things and experience many things"*. Prince (interview L, 2011) claimed that owning his own graphic design company would allow him to *"be independent and free-spirited while at the same time earning money"*.

Then there were learners that had not really thought about what they wanted to do in the future. In such cases they aspired for what others wanted for them. Aliyinza (interview B, 2011) spoke about wanting to become a therapist because it would *"make me independent like my aunt"*. *"Well, I like communicating with people and hearing about people's problems. I could help people and still do whatever I want without anybody bothering me"*. Khanyiswa (interview D, 2011) reflected that *"I haven't gone that far, imagining about my life. My cousin told me that she imagines my life as a nurse and not a doctor and married, though it's something that I was never gonna do. But yes, I think I will become a doctor and be able to reach out to other people who do not have anything"*.

In the above regard, Lingard and Christie (2003: 321) point out that the aspirations of learners "are often not only the product of their individual histories, but also that of their collective history- of their family and class and what they think they need to desire". In this regard, Patina (interview J, 2011) and Janine (interview C, 2011) were perhaps the only learners that aspired outside of the boundaries of their everyday realities.

Patina spoke about climbing Mount Kilimanjaro as a way of reaching the highest level that would make her happy and satisfied. As she was one of the school's top academic achievers, Patina noted that:

> *Everybody speaks about me doing medicine but I would like to take journalism as a career so that I can travel, and write about things, and see things, and find adventure. While I am open to other options I have enjoyed most being selected to be part of a journalism course at the Tygerburg campus of Stellenbosch University and have really benefitted from that.*

Ironically, unlike most learners that put a materialist spin on their aspirations, Janine highlighted how her passion for life was also her biggest aspiration. She noted that:

> *I want to study sport physiotherapy hopefully or perhaps become a poet. I just think I have to work with people because my passion is like, I am very positive and feel I have to motivate people, inspire them, and really push them. I love biology and have an interest in how the body works. I read anything about the body because I think it is important because it affects your mindset. It is important because ultimately it determines the way you live. I want to be able to help people to be positive and avoid these bodily challenges that hold them back.*

5.7 WHAT THE LEARNERS THINK ACHIEVEMENT DOES FOR THEM IN FUTURE LIVES

As noted above learner views of their aspirations and what they hope to achieve were often somewhat ambiguous. As opposed to their views of their various aspirations, learners often reverted to simple and elusive descriptions of their lives when questioned about what they thought their achievements would hold for them in the future. For many of them happiness and being helpful were their paramount concerns.

Patina (interview J, 2011) noted that:

> *When I think of my future I don’t see me owning a big house or having a flashy car. That’s not what I want for my future. What I do want is to be successful and be able to be happy with what I am doing. I don’t believe that if I have material things I’m going to be happy in my future. I want to be more world-wise and maybe live in different countries although I would still be attached to South Africa. Hopefully I would have a stable job but I’ll be doing what I enjoy. An interesting job and lots of good friends. Friends are very important.*

Michelle (interview G, 2011) also remarked about the need to live a happy life. *“I pray that my dreams come true and I am happy. I want to be a person with authority and get promoted at my work place either as an airhostess or choreographer. I see my future as successful because I have modeled my life on happy and triumphant people (like the female choreographer that I spoke about in the US)”.*

Abdullah (Interview A, 2011) went even further and noted that he would one day provide a cure for asthma and be very successful and respected.

> *When I study I will come up with better drugs that cure asthma. Actually, my brother and I have asthma and the inhalers they give us do not really help people. Yes I will do this because I'm determined to. I have always told myself that I have to and I foresee myself doing it, actually I know I will do it. In life there is always a beginning. I will make history as being the first to find the cure for asthma.*

This type of optimistic bravado and enthusiasm is described by Abrams (2010: 158) as "unexpected self belief". She notes in her study of learners in working class schools in the UK that "what was surprising about some people I met was not that they failed but that some of them didn't. Abrams (2010: 158) argued that it seemed the key for the learners to not failing was their enormous self belief, noting that the learners had this "in spades" and that it is this that carried them through their everyday challenges.

5.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined how learner understandings of achievement are influenced in crucial ways by the school that they attend and its reputation, by their parents' attitudes to schooling and their guidance and expectations about their children's education, by the kinds of role models they choose to have, by their individual capabilities and desires, and by the kinds of aspirations they hold for themselves about their future lives. Importantly these various environments and influences also expose learners to a variety of child rearing practices and experiences that equip them differently with the social, emotional, and cognitive skills and competences when they enter the school. The chapter asserted that it is this variety of influences that differently shaped the aspirations and notions of achievement of individual learners, and that learners based their views about their futures both on what was available and possible in their lives and what they thought they could dream about. In the next chapter an analysis of the learners' notions of achievement is given.

6 CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSING LEARNER VIEWS OF ACHIEVEMENT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I analyse what the 13 learners observed about achievement and aspiration in chapter 5, with particular reference to the highlighted literature and some of the noted contributions of Bourdieu, Appadurai, and Yosso. The chapter focuses on analyzing what learners said about their lived and imagined worlds and how this was articulated in relation to the social and cultural influences that shaped each of their lives.

Importantly, the previous chapter showed that learners understandings of achievement were quite complex and multifaceted, and at different times were associated with exemplary school performance, the development of defined skills, the attempt to get to a particular level of attainment for each of them, the kinds of lives different learners sought to lead, career dreams and aspirations, the kinds of role models each learner had, and their engagement with their individual schooling experience. Indeed, in treating achievement as both a goal and a means to a goal, learners often highlighted how the mastery of certain skills, social recognition, peer competition, group solidarity, personal ambition, individual interest, and various identity forms and situations differently came together to shape each of their approaches to what they sought to attain in their lives.

The chapter further highlighted that the school context mediated in key ways how learners perceived the utility of education and how learner decisions and understandings were shaped by their social and cultural background and home contexts, and what they thought they could attain (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1991).

In the sections below the chapter utilizes Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field, and capitals, as well as Appadurai’s concept ‘the capacity to aspire’ to explore what can be learnt from learner observations of their different life worlds, and what they thought they could become in the future. As Moore (2008: 108) suggests, it is in the dissimilar attitudes, dispositions, and value systems of learners in relation to their individual capitals from which varied perceptions of achievement as well as different familiarities on how to “navigate” their social spaces were generated.

In examining the complex relationships between socio-cultural background and life-world experiences that inform learner and family disposition to schooling and what they can achieve through education, the chapter highlights how economic and social capital, by enabling certain practices and experiences, were translated over time into embodied dispositions and capacities – cultural forms of capital. It explores how this led to learners negotiating their social spaces in quite different ways. It further examines the kinds of social structures and dispositions that became internalized at a young age within learners and were unconsciously embodied and reproduced within their everyday lives. The focus is thus not only on the attitudes and dispositions that learners brought with them to school, but their familiarity with or ability to navigate the social world into which they had entered. The chapter argues that it is in fact the combined effect of a learner's capitals, socio-economic background, home life, school experience, and life imaginings - and not any one factor - that led to different learner navigations and perceptions of the educational arena.

The chapter identifies four key themes and subsections wherein to capture these different influences, namely the influence of Victoria High School - and its reputation and legacies - on learner thinking, the influence of parents, family and home life on their approaches, how learners ambiguously engaged with their different capitals in conceptualizing achievement, and how learners understood 'the good life' and how they could attain this.

In the analysis it should be noted that learners offered differing observations also because of their respective ages (fifteen and seventeen). In this regard Agarwal and Misra (1986) caution that younger learners often set themselves lower goals and aspirations, and that as they got older these got amplified. They point out that achievement should thus always be addressed as a developmental and fluid process that occurs across a learner's lifespan.

As noted in earlier chapters learner views of achievement are closely shaped by their aspirations, which is turn are influenced by their different 'capacities' to aspire (Appadurai, 2004). The analysis thus begins by exploring how the previous experiences of parents and siblings in successfully navigating educational contexts, as well as the role of Victoria High School, developed the kinds of capitals that may have shaped learner capacities to aspire.

6.2 IMAGINING SCHOOLING AND VICTORIA HIGH

Bok (2010) has noted that learner aspirations are frequently framed by the dreams and desires of their parents or siblings; informed mainly by the various difficulties and challenges that they (parents) had encountered when they were at school. Many parents and siblings go through many trials and ordeals to provide for their children in terms of paying for the different costs associated with education, as well as for their overall sustenance. Furthermore, how learners aspire is also often shaped by the difficult and struggling lifestyles experienced in their current homes, where parents and siblings remind learners to ensure that their present experiences and ways of living are not repeated (Ball et al, 2002).

Many learners often aspire to become particular kinds of successful professionals and entrepreneurs (no matter how this fitted into their individual interests and preoccupations) to avoid the kinds of lives that their parents had had to endure (Bok, 2010: 171). Bourdieu (1997: 190) refers to this as a form of embodied cultural capital where the learners and their parents developed dispositions and made meaning in given contexts that shaped the attitudes, preferences, perceptions, and values that they attached to their school and work decisions.

In this regard, seventeen year-old Janine spoke about wanting to go to university to study English (and develop into a poet) or physiotherapy in the previous chapter, but noted that because of her aged father that lived in an old age home, her aged aunt with whom she lived, and the limited financial resources that she would be able to access, she needed to be practical about the career path she chose. Similarly, fifteen-year old Numazulu observed that because she had never had a stable home life with both an absent mother and father, she regarded money and its acquisition ‘as the source of all happiness’. With this in mind, Numazulu naively noted that she intended to study financial management at the University of Cape Town, even though her grades for mathematics was very low and she could not afford to pay for extra tuition.

The same mindset applied to Aliyinza and Michelle. Aliyinza spent most of her weekends and free time helping her parents hold onto their current standard of living via the small businesses that they operated. Aliyinza noted that even though her parents wanted her to study medicine after she matriculated and had sent her to Victoria High to ensure that she had the grades to do this, she had become much more pragmatic about her life and “would study in a profession that suits my abilities and skills – like accounting- as long as it gets me to acquire the (material) things that I need in future”. Michelle noted that because she lived in Mitchells Plain with her mother and they struggled to survive financially, she could not follow “my passion for choreography”. “This is totally unrealistic”, she noted, *“as I won’t probably study any further because of my low grades, I have to look to a career like becoming an air hostess as the best way forward. Maybe after I have achieved and am well-off, I will then be able to study further and do choreography”.*

Unlike groups with greater access to financial resources and whose aspirations are conditioned by multi-generational university experience, many learners at Victoria High School noted that they often had to look beyond their families and local communities for encouragement and belief to study further. They reflected that many of their parents had not had many educational opportunities in their lives and thus did not necessarily know what approach to follow with their children. In that respect, the capacities of parents to make powerful decisions in support of their children relied heavily on how they envisaged their children's future educational lives and the school context that they believed would best provide for them.

In the thesis it has been suggested that parental access to a grapevine knowledge socially embedded in networks and localities, although distributed very unevenly across communities (Ball & Vincent, 1998: 377), occurred mainly through their past associations and presumptions about Victoria High school and in relation to the upward mobility (through academic performance) that they thought the school could offer their children.

In the sections below the chapter explores the influence of decisions by parents on their children and the ways in which this slotted in with the reputation and practices of Victoria High School. The chapter then analyses the habitus of learners at various points that created the conditions for their engagement and nurturing of particular kinds of capitals in their lives.

6.3 THE DIFFERENT FIELDS IN THE LIVES OF LEARNERS

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 7) note that a field is simultaneously a space of conflict and competition in which participants fight to take control over the different forms of capital within it, where both people who dominate and who are dominated exist. Bourdieu further notes that there can be a number of fields with particular given boundaries at any one time within which participants contest according to given sets of rules. In this regard the home and the school are regarded as but two such fields in which different forms of knowledge and understanding are fought over; with those who think they know or who understand how to play the 'game' often emerging as victors with particular consequences for those who don't know or who don't follow the rules (Tranter, 1994: 6).

In the study most of the learners noted that they had enrolled at Victoria High School because their parents had decided that they would. Learners attended the school from areas like Khayelitsha, Mitchells Plain, Manenberg, Gugulethu, Heideveld, and Rylands because parents believed that their children would benefit from the high levels of education provided at Victoria High. Parents based these decisions on the reputation of the school, on the fact that either they or their siblings were old students of the school and were aware of its credentials, or because they themselves had always previously wanted to attend the school. Michelle noted that when she was at primary school her mother had decided *"that you're going to Victoria High because it is a good school that will lead to you achieving"*. Khanyiswa asserted that her parents had sent her there because they wanted her to apply for medicine at UCT and decided that Victoria High would provide her with the necessary social and academic skills and networks that would ensure this. *"I didn't want to attend Victoria High"*, said Khanyiswa. *"It was my parents who chose it for me because of its popularity and great academic achievement"*. Bourdieu (cited in Lareau, 1987: 74) reflects that it is the 'cultural dispositions' and desires in the home that takes form over a period of time and often influences the ways in which learners experience education.

Bourdieu (1997) notes that parents also often rely on forms of objectified cultural capital that they hope will assist their children. They try as best possible to expose their children to computers and other forms of electronic media as a way of broadening their cognitive abilities and increasing their opportunities for better life and school possibilities. Indeed, many learners noted in the study that their parents went even further and invested heavily in extra tuition for them. Where learners showed potential to do better and get access to further education, many parents 'dug deep' into their financial and other resources (whether they could afford to do so or not) to assist their children. This included the costs of tutors, the extra time and petrol costs it took to take them there. It was only parents who simply could not afford the costs of extra tuition at all or who felt that their children were not doing academically well enough to warrant the costs that did not contribute in this way.

Bourdieu (1986: 19) argues that by paying for extra classes parents hope to increase the chance that their children will academically achieve and thereby put them "ahead of the game". Learners like Khanyiswa invested heavily even though she couldn't necessarily afford to. Khanyiswa noted that:

> *I go for extra lessons in Maths, English and Accounting at Cape Peninsula University in Cape Town every Saturday during the first, second and third term. It cost R500 per subject and R250 registration so it's R1750 per year- which is half of the full annual school fees at Victoria High.*

With regard to the above where parents and learners noted their relative preferences for the learners' future, all appeared to be well aware of the limitations that framed the kinds of aspirations they could have. Nonetheless, their observations also appeared to illustrate a firm sense of identity formation taking place, where they were all thinking about the future in terms of available skills, interests and capitals, as well as the key relation to family context and the available future support for education.

The field of the school

It can be argued that it was in thinking about what they sought to achieve in future life that learners and their parents looked towards the school, both to turn learners into successful applicants at university later on and to provide the guidance and know-how that gave them access to the cultural and social capital that many of them did not have. In that regard, the institution that was Victoria High School played a critical role in both the learners and their parents imaginaries of their futures, as well as what they all sought to achieve at school (Chenoweth and Galliher, 2004).

With regard to Victoria High School, besides the key social structures and dispositions linked to the structural aspects of the school, educators and professionals also had particular aspirations and understandings of achievement that they expected learners to internalize. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) note in this regard that the internalised social structures and dispositions that operated within the school space were meant to be unconsciously developed within learners and reproduced daily through their everyday experiences.

Moreover, learners were exposed to a schooling life that not only comprised of dominant social figures and authorities but also contained a defined curriculum, set of physical resources, group of educators, developed reward system, and historical relations with particular communities and individuals. These combined to create a prevailing atmosphere that learners had to engage with.

Notably, management member Mr. Williams noted in 2010 that:

> *At this school we do tend to place a higher emphasis on academic achievement; the ability to get to the academic program and to have academic success. It's not the only way that we measure achievement because we have children that come to school and they grow in different ways, achieve in different fields, in different areas. Yes, you get a child who is a sportsperson and who achieves and finds success on sporting fields or sporting arena. And you get a child who works in societies and achieves certain degree of success and prominence in that area. But the big emphasis at Victoria High School is certainly on academic achievement.*

As a schooling environment (field) that learners had to daily negotiate, it could be said that Victoria High school created not only the terms by which learners experienced schooling but also how they understood achievement.

When asked to define achievement and the ways in which the school approached its learners, Mr. Williams asserted that because achievement was such a broad concept that operated at a personal, collective and institutional level and meant different things to different people at different times, the ways in which the school approached their learners often called upon the historical ways in which they serviced them, as well as a graded approach to what was possible and necessary. He observed that:

> *In terms of school performance if we were really honest, the children who do well at this school come from better resourced homes or from homes where there is a great parental influence, they also tend to be more successful and are generally high achievers. But again it's how you view achievement. If it's about attaining a particular objective then if you got 40% before and you improved by 10% then that could be seen as achievement. Achievement is not only about getting 80%, it is about getting to a particular goal that learners set for themselves or that are set for them. In our school we have a legacy of producing learners that become doctors and so many parents send their children to us thinking of them becoming doctors one day. They make that kind of connection. But then we are also a lot about development, development towards achievement. The way the child conducts himself in the classroom, the line of argument, the clarity of thought, the clarity of expression, the ways in which learners debate with one another in search of answers, when they walk out of class thinking what was discussed and have different windows that have opened in their minds. Some of the school's reputation is measurable by exam results, but a lot of it is not measurable in that way.*

Mr. Williams noted however that while academic achievement was certainly a key school ethos that was constantly nurtured, the school was firmly committed to all their learners and the provision of a quality education that allowed each learner to engage with their individual possibilities. Mr. Williams pointed out that:

> *If you ask any of our teachers why they stay on in the profession where the level of abuse is so high they will probably tell you about the rare moments that they bask in learners turning from buds into flowers and so expose their beauty to everyone. When teachers can say I played a role in that- not just learners excelling in academic work but in all sorts of other activities, then they remind themselves that that is why they do the job. It is a sense of achievement that you can't put down on paper.*

Importantly, this understanding of learners and educators at Victoria High is as much part of the legacy and institutional routine of the school as it is part of what teachers and administrators currently provide. An old educator at Victoria High School noted in a newspaper report in 2011 for example that:

> *Compared with the school that I attended in Fish Hoek the facilities at Victoria High was very poor and crowded where sometimes classes had to be conducted in the cloakrooms. Monies spent on each pupil were very low. But in a setting of depression, poverty and repression in the 1970s I saw the best teaching I have ever seen in my life. The reason was simple. The teachers were all completely dedicated. They were all disciplined, hard working, and devoted to the well-being of their pupils. Some went beyond into the realm of heroism. There was no better program of education (www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view).*

Some may well argue that the above understanding of the contribution of Victoria High to learner imaginations could be regarded as what Bourdieu (1990) refers to as a form of 'misrecognition' - where what was constituted as normal, natural, and necessary has simply become bound up in creating the 'way things are' and where various parents, learners, teachers and administrators have become (unknowingly) complicit in legitimizing a particular way of looking at the world (natural order of things) and their role in it. Nash (2002: 279) notes in this regard that many schools and their practices often take on a special status in the minds of the public (and aspirant enrollees) via rituals, rules, and the imagined performances that are often associated with them.

Moreover, others may also note that what learners say in the study may not necessarily apply to many other learners at Victoria High School presently. Nonetheless, it is only for the learners that partook in this study. It is argued that Victoria High School as a particular field played a crucial and significant role in learner, parent, and teacher understandings of achievement and links to overall aspirations (Thomson, 2008b: 70).

The preceding paragraphs highlighted how the various learners' dispositions became finely and even unconsciously attuned to the social practices and structure of the school and how their individual aspirations were often intertwined within structured dispositions and the development of different forms of cultural capital. The school's context, history, reputation, and curriculum offerings undoubtedly influenced learners' aspirations and notions of achievement. As noted across the thesis however, the school and home experiences of learners were but two fields that organized learner aspirations and understandings of achievement.

The next section examines the different ways in which learners' aspirations and notions of achievement emerged in relation to their home and school habitus.

6.4 LEARNER HABITUS AND THE CAPITALS THEY DISPLAYED

Bourdieu (1990b) uses the concept of habitus to refer to the general dispositions (ways of doing, of reacting, of being) which result from the internalization and accumulation of past learning; a form of know-how instilled by the family, the school, and the broader social environment as part of the generalized process of socialisation. Bourdieu suggests that learners only really become aware of their habitus when they become immersed in a totally different milieu, a milieu whose rules of the game they do not know. Thus, when learners enter institutional domains it is the relationship between learner habitus and the school (field) that a relationship of conditioning occurs where the dominant power is woven into both the field and the habitus. Notably, the social class formations that emerge at such places also serve as both their objective location, and what individuals do in relation to this location - whether consciously or not (Lareau 1987).

Moreover, Bourdieu (1986) notes that the ways in which learners navigate the space between the fields in which they operate and their habitus are crucially shaped by the different forms of capital that they have access to. Bourdieu (1986: 15) defines capital as "accumulated labour in all its materialized and embodied forms, that when appropriated by private individuals enable them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour". As such Bourdieu identified four forms of capital that learners accumulated in relation to particular spaces and contexts, namely economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital. Reay (2000) and Yosso (2005) have identified two further capitals, namely emotional capital and familial capital. For the chapter both learner habitus and learner capitals are discussed at the same time in the sections below.

The sections examine the ways in which the organizational cultures of the school and home served as different kinds of habitus that not only reflected and mirrored other wider socio-economic cultures but enabled conditions of living and trajectories that for various learners were very different from those they experienced before (Reay, 2004: 433). In such spaces learners were propelled forward by the kinds of knowledge, privileges, and capitals that each of them had developed and carried with them. Capitals in this respect were particular forms of power that learners utilized, and that shaped their worlds.

6.4.1 Material aspirations and economic capital

For example, learners that come from socio-economic environments where their parents or families possessed neither the economic nor the cultural capital to create a warm, stimulating, and empowering educational environment in which to support their children, often struggled at schools that have 'high academic achievement agendas' (Sweeney, 2002). While they carried other valuable and functional capitals around with them, because such capitals were not cherished in the school context, the children often became further marginalized and alienated (Davies-Kean & Sexton, 2009: 286).

In the portrait provided of Numazulu it was notable for example that she came from a particularly broken family and had little access to either economic or cultural capital. While her grandmother with whom she stayed was unemployed, her mother (who lived elsewhere and alone in another part of the township) didn't earn enough to offer her some of the things that other adolescents easily received. She also didn't have access to their familial parental attention, both in terms of love and stability, and support with doing her homework and learning about life. Furthermore, Numazulu did not have a desk to work on or the other kinds of cultural capital like books and access to the internet that could help her with her studies in the absence of her parents and familial support. In a number of ways Numazulu lacked key forms of cultural capital that could assist her to reach her goals. She recalled for instance that *"I don't read at home. If I read, I only read an interesting book"*.

It is asserted that not only did this lack of cultural and economic capital shape her habitus and her engagement with her schoolwork (where she was struggling academically) but that it also shaped her aspirations and the kind of life she imagined for herself in the future. Numazulu freely spoke about her need "to get as much money as she could to make life easy", without having a clear idea of what she needed to do or have to achieve this. Fataar (2010) refers to this seeming contradiction as learners with 'thin capitals' having 'thick aspirational terrain'.

Ankomah (2003:2) denotes the above as "people tending to resort to materialistic values and desires when their needs for security, safety, and sustenance are not fully satisfied…. where people experience situations that threaten their security and they then adopt materialistic values as coping mechanisms". The strong urge to accumulate material assets and wealth is not uncommon amongst learners that come from poor socio-economic environments, notes Kasser (2003: x), notwithstanding it creating a particular, limiting and often inaccessible life-world imaginary for them.

Lydia similarly hoped to improve her social standing in her future life, claiming that “*I won’t be staying in Lansdowne much longer. I will have a very beautiful house in Rondebosch. My house will have a swimming pool, two lounges and two carports; one for me and another for my husband. I just want to be very rich, have a lot of money and afford whatever I want in life*”. It is not inconceivable that this desire for material, tangible, and noticeable items have a particular ‘achievement’ value for such learners in a world in which consumerist, commercial and global standards hold sway. Indeed, Rosen (2004: 27) notes that “in contrast to the urban young people of the 1980s” that were often “searching for life’s meaning”, it is unsurprising that contemporary youth have become overly success-oriented and materialistic; constantly seeking the “good life” (this is further discussed later in the chapter).

Quicker, Galesi and Bhatani Khalfani (cited in Fielding, Clarke and Witt 2000: 4, 19) suggest that because only certain (disdained) types of work are often open to contemporary youth when they enter the labour market, contemporary youth have tended to become preoccupied with accumulation, and less interested in academic achievement. They note that it was then not the lack of work in the contemporary world that bothered youth, but rather the type of work and available wages that they were not willing to accept. Victoria High school management member, Mr. Goosen, pointed out in this regard that *“if you read magazines and watch television programs they all say the same: achievement is measured by what you own not what you know or do”*.

6.4.2 Pragmatism as habitus and form of cultural capital

On the other hand, many learners that had access to certain levels of cultural and economic capital tended to be less ‘materialistic’ and more focused on popularity, recognition and happiness. Khanyiswa explained for example that while she did not necessarily get good grades, with hard work and the support of her parents and university-going siblings it was highly likely that she would get into university upon matriculation. She noted that spending holidays doing part-time work, and her many weekends attending extra tuition classes at university gave her an industrious edge that showed diligence and dedication. She suggested that this would build up within her the kind of understanding (cultural capital) that was needed to succeed in the dominant world. *“Achievement is what a person gains over time”*, noted Khanyiswa, *“and had everything to do with the determination to get this or that”*. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) refer to this as a form of social reproduction that somehow “transmutes the effects of social origins to academic performance”.

Prince similarly noted that because all his siblings were at university and his Congolese parents were successful businesspeople, his home environment was characterized by lots of reading, studying, and the broadening of his cognitive skills (such as computers and gaming). Prince felt that exposure to the tastes, habits, and mannerisms associated with prosperity had made him realize that he could aspire to a vocation and a way of living that better suited his desires, needs, and social awareness. He claimed that he could be more pragmatic about his aspirations and could rather set sights on becoming a graphic designer than computer science and that this fitted in more neatly with his drawing capabilities. Notably, these observations by Khanyiswa and Prince need to be understood in relation to the school they attend, the small amount of school fees they pay compared to other more affluent schools, and the difficult kinds of social problems evident within the school. It could be asked why they attend Victoria High school if their levels of cultural capital are such that they are supposedly able to make more independent and less ‘materialistic’ life choices.

Their pragmatism was quite different to that of Michelle who fully realized that her financial situation would not allow her to study further after matriculation. She noted that *“I wanted to be a choreographer and study at a school of art and then I would teach other people to dance and other styles and things. But now I have to think about how I will survive”*. Ridge (2002) observes in this regard that learners that grow up in adverse circumstances or experience poverty often exclude themselves ‘from within’ when they begin to realize that some paths are inappropriate or unaffordable for them. Furlong and Biggart (1999) suggest that aspirations for such learners are fundamentally shaped by the kinds of feedback they get from their peers and from their experiences and understanding of everyday challenges and labour market opportunities. In that respect, while aspirations may contribute to the movement of individuals within schools and education systems, it is the particular dynamics, nature, and context of the different aspirations that learners are able to attain their various individual goals (Reay 2001: 69).

6.4.3 Happiness as habitus, social and emotional capital

The two learners that did seem to have high levels of social, cultural, and economic capitals among the study participants were Ulrike and Patina. Ulrike was an exchange student from Germany whose father was a police officer and her mother a Polish translator. They lived a comfortable life in Germany and had access to all the normal cultural capitals associated with living a middle class life in Europe. Ulrike also had access to the kinds of social networks and relationships that created for her life conditions that were financially and socially durable, sustainable and guaranteed (Bourdieu, 1986: 22). Her social capital was a unique resource that provided her with critical networks to develop and progress in life. Indeed, the nature of her social capital connected in crucial ways her cultural and economic capitals. Patina was a vibrant grade 11 learner that was one of the top learners at the school and was being groomed for key leadership roles within the school. Both her parents were successful professionals (a nurse and an education district officer), which meant that she had access to the cultural, social, and economic capitals that neatly fitted with her high academic grades. Patina thus did not only own strong capitals at school level but also had easy access to different forms of capital at home. It is ironic in both Ulrike and Patina's cases that they wanted to become journalists and travel the world. Both learners were operating at the highest academic levels in the school and were easily the better academic students, yet they did not aspire to careers that correlated in conventional ways with their 'abilities'.

Patina noted that the one thing that she had learnt from her parents was that after working for more than 40 years as successful professionals they were still not happy in their jobs. She observed that because her parents constantly spoke to her about aspiring to and choosing a career that would offer her fulfillment and 'happiness', she had always adopted an approach to her schooling and her achievements that emphasized growth, development, and satisfaction and that this had ironically helped her to do 'even better'. Patina conceded though that her parents could only say what they did (choosing a happy career) because they were financially comfortable, that this created the social and cultural space for them to think of 'alternative' life imaginaries. Ulrike's comfortable lifestyle similarly provided her with the economic space to concentrate on her desire to do well and help others, to focus on happiness and contentment, and to zoom in on what would bring her purpose and fulfillment.

Ulrike and Patina furthermore, had significantly high levels of emotional capital that helped keep them grounded and focused on what they could and wanted to do. Reay (2000: 572) notes in this regard that the emotional capital generated within the affective relationships of family and friends that cared about them invariably provided them with the emotional resources that they needed to successfully navigate their paths through life. Emotional capital constituted the knowledge, contacts, and relations within social and family networks that gave learners the strength, patience, and commitment to pursue their dreams (Wilkinson, 1995; Zembylas, 2007). It is this disposition and capital that allowed Ulrike and Patina to aspire to enjoyment and peace. Patina noted that goals and achievements were "*the fundamental bricks for the building of my aspirations*", that through achieving she had discovered the techniques needed to accomplish things and to attain her aspirational goals. Achieving was thus her ‘map’ and her vehicle to get where she needed to be.

6.4.4 Religion as a form of capital

Hansen (209:193) asserts that religion was yet another important capital that assisted learners to make sense of their worlds. He claims that religion provided ways of claiming respect and recognition as a ‘proper’ person from the society in which individuals lived, and that it brought forth attached notions of decency that broadened the intellectual capacities of learners in ways which lessened them partaking in offensive behaviour; thus shaping particular attitudes to learning and achieving.

In the study there were a number of learners and their families that were deeply religious and that seemed to approach their aspirations and achievements in ways that reflected this. Nadia for example came from a strictly religious Muslim family. She noted that her religious upbringing had reminded her *“to be submissive and always morally acceptable”* and that “*my parents instruct me what to do and don’t allow me to question them. They just tell me we’re your parents and these are our rules. That’s how they are. But I try to respect them because in my religion you must always respect what your parents say (unless they are wrong)”*. Nadia recalled that achieving for her was ‘living a decent life, considering everyone around you, following the rules of society, having integrity at all times, and always being an acceptable and conscientious member of society”. These, she claimed, were fundamental teachings in her religion on how to aspire and lead a decent and successful life.

Janine further noted that as a practicing Christian a key characteristic of her faith was to be ‘considerate to others’ at all times and to uphold values and morals, and to practice tolerance, that then lead to the development of society. Lydia asserted that her spiritual background had taught her how to be patient and how to appreciate that she would not always get what she wanted in life. She recalled that at church she had desperately wanted to be in the youth choir but had been blocked from doing so. *“They said I should wait and that I needed to follow the rules, which had taught me that achieving is about how well you follow the rules”*. In this regard, she observed that “*when my mother comes home from work and she finds that I have done the cooking and cleaning, she smiles and that I think is achievement. My father told me I mustn’t follow peer pressure and fall pregnant. When I listen to what my dad tells me that is also achievement”*.

The above extracts suggest that religious capital shaped the ways in which learners thought about their futures and their aspirations in important, yet quite different ways. Religion provided the emotional and spiritual energy and stability that assisted many of them to chart pathways for themselves with clarity and purpose. On the other hand, it also reinforced the dominant status quo and got learners to abide by the dominant values, rules and norms of the school they attended. Their aspirational maps thus shaped and were shaped by the levels of religious capital that many learners carried with them.

6.4.5 Role models as capital

How learners think about their futures is often also influenced in key ways by the kinds of role models they have. Often these role models share similar backgrounds with them or serve to provide them hope and encouragement to attain the kinds of goals they had set for themselves. Some learners look up to their parents as models for them to follow, while others idolize their siblings, family members, or other members of the community. Still others model themselves on television celebrities, sports stars, or prominent international activists. Often role models are fashioned according to the various social, cultural, economic and social capitals that learners have at their disposal, capitals that reflect learner aspirations and the kinds of relationships that could possibly be formed (Furlong and Biggart, 1999).

For the study what was striking about the role models for the various learners was that they were diverse and influenced learners' aspirations in very different ways. One example of this was Ulrike's role model (her mother) "who was a strong woman, grew up in Poland without much, and yet still did everything well, whatever she did". This form of capital in Ulrike's home had seemingly led her to realise that *"achievement is attaining a desired dream that didn't simply come. You work for it and when you get it, that's achievement"*. For Ulrike achievement came after persistent effort and perseverance, and was best described as the "*ability to be a successful and respected member of the society one lives in*". On the other hand, Lydia's role models were her rich aunt and her husband who was a professional footballer. She modelled her life on them because they were rich and successful and led a 'good life', and she wanted to study accountancy at university to ensure that she would follow in their footsteps. In noting the role of role models in shaping the aspirations of learners it was thus important not only to note the different role models that learners had but also to remind that depending on the role model, learner aspirations were shaped in quite different ways.

6.4.6 Familial Capital

All learners have different levels of familial capitals that result in them aspiring in particular ways. Often the emotional and moral commitments that families offer learners differ in relation to the funds of knowledge available and to the kinds of learning pedagogies available in each home (Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, 1992). Levels of emotional capital are also transmitted through quite different practices and some families are better able to pass on emotional capital than others.

Nadia for example noted that while her mother couldn't assist her much in her schoolwork (because she had left school at a young age), she provided her with important emotional and physical support every day, whether that was bringing her coffee when she studied, talking to her about her struggles and how she could deal with them, or arranging for extra tuition classes when she needed them. *"My mother worked in their family business from young, and my father also left school early*". Importantly for Nadia both her parents were keen to support her and to motivate her, and this provided her with useful support in her everyday struggles.

Their familial support was different to that provided by Lydia's mother, who was always there to support her child educationally and emotionally. Because her mother could assist her in her homework Lydia spent a great deal of time with her and this provided her with a different kind of capital (one that was not easily measurable). Peter on the other hand received no support from any sibling or parent and struggled a lot with his schooling. Peter noted that *"I don't really look into the future and take life as it comes, either bad or good. With my family background it is almost impossible to achieve anything. Nobody cares and nobody helps me. What can one do?"*

From the above it is notable that particular and varying levels of economic, social, cultural, religious, emotional, and familial capital influence the way the learners aspired and thought about achievement in relation to their habitus. Yosso (2005) notes in this regard that learners gain a variety of things from their kinship ties, community networks and familial relations, which include emotional, moral, educational, and occupational consciousnesses that serve as investments (cultural, educational, and human capital) possessed by different families in different ways.

Indeed, the points above demonstrate, along with the other (various) observations provided in the chapter, that achievement cannot be understood in a linear and one-dimensional way, and that different learners approached the concept in ways that had pertinence to their particular individual lives and aspirations. In concluding the chapter, the next section highlights the influence of geographical location on the imaginations of the learners and explores what the notion of ‘a good life’ meant to many of them.

6.5 THE ‘GOOD LIFE’ IN STRUGGLING SPACES

In chapters 5 and 6 it was noted that the physical locations where learners live and from where they travel daily seemed to influence in very harsh ways how learners understood and approached achievement.

Indeed, even though it meant travelling long distances every day, many learners enrolled at Victoria High to get away from the “noisy, poorly resourced, drug affected, poor quality teaching” schools in the townships. Wilson (1996) has observed that disadvantaged neighborhoods often provide a fertile backdrop in which problem behaviors (e.g., violence, school dropout, and school failure) and oppositional values flourish and spread. This meant that parents who had high aspirations and expectations for the futures of their children inevitably resolved to send their children to schools outside the townships. Their main motivation for doing so was to counter the oppositional values prevalent in schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods and the low levels of expectations of learners there.

Patina suggested that:

> *I think that where you live have a lot of influence on you, because once you live in an area that is perhaps not exactly what you would want to be in, it does affect the way you feel about yourself. If there is no support in the community, even from your family you tend to feel like you can’t achieve much. And also the ways you spend your weekends affects the way you feel and what you think.*

Michelle noted that:

I try to stay away from everything that happens in our area. None of our family members have gone through the bad things that happen around here. We don’t follow people in the community. We stick to what is right. I am not a person who you’d think lives in an area like that. I don’t conduct myself in that manner.

Numazulu and Aliyinza also stayed in a township. They also found the township to be very noisy and disorganised, noting that many people in the neighbourhood could not find work and thus spent their days at home. They claimed that this distracted them in terms of doing their homework and in terms of the kinds of energy that was needed to stay focused every day on what needed to be done. In this regard, Wilson (1991) claims that young people often become "incoherent" in their thinking because of the lack of structuring norms that were being modelled by working adults.

It is notable however, that learners that attend Victoria High School have historically lived a fair distance from the school and thus these challenges are not new to the school and its learners. What is striking however in recent times is the longer distance that learners have had to travel. This has changed both the school dynamics in important ways, and developed alternative spaces of social interaction that have not been understood or regulated. Firstly, whereas in previous years the school engaged in a variety of extra-mural and after-school activities, because learners spend between 1-2 hours travelling home these activities have basically been discontinued. This has taken away a key arena within the school within which cultural and social capital was built and developed. Secondly, learners noted that they spent a large portion of their day on public transport and often had to resort to doing their homework on the bus, relying on fellow travelling learners for advice. Learners noted that the learning and peer cultures that they developed in such spaces were invariably brought into the classroom, even though it was inevitably sneered at and dismissed. In the above section it has been suggested that the space between the school and the home played a crucial role in how learners imagined their lives and their futures. These shaped their notions of achievement in ways that remain misunderstood.

6.5.1 What does the good life represent for learners?

Appadurai (2004) has noted that all learners (evenly) hold aspirations and that particular desires for the future are not exclusively held by more affluent or powerful groups. Learners, whatever their socio-economic background, cognitive capacities, home environments, or levels of academic achievement, can dream, imagine about, and yearn for exactly the same things.

Appadurai cautions however that it is in the capacity to aspire, which is shaped by the social, cultural, and economic experiences of learners, where things are not evenly distributed. How learners get access to the capacities to dream and to think about what their futures could be is what the chapter has thus far tried to explore. In the section below the chapter seeks to connect how learners view achievement to their heterogenous visions of ‘a good life’. In so doing the chapter highlights the surprisingly ‘optimistic and hopeful visions’ amongst all the learners in the study of their futures (Bok, 2010).

It is notable however, from the feedback of the various learners, that learners from within similar socio-economic groups and with similar levels of capitals often did not have the same kind of outlook of what constituted the 'good life'.

Patina for example highlighted in Chapter 5 that she had a significant capacity to aspire based on her family background, her schooling experience, and the kinds of educational and learning experiences that she had thus far been exposed to (outside of school). This enabled her to have a more developed aptitude to imagine a different future life. Appadurai (2004: 69) notes in this regard that learners from more affluent, powerful, or knowledgeable groups often have more experience reading 'navigational maps' and are in a position to 'share this knowledge with one another more routinely'.

The same capacity noted above can similarly be attributed to Abdullah. Both his parents and his sister are teachers, and both his brothers are engineers. He too performed well in his academic studies and had access to the cultural and social capitals that suggested that he would attain his aspirational goals. Because all his family members also did very well in their own social lives, they were able to easily assist him and encourage him to work hard and diligently.

On the other hand, Numazulu and Nadia both came from socio-economic backgrounds where their parents struggled to provide for them at the daily sustenance and educational levels. Numazulu had little access to the emotional, familial, cultural or social capital that could 'put her ahead of the game'. She lived with her retired grandmother and hardly saw either her mother or her estranged father. Though she diligently got up every morning at 5am to get ready for school and sacrificed much to attend school, Numazulu simply did not access to the kinds of capital that would contribute to her achieving her goals. While Nadia had the emotional and familial support of her parents as well as the stability and calmness that came from her religious capital, she neither had the economic or cultural capital to make a concerted push to attain her aspirational goals.

In the above regard Appadurai (2004: 68) asserts that because aspirations are determined in relation to everyday living and common communities that they tend to reflect similar desires found amongst those that inhabit these common spaces. In the study this claim was problematized and found wanting.

Abdullah for example regarded a 'good life' as having two holiday homes, the latest Audi, and a successful career, while Patina (roughly in the same social group as he) regarded travelling the world, climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, following a career that made her happy and having purpose, and contribute to community development. For Nadia and Numazulu, both from struggling socio-economic environments, the ‘good life’ for the former entailed living ‘a respectful and decent life’ that fitted in with her religious views, while the latter saw it as ‘getting as much money as possible to enjoy’.

Holt (2008: 233) suggests in the above regard that where dominant relations in society are reproduced via the habitus and the everyday practices of learners, social class expressions are not often uniform. Differences and status distinctions within social classes abound, where ranking takes place both in terms of financial prosperity and according to ‘performed’ levels of achievement and types of aspirations (Parsons, Adler and Kaczala, 1982). The ‘good life’ is an elusive term that frames individual learners understanding of achievement in very different ways.

6.6 CONCLUSION

The discussion in this chapter has analysed what can be learnt from learner aspirations and views of achievement in a given school and social context. It has shown how the school that the learners attended, the aspirations of parents and siblings, the capitals located in their broader families, the influence of peer groups, role models, religion, neighbourhood and the various capitals obtainable in each of the environments, together provided a particular life world and social imagination for each of the learners (Hauser and Anderson, 1991).

7 CONCLUSION

A focus on the views of youth at one high school in Cape Town provides a particular depiction of the social landscape of the city and its operation. It provides insight into how power and agency, public, national, and domestic spaces and identities play themselves out in the lives of youth, bearing in mind their different articulations and disjunctures, and the role of memory, social change, history, and social formulations like race, class and gender involved therein (Durham, 2000: 113).

Youth in the city are regarded as important ‘social shifters’ that engage daily in reformulations of the social imagination of the city. In being key agents in generational debates about what is most coveted, through these imaginings they daily co-construct new worlds and futures (Durham, 2000: 113). In this regard, urban youth are what Willis (2005: 461) refers to “as the compulsory living materials of particular imaginings and moldings”.

It is notable that as a social category the idea of youth as an in-between group that are separate and in need of protection and privilege was only really generated over the course of the twentieth century (Dimitriadis, 2008: 13), and emerged mainly so that those that were not adults or young children could be better managed, cultivated, and prepared for work in a rapidly modernizing and developing world. As such, the idea of youth (as a category) was important to the formation of the modern state and took its place therein over more than a century via state-mandated education (Willis, 2005: 461). The school as a key institution was thus imagined with a particular idea of youth in mind.

In a study that explores how youth at one school ‘think’, the above point was important because it suggested that the views of youth signified that of the schools they attended as much as it did theirs. It suggested that as youth went about “profoundly conditioning what gets played out socially and culturally” (Willis, 2005: 461) through their imaginings, that the school played a crucial role in how they did that. As a physical site the school was also where youth dialectically played out the contradictions that daily confronted them, and had ‘enormous social power’ and relevance (Willis, 2005: 461) not only for how they (youth) thought about it, but also for how their parents, as well as administrators and educators, engaged with it (the school).

7.1 SCHOOLS AND ACHIEVEMENT

For the thesis the school site was regarded as an important social structure within which various social and learning discourses played themselves out. It was argued that the schooling context of Victoria High School framed the ways in which youth engaged with, and thought about, their dreams, desires, and aspirations, that not only influenced their schooling experiences but fulfilled an integral part of their individual identity-making processes. It was asserted that within the school learners engaged with a variety of discourses that shaped how they approached their schooling lives. One of these discourses was that of achievement.

With regard to the above the thesis started out by arguing that 'achievement was more than simply student academic results' that allowed only those that got good results to be acknowledged and valued. It claimed instead that all learners thought deeply about achievement and that in order to get a better idea of what the concept meant within schools, learner aspirations needed to be more closely explored. It was suggested that learner aspirations crucially influenced how students learnt, how they prepared for their future lives, and how they thought and felt about themselves and what they wanted. And thus, it was claimed, it was only logical that if learners' life aspirations differed, that learners attitudes towards achievement would also then differ.

The goal of the study was to explore how learner views of achievement connected with their individual aspirations, as a way of showing not only the multifaceted and contradictory nature of the debate but capturing how the economic, the social, and the cultural came together to frame the life worlds of some learners (Bourdieu, 1986).

In discussions with the thirteen learners that partook in the study it was immediately found that learners had quite different views about and starting points with regard to achievement. This fitted in with Agarwal & Misra's (1986: 718) argument that "people differ in their conception of goals that generate the feelings of achievement and the means through which they try to attain those goals". Some of the learners for example regarded achievement as 'what a person is able to attain and do', 'the culmination of working towards something and getting it', while others saw it as 'developing sets of skills to succeed, 'setting goals to work towards, and 'overcoming your immediate challenges'. These were quite different beginnings and thus the thesis needed to develop a framework that explained how different learners organized their thoughts and feelings in relation to who they were, the different ways they approached their lives and schooling, and what it was they told themselves to get there. This framework was based on the kinds of issues that learners spoke about, such as their aspirations, their lives at home and in the community, their social class desires, their role models, religion, their parents, their access to media and technology, and how they engaged with their schooling. It was also based on what the learners said about their "possible selves", about what they might become, about what they did not want to become, about the things they wanted and did not want, and about the ways in which their desires and wants ebbed and flowed at different times (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

For the thesis the main framework was subsequently built on the work of Pierre Bourdieu who offered ways of explaining how the social, cultural, and economic milieus of learners converged, intersected and diverged within their different social and school contexts, and how this shaped the ways they thought about their futures. Bourdieu offered a way of understanding how learners formulated their particular views on achievement and how this helped them go about making sense of their individual lives.

The thesis also lent a lot from Appadurai's argument that learners make sense of their lives mostly by dreaming and imagining alternate futures, and that it is in the 'capacity to aspire' that learners best developed the means to reach their goals. Appadurai (2003: 52) further argued that aspirations were never individual and were always formed in the 'thickness of everyday life'.

These two theoretical frameworks assisted the thesis not only to make sense of what learners said about achievement but to better understand how the learners individually positioned achievement during the interviews to make sense of how they understood their own lives. When this last point became clear only then did the ways in which they expressed themselves start adding up. It started to explain how learners provided explanations that included the measurable (school results, economic status) and immeasurable (knowledge, taste, power), and the tangible (occupations, material possessions) and the intangible (beliefs, attitudes, expectations).

Clearly, learners approached achievement in very different ways and with very different expectations. This was also tied to where they lived, who their parents were, what they and their parents wanted, what they understood to be the opportunities and occupations available for them in their future lives, and what the schooling system had become in twenty-first century Cape Town. Within this new contemporary world many learners seemed to be increasingly not buying into the rhetoric of the achievement agenda, or into its supposed benefits.

Learners argued that this has had consequences not only for them, but also for the school that they attend - that has had to rethink its approaches and cultures in order to serve them. Notably, their perception that the school had adapted to serve their different needs was not an accurate reflection on the history of the school, the reasons why their parents sent them there, or the school social structures in place that daily served them – which included the chosen curriculum, nature and qualification of the teacher cohort, prevailing targets and ethos of the school in attaining excellent academic performances, and learning cultures that focused on outcomes more than on process. In this regard, the rigid and exclusionary achievement discourse at the provincial level has not assisted the school in its efforts to think about what the majority of its learners need (www.curriculum.wcape.school.za/index/n/v/1762). For Victoria High school, while it allegedly tries to inspire learners to both achieve academically and to acquire a variety of skills to understand their lives and become responsible citizens, this approach is persistently frustrated by pressures on the school to ensure that its learners perform/achieve academically, both by parents and the Western Cape Education Department.

This has meant that the learners that stand out are those that "had the strategies to play the game" (Tranter, 1994:6) in the school system and the dispositions and values associated with such a system. Ironically, while many learners (like Michelle) didn't have the strategies and dispositions to perform academically they still managed to think about achievement in ways that took them forward and gave them hope. Michelle noted that "it's like you just have to set a goal or goals and manage to do them to the best of your ability. It doesn't really matter where it is and what it is. It's about trying and trying. You will succeed".

7.2 SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

A key challenge for education authorities and individual schools presently is that they need to better understand why many learners in schools are not achieving academically. Much effort and intervention has gone into getting schools and learners to produce at the academic level and yet results have not been forthcoming. This thesis has argued that it is perhaps in exploring how different youth (including those that supposedly don't achieve) think about achievement and what they can do in the current environment that a clearer perspective will emerge.

It has been argued that past and conventional approaches to achievement as a measurable outcome need to be challenged if the problem of 'under-achievement' is to be adequately understood. Looking more closely at what youth regard as achievement will also offer a lens into what learners think they can attain in the future lives and what they aspire to. In this regard, learners often provided quite unrealistic views of what was possible given their current situations and yet firmly bought into these dreams, desires, and imagined worlds (for example Numazulu's view of the life of television personality, Karabo). Understanding and confronting the logic of this is a necessary challenge for future research.

By studying learner views of achievement at Victoria High School it has been shown that the concepts of achievement and aspiration are surprisingly complex phenomena and that they influence the lives of learners in quite intricate and contradictory ways. In conclusion, it needs reminding that imagining or desiring a future does not happen in a vacuum but rather occurs in the 'thickness' of particular social and schooling contexts. It is when the dynamics of such contexts and their influence on the lives of individual learners are better understood that perhaps their needs will be better served.

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Janine,	Interview C,	8 February 2011, p. 1-10
Khanyiswa,	Interview D,	8 February 2011, p.1-8
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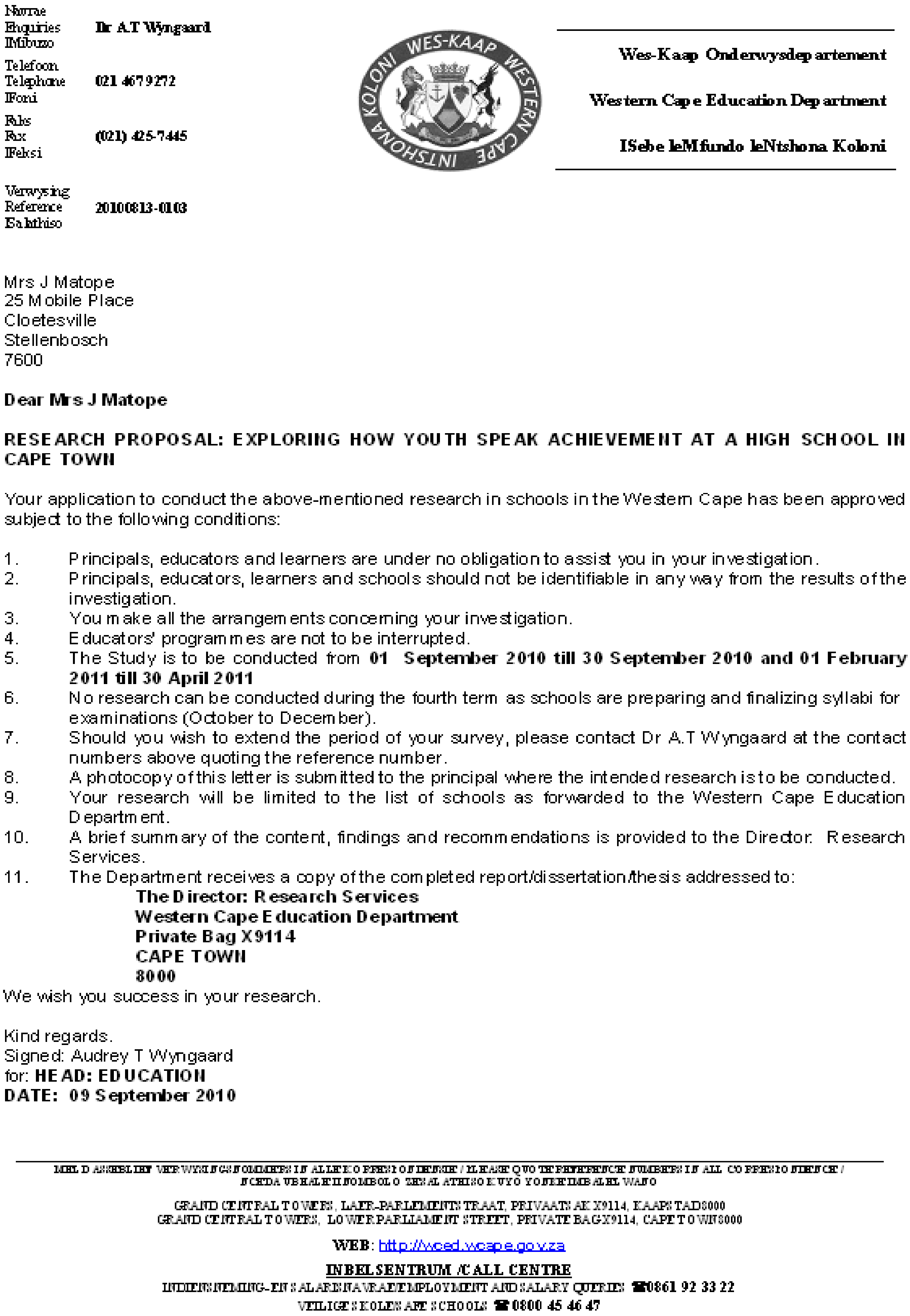
APPENDIX A



Navrae
Enquiries **Dr A.T Wyngaard**
IMibuzo

Telefoon
Telephone **021 467 9272**
IFoni

Faks
Fax **(021) 425-7445**
IFeksi

Verwysing
Reference **20100813-0103**
Isalathiso

Wes-Kaap Onderwysdepartement

Western Cape Education Department

ISebe leMfundo leNtshona Koloni

Mrs J Matope
25 Mobile Place
Cloetesville
Stellenbosch
7600

Dear Mrs J Matope

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: EXPLORING HOW YOUTH SPEAK ACHIEVEMENT AT A HIGH SCHOOL IN CAPE TOWN

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **01 September 2010 till 30 September 2010 and 01 February 2011 till 30 April 2011**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

The Director: Research Services
Western Cape Education Department
Private Bag X9114
CAPE TOWN
8000

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.
Signed: Audrey T Wyngaard
for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**
DATE: 09 September 2010

MELD ASSEBLIEF VERWYSINGSNOMMERS IN ALLE KORRESPONDENSIE / PLEASE QUOTE REFERENCE NUMBERS IN ALL CORRESPONDENCE /
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GRAND CENTRAL TOWERS, LOWER PARLIAMENT STREET, PRIVATE BAG X9114, CAPE TOWN 8000

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APPENDIX B

Enquiries	**Mr Visagie**
Telephone	
Fax	
Reference	

Mrs J Matope
25 Mulnberry Place
Cloetesville
Stellenbosch
7600

Dear Mrs J Matope

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: YOUTH DISCOURSES OF ACHIEVEMENT AT A SCHOOL IN CAPE TOWN

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research at ‘Victoria High’ School in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. The principal, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. The principal, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators’ programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **01 February 2011 till 30 April 2011**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Mr Visagie at the contact numbers above.
8. Submit a brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is to the Director: Research Services.
9. You should submit a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

The Director: Research Services
Western Cape Education Department
Private Bag X9114
CAPE TOWN
8000

We wish you success in your research.

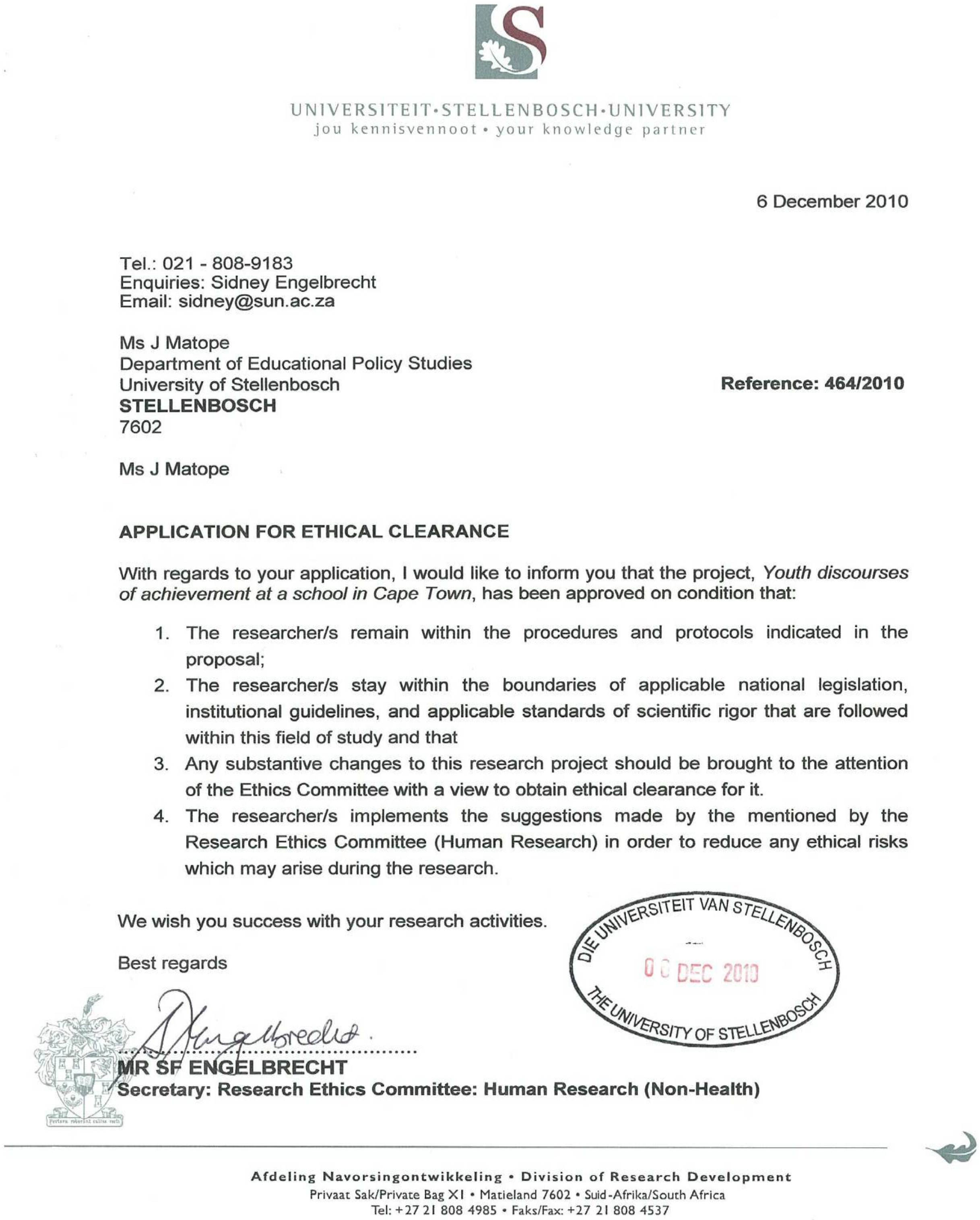
Kind regards.

Signed:

Mr Visagie
The Principal
‘Victoria’ High School

**** Name of school has been changed to ensure anonymity**

APPENDIX C



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6 December 2010

Tel.: 021 - 808-9183
Enquiries: Sidney Engelbrecht
Email: sidney@sun.ac.za

Ms J Matope
Department of Educational Policy Studies
University of Stellenbosch
STELLENBOSCH
7602

Reference: 464/2010

Ms J Matope

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE

With regards to your application, I would like to inform you that the project, *Youth discourses of achievement at a school in Cape Town*, has been approved on condition that:

1. The researcher/s remain within the procedures and protocols indicated in the proposal;
2. The researcher/s stay within the boundaries of applicable national legislation, institutional guidelines, and applicable standards of scientific rigor that are followed within this field of study and that
3. Any substantive changes to this research project should be brought to the attention of the Ethics Committee with a view to obtain ethical clearance for it.
4. The researcher/s implements the suggestions made by the mentioned by the Research Ethics Committee (Human Research) in order to reduce any ethical risks which may arise during the research.

We wish you success with your research activities.

06 DEC 2010

Best regards

MR SF ENGELBRECHT
Secretary: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Non-Health)

Afdeling Navorsingontwikkeling • Division of Research Development
Privaat Sak/Private Bag X1 • Matieland 7602 • Suid-Afrika/South Africa
Tel: +27 21 808 4985 • Faks/Fax: +27 21 808 4537

APPENDIX D

Dear Educator

REQUEST TO GAIN YOUR CONSENT TO INVOLVE YOU IN MY RESEARCH STUDY AT 'VICTORIA' HIGH SCHOOL

I am Mrs Jasmine Matope doing a Masters in Education degree, supervised by Dr A. Badroodien, in the Department of Policy Studies under the Faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University. My contact details are: Cell phone 0719069723, e-mail: smatope@sun.ac.za; Dr. A. Badroodien's contacts are Cell phone 0741432440, e-mail:azeem@sun.ac.za, Department of Policy Studies, P. Bag X1, Matieland, 7602.

I seek to do research on how different youth and different youth age groups think and speak about achievement at a high school in Cape Town. The purpose of the project is to better understand the aspirations of learners and the ways in which they imagine their future lives. I will conduct my fieldwork at Livingstone High School and seek your permission to include you in the discussions and interviews.

The overall aim is to understand some of the external factors that seemingly shape how learners imagine their future lives and influence their approach to achievement.

BENEFITS AND RISKS OF RESEARCH

The research expects to provide a variety of perspectives on achievement by learners. This may assist educators to grapple more substantially with different understandings of achievement and aspiration. It is hoped that this will lead to educators including insights of how learners view achievement in relation to their aspirations.

PROCEDURE

1. You will be expected to randomly select learners in Grade 9 and 11 to participate in the research.
2. I declare that you will be fully protected from any physical, emotional or psychological harm. I commit to ensuring that interviews with you will occur in a safe environment, which will not place you in any danger whatsoever .
3. All the information I get from the study will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Your name and the school's name will not be used or inferred in any way or form in the study

4. I will respect you and your privacy at every point and time in the study. Furthermore, you may withdraw from the study at any point whatsoever, should you of course wish to do so.
5. Please feel free to consult Ms Maléne Fouché (mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808-4622), Research Development Division, Stellenbosch University should you have any questions about your rights in participating in this research.

INFORMED CONSENT SLIP

I, ____ , agree to participate in this study.

I understand the purpose of the study and its benefits and risks. I have been informed about all the implications and various procedures of the study.

____________________________________ ______________________________

Name and Surname Signature

____

Date

APPENDIX E

Dear parent/guardian

REQUEST TO GAIN YOUR CONSENT TO INVOLVE YOUR CHILD IN MY RESEARCH STUDY AT 'VICTORIA' HIGH SCHOOL

I am Mrs Jasmine Matope doing a Masters in Education degree, supervised by Dr A. Badroodien, in the Department of Policy Studies under the Faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University. My contact details are: Cell phone 0719069723, e-mail: smatope@sun.ac.za; Dr. A. Badroodien's contacts are Cell phone 0741432440, e-mail:azeem@sun.ac.za, Department of Policy Studies, P. Bag X1, Matieland, 7602.

I seek to do research on how different youth and different youth age groups think and speak about achievement at a high school in Cape Town. The purpose of the project is to better understand the aspirations of learners and the ways in which they imagine their future lives. I will conduct my fieldwork at Livingstone High School and seek your permission to include your child in the discussions and interviews.

The overall aim is to understand some of the external factors that seemingly shape how learners imagine their future lives and influence their approach to achievement.

The study is important as the school that I seek to do my fieldwork produces large numbers of learners that achieve at a variety of levels, and who also seem to encounter a variety of difficult challenges on a daily basis.

BENEFITS AND RISKS OF RESEARCH

The research expects to provide a variety of perspectives on achievement by learners. This may assist educators to grapple more substantially with different understandings of achievement and aspiration. It is hoped that this will lead to educator practice including insights of how learners view achievement and in relation to what they imagine are their futures.

I would like to include _______________________________ in my group. This will involve:

- Him/her partaking in two interviews (individual and group)
- Him/her completing some writing for me on predetermined questions that will be given to the student beforehand for checking

PROCEDURE

6. As ________________________________ is still a child, I need to get informed consent from you, the parent/guardian
7. I declare that both you and your child will be fully protected from any physical, emotional or psychological harm. I commit to ensuring that interviews with your child will occur in a safe environment, which will not place him/her in any danger whatsoever or lead to his/her exclusion from his/her peers
8. All the information I get from the study will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. The school's and the child's name will not be used or inferred in any way or form in the study
9. I will respect you and your child's privacy at every point and time in the study. Furthermore, you and your child may withdraw from the study at any point whatsoever, should you of course wish to do so.
10. Please feel free to consult Ms Maléne Fouché (mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808-4622), Research Development Division, Stellenbosch University should you have any questions about your rights or the rights of your child participating in this research.

INFORMED CONSENT SLIP

I, ____ , the parent/guardian of
____, agree to him/her participating in this study. I understand the purpose of the study and its benefits and risks. I have been informed about all the implications and various procedures of the study.

________________________________ ________________________________

Name and Surname of parent/guardian Signature

____

Date

______________________________ ______________________________

Name and Surname of witness Signature

____

Date

APPENDIX F

Dear Learner

REQUEST TO GAIN YOUR CONSENT TO INVOLVE YOU IN MY RESEARCH STUDY AT 'VICTORIA' HIGH SCHOOL

I am Mrs. Jasmine Matope doing a Masters in Education degree, supervised by Dr A. Badroodien, in the Department of Policy Studies under the Faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University. My contact details are: Cell phone 0719069723, e-mail: smatope@sun.ac.za; Dr. A. Badroodien contacts are Cell phone 0741432440, e-mail:azeem@sun.ac.za, Department of Policy Studies, P. Bag X1, Matieland, 7602.

I seek to do research on how different youth and different youth age groups think and speak about achievement at a high school in Cape Town. The purpose of the project is to better understand the aspirations of learners and the ways in which they imagine their future lives. I will conduct my fieldwork at Livingstone High School and seek your permission to include you in the discussions and interviews.

The overall aim is to understand some of the external factors that seemingly shape how learners imagine their future lives and influence their approach to achievement.

BENEFITS AND RISKS OF RESEARCH

The research expects to provide a variety of perspectives on achievement by learners. This may assist educators to grapple more substantially with different understandings of achievement and aspiration. It is hoped that this will lead to educators including insights of how learners view achievement in relation to their aspirations.

PROCEDURE

11. You will be expected to partaking in two interviews of 30 minutes each.
12. I declare that you will be fully protected from any physical, emotional or psychological harm. I commit to ensuring that interviews with you will occur in a safe environment, which will not place you in any danger whatsoever .
13. All the information I get from the study will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Your name and the school's name will not be used or inferred in any way or form in the study
14. I will respect you and your privacy at every point and time in the study. Furthermore, you may withdraw from the study at any point whatsoever, should you of course wish to do so.

15. Please feel free to consult Ms Maléne Fouché (mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808-4622), Research Development Division, Stellenbosch University should you have any questions about your rights in participating in this research.

INFORMED CONSENT SLIP

I, ____ , agree to participate in this study.

I understand the purpose of the study and its benefits and risks. I have been informed about all the implications and various procedures of the study.

___________________________________ ___________________________________

Name and Surname Signature

____

Date

APPENDIX G

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INTERVIEW INSTRUMENTS: 'YOUTH DISCOURSES OF ACHIEVEMENT' 2011

Two instruments are provided. These roughly capture what kinds of questions will be pursued during interviews. The instruments separately focus on:

1. Learners
2. Educators

The questions provided below are obviously too many to cover in two half-hour interviews. I provide the questions to give a sense of what I am trying to achieve in the interviews and to show the logical sequence of the questions. Many learners will probably answer 2 or 3 of the questions in a single response. In such a case, the follow up question would not be needed.

In-depth interviews normally include only a few questions. However, I have provided a large number of questions here to assist me when interviewees are unresponsive, need further prodding, or simply to guide me to hold onto some structure and flow in the interview.

1. Interview instrument for Learners

In interviews with learners the aim is to get them to speak about four key areas of interest, namely aspects of *aspiration*, *achievement, social context and social class*. This will allow for some insight into how identities are formed and how learners imagine themselves and their futures

The first activity will be to explain to the learner what the project in essence is trying to accomplish

The aim of the project is to better understand learner perception of achievement and how different youth think about their futures. Thus I will ask you about different aspects of your life that influence how you view achievement. The purpose of this is to get some understanding of your 'voice' and how you think about schooling, the world, and your future. Questions will therefore focus on things like what your personal views are on achievement and what affects this perception. I will ask questions about your schooling subjects, what your schooling preferences are, and what you aspire to accomplish in life.

First group of questions: *The purpose here is to get some sense of social context*

- Tell me about yourself?
- Who do you stay with? (Parents, mother, father, grandparents, family members)
- How many are you in your family?
- How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- What are the age differences between your siblings?
- Describe what you do over weekends
- Describe your life at home?
- Where do you live?

- What is the distance between your home and school?
- How do you travel to school?
- How long does it take to get to school?
- How long does it take to get home in the afternoons?
- How much does it cost (estimate) to get to school and back?
- Tell me about some of your experiences travelling to and from school
- Tell me some things about your life that you feel define who you are (sport, artist, social experiences, good speaker, employed in afternoons, etc)
- To what extent do you think where you live, how you travel to school, what you do over weekends etc shapes how you imagine what you can achieve?

Second group of questions: The purpose here is to get some sense of social class

- Tell me about your parents and where they work
- Whether they are married, divorced, widowed or single, tell me what kinds of jobs each of them do
- Does your parents/parent own a motor vehicle? Do you want to say more about this?
- Do you have siblings that work fulltime?
- Tell me about your house?
- (I need to add much more nuance to these questions and also add a few more)

Third group of questions: The purpose here is to get some sense of aspiration

- How do you imagine your future?
- What do you hope to become?
- What makes you want to become this?
- Who are your role models?
- What are your interests at school and home?
- What are your hobbies?
- What kinds of activities do you take part in with your friends?
- Where do you think you will be in 10 years?
- What do you think will help you achieve or not achieve your ambitions?

Fourth group of questions: The purpose here is to get some sense of achievement and what informs this

- Tell me about how you came to be at this high school
- Tell me about your school life
- Tell me about the subjects you do and about the kinds of things that interest you
- What challenges do you face in school?
- Tell me about how you understand the term or word ‘achievement’
- Do you think achievement is about school results?
- Are you happy with what you achieve in life?
- Are you happy with what you achieve at school?
- Explain what you mean when you say that
- What would you like to achieve?
- How do you think that you can attain the goals that you set for yourself?
- What challenges do you encounter at home and school that influence what you achieve?

These next questions may seem silly but I want to build individual pictures:

- Do you ever work on a computer at school to do homework, projects, or for your own interest?
- Do you have a computer at home?
- Do you have a separate space at home where you study?
- Do your parents/parent/guardians/siblings assist you with your homework?
- How much time per day and week do they spend with you going through your school work? How frequently do they assist you?
- If someone does, at what time of the day do they normally assist you?
- Do you enjoy reading? How much do you read (books, magazines, newspapers)?
- Do you attend any extra classes during the week to help you?
- If so, how do you get to extra classes and how much time does it take?
- Do you have a personal timetable?

Instrument Two: Interviews with Teachers

The purpose of interviewing educators is to establish what they consider to be achievement and what they expect for their learners. They will be mostly asked about how they work with contradictory notions of achievement and how this challenges their practice.

- Tell me about the learners at this school
- Tell me about what you perceive to be their main achievements?
- What do you understand by the term ’achievement’?
- Do you think social context and social class influences what learners achieve at this school?
- What do you think are the links between learner aspirations and achievement at the school?
- What do you think assists some learners to achieve and others not?
- Describe some things that you think make some learners achieve their aspirations at school? And at home?
- How important do you think parental involvement is in the education and lives of their children in relation to their achievement?
- How do you go about assisting learners with quite different understandings of achieving?
- How does this shape your everyday practice?
- Tell me about the different kinds of learner achievement at the school?

(I need to develop a better flow between the questions in order to generate some good responses from educators)