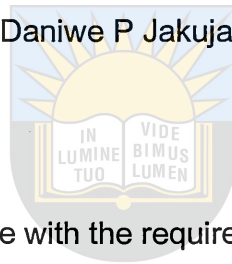


**An Investigation into the Social Experiences of Dropouts following their  
Reenrolment in Secondary Schools in Stutterheim District: Implications  
for School Leadership**

by

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

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**Supervisor Dr BA Brown**

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## DECLARATION

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I declare that AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF DROPOUTS FOLLOWING THEIR REENROLMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN STUTTERHEIM DISTRICT: IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



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## ABSTRACT

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Many secondary schools in the Eastern Cape and elsewhere in South Africa are facing a drop out crisis but a proportion of these dropouts return to school to complete their education. The kind of social experiences that dropouts have as they reenrol and reintegrate in school remains an under-research aspect in the discourse on education access. The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that prompted dropouts to reenrol in school and the social life experiences of these learners in school. It was also to explore school leaders' reactions towards these experiences, and the implications for school leadership of the dropouts' experiences.

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Using qualitative methodologies, involving a sample of 15 dropouts and two school leaders, the study found multiple motives, associated with individual characteristics of dropouts and the institutional characteristics of their family and the labour market, prompting reenrolment. Institutional characteristics at the school level were not featured. Regarding social life at school, it found that while some participants had positive social experiences, which reinforced their motivation to pursue their education, others experienced the school context as socially hostile. The nature of the social hostility is described, but school leaders seem insensitive to many of the social integration challenges that confront dropouts. Several implications for school leadership have been drawn out, including the view that while there are a variety of leverage points for addressing the social hostility problems, the social development of dropouts who experienced hostility stand to wither if supportive measures are

not implemented to help them reintegrate.

While the research provides new insights into the experiences of dropouts in school, it had the limitation of being a case study whose findings cannot be generalised.

**Key words:** Social experiences, Dropout reenrolment, School leadership, Social integration challenges, Supportive measures



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## **CHAPTER 1**

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

---

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter has a presentation of the background and rationale of the study. In addition, the chapter outlines the research problem and question, purpose of the research, and the paradigmatic perspective. The key concepts have also been defined and a delimitation of the study explained. These aspects together constitute the formulation of the research problem. The chapter ends with a brief summary. The background to the study is first outlined below.

#### **1.2 BACKGROUND TO STUDY**

Educational attainment exerts a powerful influence on access to the labour market (World Bank, 1999). This link between education and employment is one which is well documented in not only European and North American literature but also in African writings (Gibbs 2005; Kraak, 2003; Sen, 1999; Lucas 1988; UNESCO 2005). These literatures also show that in many countries, not just in Europe or North America, but also in Africa, education, particularly basic education, is entrenched in the constitution of many countries as a fundamental human right. In many ways, this demonstrates the



importance and value of education (HREA, 2008:4; Motala, Dieltiens, Carrim, Kgobe, Moyo & Rembe, 2007:14).

Yet each year, in South Africa, broadly, and in the Stutterheim area of the Eastern Cape in particular, an alarming number of learners drop out of school (Brown, 2009; ESAR, 2000; NMF, 2005; Motala et al, 2007; Mgwangqa & Lawrence, 2008). Kraak (2003:13) provides evidence which shows that, of the estimated 826 000 youths who leave school each year, approximately 551 000 of them drop out before grade 12. The number of learners who drop out is about three times the number failing grade 12 each year (Kraak, 2003:13).



What the sheer number of learners who drop out of school before grade 11 shows is that there is a sizeable proportion of learners who exit the school system before the Matriculation Examination (Brown, 2009; Kraak, 2003:14; Motala et al, 2007:10). Learner drop out affects all grade levels across the school system in South Africa, and in the Stutterheim area of the Eastern Cape in particular, although not necessarily in the same proportion (DoE, 2006:83; Kraak, 2003:14). In the Eastern Cape, average drop out rate for all grades between the 2003 & 2006 was 10 percent (DoE, 2006:3).

While there are debates about the grade level mostly affected (Crouch, 2005; Perry & Arends, 2003), dropping out seems particularly chronic at the primary school level, chiefly grade 1 (DoE, 2006:81), and in the latter years of secondary schooling: mainly grade 9, 10 and 11 (Motala et al, 2007:55). These patterns in dropping out of school

are particularly evident in rural communities. Learner drop out analysis by province shows that in the Stutterheim area, and the wider rural districts in the Eastern Cape, grade 9, 10 and 11 groups consistently experience the highest drop out rates (DoE, 2006:83), and the trend is similar nationwide, even after the drop out rate is adjusted for grade repetition (Crouch, 2005; Motala et al, 2007:10).

Demographically, instances of male drop out are higher than female (DoE, 2005; Motala et al, 2007). Furthermore, drop out rates are much lower in the white and Indian communities, than in the coloured and black groups, not just in the Stutterheim area, but elsewhere in the country (ILO, 2008a:1). There is a host of evidence pointing to why learners, regardless of gender, age, or other demographic characteristics, drop out of school (Brown, 2009; Motala et al, 2007; 2000; NMF, 2005; Mgwangqa & Lawrence, 2008). Many of the learners who drop out of school before grade 12 remain out of the education system (Kraak, 2003; Sun, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, Tobar, Motroni, & Palma, 2007). Their reasons for not re-enrolling are often multifaceted and complex (Sun et al, 2007). Many give up on further schooling to seek access to the labour market (ILO, 2008b; Kraak, 2003; Sun et al, 2007).

There are, however, among the cohort of learners who dropped out of school before grade 12 each year a proportion who return to school to complete their education (Brown, 2009; Grant & Hallman, 2006; Maharaj, Kaufman & Richter, 2000). Maharaj and her colleagues (2000), for instance, found that approximately 35 percent of African girls who had given birth at least once returned to secondary school. A study

by Grant and Hallman (2006) reports performance challenges and concerns among dropouts in KwaZulu Natal who had returned to school. In their systemic evaluation of school and learners, the Eastern Cape Provincial Education Department (DoE, 2006) conceded that there were learners re-enrolling in school after an initial phase of dropping out. But the proportion of learners reenrolling was not reported (DoE, 2006). There are anecdotal evidence from personal experiences in both primary and secondary schools in the Stutterheim district that dropouts do return to school to carry on with their education.



All this change is happening in a social environment increasingly affected by social problems such as poverty, the HIV and AIDS pandemic, violence and other misbehaviours in school, and delinquent behaviours outside the school setting (De Wet, 2007; HRW, 2004). Often, dropouts are perpetrators of some of these activities, resulting in breakdown in relationships with other learners and educators. Dropouts who reenrol in school, according to Sun et al (2007:7), experience "what life is like without Grade 12 qualification outside school". Although social and cognitive psychologists have provided evidence to suggest that no two people may necessarily experience a phenomenon in the same way (Smith, 2008; Moran, 2005; Mohanty, 1989), Lamm, Harder, Lamm, Rose and Rask (2005) argue that the way dropouts are treated upon their return to school can relate to the reasons that cause them to drop out in the first place. Mgwangqa and Lawrence (2008:2) found that a reason many learners in rural areas drop out of school is poverty, which serve as an overarching motif for related factors such as illnesses, child pregnancies, and hunger leading to

petty criminal offences.

When a learner, who dropped out of school for the above or similar reasons, reenrols in school, he/she may experience the kind of discrimination and stigma attached to being poor (Brown, 2005; Preece & Ntseane, 2002). Physical and verbal abuse and intimidation using such terms as “dirty”, “stupid”, “no good”, or “incompetent” are common on the streets, in the home, and across many other social spaces (Lamm et al, 2005), and may be experienced by dropouts who quit school for economic reasons. And they may experience this discrimination either directly or indirectly in the school context (Ross & Roberts, 1999; Brown, 2005; Preece & Ntseane, 2002). Such commentary is audible and visible and often is a key component of prejudice against youths who drop out, but later return to school.

Experiencing the kind of social prejudice described above can place dropouts in a stressing situation, which may lead to associated problems such as self-imposed isolation, self hate, low self-esteem, depression, denial, and suppressive experiences (Ross & Roberts, 1999; Brown, 2005). While dropouts may experience stress after returning to school, it is by no means automatic that they will all have this experience. There is also the possibility that some dropouts could re-enter the school system and reintegrate normal with their peers, or work harder than they did before dropping out (Stoecker, 1991). But whether such experience actually occurs remain undocumented.

The literature addressing learner drop out of school in South Africa, broadly, is large (e.g. Crouch, 2005; DoE, 2005; Motala et al, 2007; ESAR, 2000; NMF, 2005; Mgwangqa & Lawrence, 2008). But while this is the case, few studies focus on the cohort of dropouts who re-enrolled in school (Brown, 2009; Grant & Hallman, 2006; Maharaj et al, 2000). In particular, there is a general silence in the literature regarding the experiences of dropouts in the class and school context, particularly as it pertains to the Stutterheim area, and the lessons that can be learnt from these experiences, particularly among dropouts who re-entered the school system at grade 9 which, in terms of the South African School Act (SASA, 1996), is the last year of compulsory education, or grade 10 and 11 where preparation for the Matriculation Examination picks up in earnest.



### **1.3 FORMULATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Although the literature, certainly within the Stutterheim area, is rife with theorizations on school drop out (ESAR, 2000; HRW, 2004; Motala et al, 2007; Mgwangqa & Lawrence, 2008), there is a common focus on drop out causes and issues of access. There is also a common focus on finding ways to minimize drop out incidences (Mgwangqa & Lawrence, 2008). Less attention has been given in research to the learners who drop out but later return to the school system, and their subsequent social or educational experiences. Grant and Hallman (2006) as well as Maharaj et al (2000) studied a sample of dropouts who returned to school in Kwa Zulu Natal Province but their work examined other aspects. Grant and Hallman (2006) examined

the academic performance of female dropouts after re-entering to schools. Whereas Maharaj et al (2000) studied factors impacting on dropouts' return to school. Brown (2009) studied dropout experiences but it remains a single case study of two schools.

Whether dropouts in secondary schools in the Stutterheim experience difficulty adjusting to school life, or settled in normally, is unclear. Recent reports link gang violence in schools to the presence of dropouts (de Wet, 2007; HRW, 2004). The sort of implications that the reenrolment of dropouts and their experiences have for educational leadership is also an aspect not well explored in research. This research locates and focuses on this issue as its problematic concern. The main question posed for this investigation is provided in the next section.

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#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

How do dropouts experience their social world in school after reenrolment?

##### **1.4.1 Sub – research questions**

- What factors prompted the dropouts to return to school?
- What social-life experience characterise dropouts' reintegration in their school context?
- What are school leaders' reactions towards, dropouts' experiences and their implications?



## 1.5 PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that prompted dropouts to reenrol in school and social life experiences of dropouts in school. It was also to explore school leaders' reactions towards these experiences, and the implications for school leadership of the dropouts' experiences. This was an exploratory study, undertaken qualitatively.

## 1.6 SIGNIFICANCE



An exploratory study of this nature is quite important. By examining the experiences of dropouts who return to school, this study contributes to our understanding of what goes on in the school life of such learners, and shed light on, not just the variety of these experiences, but also on whether these contribute in any way to those learners being at risk of becoming repeat dropouts. Education leaders have a key role in supporting these learners to readjust and integrate in school. It is from these experiences for instance, that potential policies and programmes to keep all learners in school may be better designed. Thus, the study has important significance for policy design and improvement. Furthermore, the study provides an initial step in the development of body of South African literature regarding the experiences of dropout reintegration in school. This provides a new dimension to the education access debate in the country.

## **1.7 RATIONALE**

The researcher has had several personal experiences and encounters with dropouts at school. These encounters have motivated the researcher to question how these learners adjust to school life after returning. This is because there have been instances whereby other learners mistreat dropouts when they return to school.

Furthermore scanty literature on the issue under investigation provides a major justification for this study. It suggests that the issue of dropouts' experiences in school is under researched. By focusing on this cohort of learners, the study makes an attempt to build up the knowledge base in this regard. Furthermore, there is a policy which gives dropouts the right to return to school in South Africa, especially if they drop out before completing compulsory education. (Motala et al, 2007). Through this research, one may be able to determine whether factors at the school level in Stutterheim are contributing to learners becoming repeat dropouts, and based on this, corrective action, supporting the policy may be better designed.

## **1.8 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE**

Monton and Marais (in Loock 1999:10) note that a researcher's assumptions and beliefs reflect how he or she thinks about the research process. This should thus be made known to the readers. Miles and Huberman (1994:4) declare that the paradigmatic perspective of the researcher allows the reader to obtain a more holistic



view of the research. Based on the significance of declaring one's paradigmatic view, the researcher explores and outlines hers' below under the headings metatheoretical perspective, theoretical perspectives, and methodological assumptions.

### **1.8.1 The metatheoretical perspective**

Metatheoretical perspective refers to the researcher's personal assumptions concerning the field of study or subject area being researched. It includes the researcher's assumptions about experiences of dropping out of and returning to school. This research came out from issues of education access and school efficiency. As such, many assumptions and beliefs have their origin in these fields. The researcher supports the principle of life-long education (Delors, 1996:99) which recommends that one has a life-long ability and need to continue to learn, grow and develop one's potential. Having access to school is a crucial part of life – long learning.

Fordham (in Loock, 1999:11) stresses that the whole person should be educated and supported in such a way that his or her potential can be developed. Being in school is a good way to develop these potentials. The researcher assumes that every learner is unique, has talents and potential to fulfil his or her educational needs in life and the school and its communities (internal and external) have to work together in helping and encouraging the learners to improve themselves. Part of this involves helping dropouts, as learners, reintegrate in school.

### 1.8.2 Theoretical perspective

The focus of this study is on experiences. Consequently, the study was informed by two social theories: Haussler's (1989) theory of lived experiences and Tajfel's (1978) social comparison theory. Haussler's theory of lived experiences is within the phenomenological approach to the study of experience (Smith, 2008). The phenomenological approach looks at intentionality as a central structure of conscious experience, and considers meaning a key mechanism in the construction of such experience (Smith, 2008:2). This approach asserts that our conscious experience is directed towards - 'intends' or represents - things through particular concepts, thoughts, ideas, images, etcetera, and that it is these that make up the meaning or content of a given experience. Haussler and Ponty's (Haussler, 1989; Ponty, 1996) 'lived experience' model of phenomenology exemplified this approach. This perspective guided the way the researcher approaches this research.

Furthermore, the label "dropouts" automatically puts such learners in a group distinct from those who did not drop out of school. This puts learners who never dropped out of school in a position to see their world in terms of 'us' and 'them' (Tajfel, 1978). Tajfel (1978) social comparison theory draws attention to such comparison. The dichotomous conception of the social world into 'us' (in-group) and 'them' (out-group) is the aspect of Tajfel's work that is of relevance to the study. Of significance is the claim that people often highlight the differences between their group and other groups by focusing on their group's distinctiveness (Tajfel, 1978). This means that it is

possible to find in-group (us) favouritisms and out-group (them) derogation (Harasty, 1997). This involves the explicit belief that members of the 'out-group' are inferior. The in-group / out-group divisions of social reality can lead to prejudicial tendencies. The researcher's assumption is that these different world views can shape the experiences of dropouts in school. It is argued that this simple categorisation may construct the social world in school in such a way that it eventually shapes the lived experiences of each of the groups in school context. Tajfel's theory therefore is applied to interpret the accounts and attitudes that dropouts shared, and place the findings of this study into perspective.



### **1.8.3 Methodological assumptions**

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The researcher considered qualitative research and a phenomenological approach as essential in this study. Learners supplied data in personal interviews. From this data, key factors related to experiences are determined. The researcher assumes that the account that participants shared reflect a true story line of their lived experiences, and that the interviewing process is an ideal way to access the experiences of these individuals.

## **1.9 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS**

A number of concepts relevant to this research have been defined in this section. These include experiences, school dropouts, reenrolment, education leadership, and

investigation.

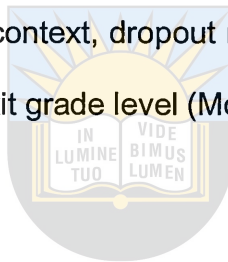
### 1.9.1 Experience

Wikipedia (2009a:1) and Palya defined experience as "a consequence of an event or action" that one witnessed or participated in (in the broadest sense of the word). This interpretation is similar to the definition used by Payla (2009:3) that experience comprises one's knowledge of skill in or observation of something/event, gained through involvement or exposure. But this view presupposes that one is conscious of the experience (Smith, 2008:4) yet, as Hausler (2001:5) maintains, experience can spread out from the conscious into the semi-conscious and even unconscious mental activity. In terms of dropout, Husserl's analysis would seem to suggest that the state of mind of the experiencer could form an organising framework of experience. In this study, Payla's (2009:3) view of experience is adopted.

Furthermore, the fact that an experience can be formed vicariously (Palya, 2009) suggests that a learner could know what its like to be a dropout, without actually dropping out of school (Schunk, 2004). But an indirect experience of a phenomenon is often not a credible source of information as it is susceptible to, *inter alia*, errors of misinterpretation (Palya, 2009). Given this limitation, only the conscious and direct experience are of concern in this study. This clarification helps decision about relevant participants in the study.

### **1.9.2 Dropouts**

In this study, dropout refers to learners who dropped out of school but later returned. This includes learners who stayed out of the school system for three months or more. Drop out is generally understood conceptually as involving an action in which a person, for instance, leaves, or becomes detached from, a group or system (Wikipedia, 2009a:1). It is a selective process of detachment, which sometimes is made involuntarily. In the school context, dropout refers most commonly to a learner leaving school before the official exit grade level (Motala et al, 2007).



### **1.9.3 Reenrolment**

This refers to a process whereby a person who dropped out of school returns and accesses school due to some pushing or pulling factors.

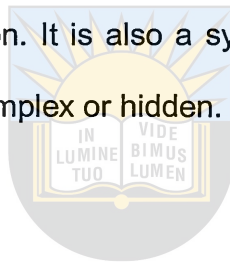
### **1.9.4 Educational leadership**

Bush and Glover (2003) state that there are more than 350 definitions of leadership. They however indicate that educational leadership is a process of influence, leading to the achievement of desired purposes. Successful leaders develop a vision for their schools based on their personal and professional values (Bush & Glover, 2003). School leaders articulate this vision at every opportunity and influence their staff and other stakeholders to share the vision (Bush & Clover, 2003). This suggests that there is guidance, direction, and vision provided in the educational process by school

leaders such as the principals and senior management team. The above interpretation of educational leadership is adopted in this study.

### **1.9.5 Investigation**

In this study, investigation refers to the process or instance whereby a person studies the experiences of ex - dropouts carefully or makes an official enquiry for ascertaining facts, details or careful examination. It is also a systematic and thorough attempt to learn the facts about something complex or hidden. It is often formal and official.



### **1.10 DELIMITATION OF STUDY**

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The study was limited to two secondary schools in the Stutterheim area, in the Eastern Cape Province. Like other areas in the province, it has a number of cases of dropouts returning to school. Although the school environment include both learners who previously dropped out of school and learners who never dropped out at all, the study focused on those who dropped out, but later return to school. These learners were preferred because of their direct experiences of being out of school. Experiences outside of this parameter were excluded.

### **1.11 CHAPTER OUTLINE**

The research report comprises of six chapters as follows:

## **Chapter one**

Chapter one provides the background and rationale for the study, the research question, purpose of the research, significance, the paradigmatic perspective, definition of concepts, delimitation of the study and chapter summary.

## **Chapter two**

Chapter two presents a literature study on education access and factors motivating a person to drop out and / or later return. This includes the reasons, concepts, characteristics, causes, models, consequences and factors for dropping out and reenrolling in school. Issues related to the reintegration of dropout in school have also been covered.



The chapter also presents a literature study on educational leadership. This chapter attempts to see the role of leadership that is their responsibility to accommodate dropouts in their schools. In this chapter, theories and definition of leadership will be examined.

## **Chapter three**

Chapter three describes the research design and methods and how the process took place. This chapter gives an account of the research methods and designs adopted, including measures to ensure trustworthiness, ethical considerations, anonymity/confidentiality, deception, data collection and data processing.



## **Chapter four**

Chapter four presents a discussion of the findings from the empirical investigation. What is presented in chapter four is discussed in chapter five. In this chapter, data analysis and the clear interpretation of its meaning is done and the summary of the main results of the study is given.

## **Chapter five**

Chapter five consists of the lessons learnt and conclusions from the literature study and the empirical investigation, regarding experiences of dropouts. Also included in this chapter, is a discussion of the implication of the evidence for school leadership.

### **1.12 SUMMARY**



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This chapter commenced with an introductory background and rationale for the study. This was followed by problem formulation, the resulting research question and research aim. The researcher's perspective has been described, various relevant concepts defined, research method explained and the planned research programme outlined. Chapter two will report on the literature study on school drop outs.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DROP OUT CAUSES, MOTIVATION FOR REENROLMENT IN SCHOOL AND ISSUES OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND REINTEGRATION**

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##### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**



This chapter presents the literature review on the issue of education access, with particular reference to learner drop out and reenrollment in school. Kaufman, Kwon, Klein, and Chapman, (1999:3) mentioned in their study that there are many ways to define the concept “drop out”. They argue that dropping out is assigned to persons who have not completed their school and no longer enrolled in school. But this perspective of drop out is contested. This chapter outlines and criticise different interpretations of the concept drop out and reflects on views of this concept in South Africa.

An overview of different theorisation regarding drop out causes and motivation to return to school have been discussed. Conceptual frameworks are presented that focused on different perspectives for understanding the drop out phenomenon. One framework is based on an individual perspectives focusing on individual factors, the

other on institutional factors. The argument is made that both frameworks are useful to understand the complex phenomenon of dropping out and reenrolling in school.

The literature has attributed causes to dropping out of school, and possibilities of reenrolling in school, to personal as well as family factors. The merits in these arguments have been teased out, along with highlighting limitations in linking drop out or reenrollment behaviours to particular factor. A central part of the review is in discussing evidence relating to government strategies and programmes in place to encourage dropouts to reenroll in school. The argument is made that the state's interest in dropouts' reenrollment is in the fact that dropouts constitute serious social consequences to society, and having these individuals in school reduces such risk. The chapter ends with a reflection on possible gaps in the literature and makes the point that this review serves as a conceptual base for this study.

The chapter begins with a focus on different interpretations of the concept 'drop out'.

## **2.2 CONCEPTUALISING NOTIONS OF DROP OUT**

Various theoretical perspectives on dropping out of school can be found in the literature. Gaustad (1991:2) states that the definition of a "drop out" varies widely, with different countries, states, districts and even schools within a country or district using the term somewhat, differently. One of these definitions was put forward by Tinto (1982:3), who defines a drop out as an instance whereby a learner fails to graduate

four years after enrollment. The assumption here is that the duration of the school programme is four years, which suggests that Tinto is more concerned with the outcome of the process. Thus, if a learner 'stops out' from school for less than a year but manages to return and complete that year of schooling successfully, and graduate within the specified period, he/she, according to Tinto's perspective, would not be regarded as a dropout.

At the same time, in Shannon's (2002:27) view, a drop out is when a learners leaves school before entering the ninth grade, or drops out during their high school years (Shannon, 2002). Both of the perspectives above suggest that school drop out involves being out of the school system, and away from its activities, for a period of time. This period of time may be permanent or temporary.

In the South African context, school reform legislations and research on education access hold the same views on notions of drop out. The SASA for instance, regards a learner who has not completed secondary school, or the nine years of compulsory education, a dropout (SASA, 1996). But Brown (2009) cites the fact that since secondary schooling after grade 9 is not compulsory in South Africa, but optional, it is not entirely accurate to regard post-grade 9 learners who quit school as dropouts. He argues that the use of the word "stop-outs" is more accurate because those learners are free to stop attending school whenever they wish. The argument is that those learners should not be labeled dropouts when they have the option to leave after grade 9.

In some education systems in the World, the entire period from primary to the end of secondary school (or grade 12) is compulsory. Using this perspective Wayman (2001) defines drop out as a learner in grade R to 12 who had not attended school for at least 30 days, not transferred to another school nor is being home-schooled, and had not contacted the school system about readmission. Wayman's definition is in line with the one proposed by Morrow (1996:3-4) whose definition of drop out calls for a period of unexcused absence from school of two weeks or more (Morrow, 1994). Although it could be argued that the time period suggested by both of these authors is debatable, the authors nevertheless are very clear about the out-of-school duration which qualifies one as a dropout.



School drop out then is generally understood as involving an action in which a person, for instance, leaves, or becomes detached from the system. It is a selective process of detachment, which sometimes is made involuntarily. In the school context, drop out commonly refers to the learner leaving school before the official exit grade level (Motala et al, 2007).

### **2.3 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON DROP OUT AND REENROLMENT**

Different theoretical perspectives have been put forward to explain learner drop out or reenrollment in school behaviours. These perspectives can be found in not just the human capital paradigm but also in the economic rational decision-making model

which draws attention to various cost-benefit considerations (Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999). Each of these theoretical lenses is discussed in turn below.

### **2.3.1 Reasonable decision making as a drop out and reenrollment model**

A study by Beaudry, Lemieux and Parent (1999:1-2) portrays the reasons that learners give for dropping out as relating either to their perception that school “pushes” them out, or that work, personal or family related reasons “pulls” them out (Parent, 1999:1-2). In a survey that was done in the US, learners cited school related reason as the cause for dropping out (Parent, 1999). A number of learners mentioned their school experience as the reason for dropping out. The rest tend to disengage from school by taking on more workplace or family responsibilities that ultimately jeopardise their chances of completing high school or even returning. These learners were too overloaded with family responsibilities and were unable to succeed in school or reenroll (Parent, 1999).

Parent (1999:2) suggests that some male youth may be enticed to leave school prematurely by the high hourly wages they can earn, which are close to what they would earn if they had completed school. According to Parent (1999), this factor both pulls a learner out of school and blocks him/her from returning. A study by Beaudry, Lemieux and Parent (1999:2) reveals that young men, 15-19 years old in particular, demonstrate a “discouraged worker” effect. These young men leave school and join the labour market when there is an improvement in the economy and job availability

and disregard school reenrollment. Montmarquette and Briot (2000:2) have used School Leavers Survey (SLS) and School Leavers Follow-up Survey (SLFS) data to rank most significant variables in a model of Canadian youth who are at risk of dropping out of high school. They found the top two factors to be (a) an increase in the minimum wage and (b) a decline in the unemployment rate. The authors concluded that youth do indeed make reasonable short-term decisions to drop out of school, based on current wages and job availability (Montmarquette & Briot, 2000).

Another study (Dagenais, Pelletier & Carrier, 1999:2) reinforces the argument by Montmarquette and Briot (2000:56) cited above that the higher the minimum wage, the higher the drop out rate. But there is gender variation in this regard, as Dagenais (1999:2) reported, where women are less influenced by this factor.

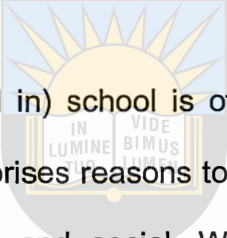
Rather than disengaging from school and join the labour market force, the reasonable decision of female dropouts were that of being less interested to participate in the work place at all (Dagenais, 1999:2). Young women quit school because of pregnancy or child bearing responsibilities whereafter some return to school. But among those who do not reenroll in school, the lack of education, single parenthood and withdrawal from the workforce is the outcome, which has serious long term consequences for these dropouts and their children (Parent, 1999).

The reasonable decision making model provides a sense of underlying factors in learners' drop out and reenrollment.



### 2.3.2 Human capital theory and issues in learner dropout school behaviour

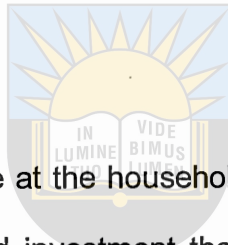
Another approach to conceptualising school drop out and reenrollment behaviour and experience is the human capital approach. Schooling, according to the human capital theory, is an investment (Patron, 2008). Schooling generates higher future income for individuals and enhances economic development in a society (McMahon, 1998:1; Patron, 2008).



The decision to attend (or reenroll in) school is often in anticipation of educational benefits. McMahon (1998:1) categorises reasons to return to school as monetary and non-monetary, as well as private and social. Wages are the direct private and monetary returns from education, but non-monetary-private returns, according to Patron (2008), include health effects, the human capital produced at home, efficient household management, lifelong adaptation, continued learning at home, motivational attributes and non-monetary job satisfaction. The point is that an individual's motive to return to school might be for these kinds of factors. But when a dropout returns to school and perceives that these goals are not accomplishable, the experience often is unpleasant.

In terms of the human capital theory, early dropout can be explained as a consequence of perceived absence or non-significance in the categories of benefits from schooling: monetary and non-monetary as well as private and social.

The idea, however, that a learner thinks in terms of these benefits upon reenrolling at school has been questioned. As Manski (1989:4) argues, the learner initially enrolls without knowing how far he/she will progress inside the school system. Patron (2008) states that a learner's progress through the school system is not straightforward as it depends on several systemic factors, many of which lies outside the learner's control. Patron (2008) states that, three of these factors include (a) the level of the qualification, (b) the probability of repetition, and (c) the time horizon of the decision-maker.



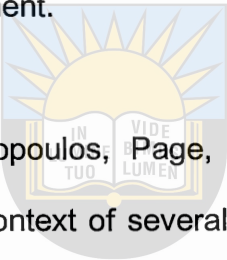
But some factors might also reside at the household level. Moser (1996) asserts that although education is a household investment that is often protected from external shocks (Moser 1996; Hunter & May 2002), the ability of a household to sustain this long-term investment may be hampered by short-term and intermediate-term economic difficulties and labour demands. An adolescent's unwanted pregnancy not only endangers the long-term investment made in a daughter's education (NRC 1993:6), but also creates additional financial strain.

The above explanation for learner drop out or reenrollment in school offered by the human capital theory provides another dimension to issues in learner reenrollment, and provides a clue that causes of school drop out can influence the experience that a learner gain after returning.



### 2.3.3 Rational decision-making theory and issues in learner dropout and reenrolment behaviours

An alternative explanation to the human capital proposition can be found in the economics literature. In the economics literature, dropping out and dropping into school are large because of a rational decision. Individuals consider the *benefits and costs* of continuing in school (i.e. continue and complete their education), versus leaving school before this achievement.

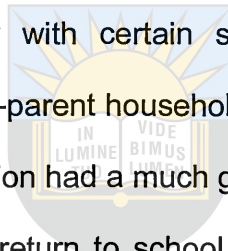


In one model espoused by Oreopoulos, Page, and Stevens (2003), individuals consider dropping out within the context of several factors. To Eckstein and Wolpin, three of these factors are: (a) academic performance, (b) expectations about benefits after completing high school, and (c) local work opportunities. Within the context of academic performance, an individual considers, for instance, whether he/she has poor or good academic grades, but in terms of expected benefits and labour market opportunities. The decision is weighted in terms of whether the benefits: work-related opportunities are low or high (Raymond, 2008). Eckstein and Wolpin contend that the ultimate weighting on each of the above mentioned issues leads to a rational decision about whether to stay in school, quit, or return to school (Eckstein & Wolpin, 2003).

Crane (1991:3) used an “epidemic model”, which is a subset of contagion theory (see Jencks & Mayer, 1990) to show that the hypothesised relationship between school drop out and socio-economic status is nonlinear, with those from the poorest neighbourhoods being disproportionately more likely to drop out and stay out, or have

indifferent reintegration experience upon returning. Crane took the analogy of epidermis of social problems.

Oreopoulos et al (2003) developed a rational decision model which included other factors from those put forward by Eckstein and Wolpin. According to Oreopoulos et al (2003), the decision to drop out of, or reenroll in, school is based on two key aspects: (a) the personal life of the individual, and (b) his/her family background. Their thesis is that an individual from a family with certain socio-economic and demographic characteristics such as (a) a single-parent household, (b) a low-income family, and (c) parents without high school education had a much greater likelihood of dropping out of school, and a slimmer chance to return to school, than one from an affluent family structure without these characteristics.



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But while Raymond (2008) criticises the rational decision-making models, arguing that it makes two implicit assumptions that there is (a) perfect information and (b) perfect credit markets – neither of which may necessarily be the case – the argument by Oreopoulos et al (2003) above could be extended further to include the fact that being from a poor background in school also impact on the lived experience of the individual in school (Brown, 2005:398).

#### **2.3.4 Social environment model and issues in learner drop out behaviours**

In contrast to the rational decision-making model, the social environment model uses the social environment theory to explain the relationship between the drop out behaviour of a learner and the social ecology of the classroom (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987:152). According to this perspective, in school settings discrepancies between the learners' expectations of the school or classroom environment and their actual experiences in that environment promote dissatisfaction (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987:1). When a learner drops out of school, it merely reflects this discrepancy: expectation and actual experience differentiate.

The social environment model provides an alternative explanation to the drop out phenomenon as it draws attention to both the school or systemic aspect and the learner aspect. Both of these have expectations towards each other, and that early exit from the school system may reflect a breakdown in expectations on either or both of these sides. This has the power to shape a dropout's experiences at school.

Studies, using this perspective measure expectations and actual classroom experiences using surveys, analyse discrepancy scores using t-tests and multiple regression (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987). In one study in North America, Darkenwald and Gavin (1987) found that dropouts expect a classroom environment characterised by less social involvement with other learners. Witte (1996) found in a European sample that three forces prompted school attendance among learners: (a) the social

relations provided in the school environment, (b) interest in academic work, and (c) to gain a qualification. These experiences can push a learner out of school as well.

### **2.3.5 Epidemic and contagion models**

At the core of the epidemic theory is that social problems are contagious and are spread through peer influence such that children in neighbourhoods with a high concentration of social problems will tend to have networks of friends who are dropouts, or who are on a trajectory towards dropping out (Crane, 1991). What Crane's (1999) argument is suggesting is that dropping out, staying out, and/or not reenrolling in school can be contagious in the sense that other learners might be influenced to do like others. This perspective opens up a view that reenrolled dropouts could have their experiences in school shaped by the wider neighbourhoods. A community in which there is high drop out rate could add social pressure on dropouts to stay out, rather than return to continue their schooling.

Crane (1999) argues that residents' risk of developing social problems and their susceptibility to peer influence were two fundamental conditions determining a community's susceptibility to the drop out or stay out epidemics. Crane (1999) studies children in urban ghettos and argues that high status jobs were important indicators of neighbourhood quality, since they provide important role models for young people. It implies that some experiences in school are inextricably linked to the school communities.

### 2.3.6 Congruence model and issues in learner drop out behaviours

The congruence model is based on self-theory. A key proponent of this model is Boshier (1973). According to Boshier (1973), the congruence model rejects single variable explanations for learner participation in school or their early drop out from the school system. It submits that multiple explanations are more plausible as drop out (or reenrollment) is a complex social phenomenon.

The congruence model says that participation is a function of a dialectic between oneself and the learning environment of an institution. Similarly, drop out is a function of a dialectic between the intra-self and the self-versus-others perspective. Any incongruence between these aspects, whether it is the self-institution incongruence, or the intra-self and self-versus-others, shapes the experiences that one developed (Boshier, 1973). These, therefore, suggest that social, psychological and institutional variables typically studied in drop out research merely mediate the congruence versus drop out (or reenrollment) relationship.

One could argue that the congruence model is an attempt to bring the previous models discussed above together. Patron's (2008) theorisation, which explains learner drop out or return to school in terms of learner factors and systemic factors, fit well within the congruence model. According to Patron (2008:4), drop out causal factors emanating from learners are subjective but might be both internal (e.g. short-termism view of school) and external (e.g. school systemic factors). These factors might help to

explain the kind of experiences that dropouts acquire in school as they reenroll and try to integrate.

## **2.4 MOTIVATIONS FOR SCHOOL REENROLMENT**

### **2.4.1 Motives for the decision to return to school**

There are both 'push' and 'pull' factors in learners' motivations to drop out and return to school. The school drop out literature describes labour market experiences that push learners back into school to complete their education: wider employment prospects, higher earnings, higher skills demand, disappointing labour market experiences and, recognition of the economic benefits obtained from completing school (Berliner et al, 2008). At the same time, principals, educators, sports coaches, and counselors helped to pull dropouts back to primary and secondary school by offering to immediately re-enroll them and by providing counseling and academic assistance on their return. This is particularly the case in developed countries (Berliner et al, 2008; Rumberger & Lamb, 1998; Bushnik, Barr-Telford & Bussiere, 2004; Raymond, 2008).

In general, Raymond summarises some of the common characteristics that have shown to "influence the decision to return to school" (Raymond, 2008:15). These are displayed in Table1.



**Table 2.1: Characteristics that Influence the decision to return to school**

| NO | CHARACTERISTIC                               | EXAMPLES OF DIMENSIONS                                                                  | INTENDED VARIABLE                                                                          |
|----|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Personal and family characteristic           | Has one or more children                                                                | Captures financial constraint                                                              |
|    |                                              | Lives alone                                                                             | Captures financial constraint                                                              |
|    |                                              | Main parent has postsecondary education diploma, certificate or degree                  | Captures individual's value of education                                                   |
|    |                                              | Main parents' education unknown                                                         |                                                                                            |
| 2  | Educational experience and aspirations       | Repeated a grade in primary school                                                      | Captures costs for returning to school, having lower ability, having lower self-confidence |
|    |                                              | Last math course was postsecondary education preparatory                                | Captures intentionally-temporary dropout                                                   |
|    |                                              | Last math course was grade 9 level or below                                             | Captures intentionally-temporary dropout                                                   |
|    |                                              | Wants to get postsecondary education                                                    | Captures intentionally-temporary dropout                                                   |
| 3  | Dropout circumstances (last grade completed) | Grade 10                                                                                | Captures costs for returning to school                                                     |
|    |                                              | Grade 11                                                                                |                                                                                            |
|    |                                              | Grade 12                                                                                |                                                                                            |
|    |                                              | Numbers of quarters since left school                                                   | Captures costs for returning to school                                                     |
| 4  | Reason for leaving school                    | Academic                                                                                |                                                                                            |
|    |                                              | Personal                                                                                |                                                                                            |
|    |                                              | Want to work/money                                                                      |                                                                                            |
|    |                                              | Other                                                                                   |                                                                                            |
| 5  | Labour market activities and conditions      | Did not work in the fall of 1999                                                        | Captures the cost of returning to school                                                   |
|    |                                              | Greatest number of hours worked per month in one job in fall 1999                       | Captures the cost of returning to school                                                   |
|    |                                              | Local unemployment rate for 15 year-olds and over (gender-specific, by economic region) | Captures the potential supply of jobs                                                      |
| 6  | Location                                     | Township                                                                                |                                                                                            |
|    |                                              | Town                                                                                    |                                                                                            |
|    |                                              | Farm                                                                                    |                                                                                            |
|    |                                              | Village                                                                                 |                                                                                            |

Rumberger (2005) notes that a highly skilled labour force in the USA makes it harder for dropouts to access the labour market and to survive economically. Dropouts cost



the society in terms of low productivity and loss of tax revenues. Dropouts have limited opportunities in life because they are likely to be unemployed or earn low wages over their working life (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Life opportunities are severely limited for learners who drop out of school (Croninger & Lee, 2001:10).

Family related pressure factors also pushed dropouts back into school. Younger girls who dropped out of school because of pregnancy may return to school. Household asset and adult member education in the household are *unimportant* in South Africans with regard to females returning to school after a pregnancy. In the cohort of dropouts that Grant and Hallman (2006:2) studied, household wealth, as measured by asset ownership, was not significantly associated with a return to schooling, nor was the level of education of adult household members. But household composition was significantly associated with a return to school. Young women living in households where an adult female (aged 25 to 49 or aged 60 and older) was present was more likely to return to school, compared to young women without this asset. The older member plays the role of caregiver.

According to Croninger and Lee (2001:10), the prospect of being at socio-economic disadvantage pushes many dropouts back into school. Many of the factors in Table 2.1 that triggered dropping out of school also influence reenrollment.

#### 2.4.2 Demographic factors in Motives for the decision to return to school

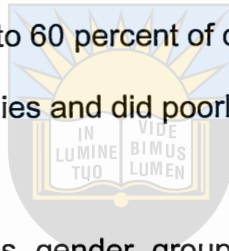
Certain demographic factors are common among dropouts who return to school. These include whether the parents have postsecondary education, the dropout's academic ability, age, duration of period out-of-school, and perceived cost to return (Raymond, 2008; Berliner et al, 2008; Oreopoulos, Page, & Stevens, 2003).

- Learner demographic factors and issues in dropping out of school

In the USA, the highest reenrollment rates were found for grade 9 dropouts (49.4 percent), Black dropouts (43.4 percent), female dropouts (34.7 percent), and dropouts not classified as English language learners (33.7 percent). But majority of reenrollees in the US dropped out in their first year of school (Berliner et al, 2008). In South Africa, Grant and Hallman (2006) found that 29 percent of 14–19-year-olds who dropped out of school when they were pregnant had returned to school at the time of the survey, compared with 52 percent of 20–24-year-olds. But with every year that passes after school dropout, young women are significantly less likely to return to school. Grant and Hallman (2006) argue that the time horizon explains the greater reenrollment among grade 9, compared to higher grades. These return to complete school to be able to access the labour market.

School dropout varied by gender. Berliner et al (2008) support this perspective as they reported that male learners were more likely to drop out than were female learners

(39.5 percent compared with 30.7 percent) and less likely to reenroll (28.1 percent compared with 34.7 percent). Work by Raymond (2008) in Canada echoed similar findings. Raymond submits that fewer women than men drop out from school and more women return to school. Also, the reasons that drove young men to drop out *do not* affect their decision to return. In contrast, the reasons for dropping out distinguish which young women return (Raymond, 2008). Of utmost importance in the finding from Raymond is the high failure rate experienced by dropouts on return to schooling. Raymond found that more than 50 to 60 percent of dropouts who re-entered education system failed to complete their studies and did poorly academically.



School performance disaggregates gender group reenrollment. Prior poor school performance, measured in terms of grade repetition or temporary withdrawal from school, is highly predictive of which young women will drop out, or be uninterested in reenrolling (Raymond, 2008; Berliner et al, 2008; Light, 1995; Meekers & Ahmed, 1999). Meekers and Ahmed (1999:5) found that among young women in Botswana who dropped out of school following a pregnancy and subsequently returned to school, the majority of returnees stayed in school until they received their matriculation certificate. But this is in contrast to Berliner et al (2008) who found in the US that dropouts stay about a year after reenrollment. Contexts seem to play a role in the reintegration experience.

But Meekers and Ahmed (1999) speculate that highly motivated learners with good school performance prior to pregnancy are those most likely to return, but also that

any learner who manages to return to school following a pregnancy is likely to have the impetus to advance her education. This is consistent with the greater urgency among female hypothesis to reenroll.

Bushnik et al (2002) investigated the phenomenon of return-to-school by gender in a sample of 2 350 school dropouts aged 18 to 20 years in Canada. Bushnik et al found both male and female dropouts returned to school but reported qualitative differences in their motives. While very few factors influence young women's decisions to return to school such as (a) the circumstances that brought them to leave school in the first place, (b) their aspirations to obtain a postsecondary education, and (c) the time elapsed since they left school, young men on the other hand, returned to school because of (a) their negative labour market experience, (b) their past academic experience and decisions, with those with good experiences being the more likely to return, and (c) their aspirations to obtain a postsecondary education.

For both men and women, returning to school is depended on whether the factors that push them out remain, or whether the absence from school was considered temporary, as captured by their long-term postsecondary aspirations (Raymond, 2008 p. 8).

### **2.4.3 Poverty**

Research and professional literature show that poverty has an impact on dropping out and the chances of reenrollment, or even reintegration at school (Rumberger, 2001:3). In 1993, the Casey foundation reported that "learners from low-income families were

three times as likely to drop out of school as those from more affluent homes. Female learners in the lower quartile were five times the rate of females from higher quartile, to drop out. Male learners in the lowest quartile were more likely to drop out than those in the highest quartile (Schargel & Smink, 2001:21). Often, when poverty conditions push a learner out of school and this learner later reenrolls the poverty conditions do not go away. And the poverty conditions continue to confront the person at school. Poverty conditions can shape the person's exposure at school (Brown, 2005:398).



According to a study conducted by the U.K. Department of Education (1993), children living in poverty face the following obstacles in their education: (a) lack of access to formal learning opportunities, (b) more serious physical and mental health problems, and (c) more environmental barriers that affect their education. These obstacles contribute to the kind of experience that a learner has when he/she reenrolls in school.

Poverty is as much a serious problem in rural South Africa as in urban South Africa. Black children face a higher rate of poverty than children of any other racial or ethnic group in South Africa (Sum & Fogg, 1991) and these children often live in conditions that may impede their school achievement (McLloyd, 1990) and return to school (Sum & Fogg, 1991). Wehlage et al (1989:58) emphasises the disconnection between home and school experienced by children in poverty. St. Germaine (1995:4) stresses the profound impact of poverty on American Indian and Alaska Native learners and the likelihood of completing school. Lockwood and Secada (1999:2) describe the

conditions of Hispanic learners who face severe poverty and the effect on their studies.

#### **2.4.4 Academic structure and failure**

A learner who reenrolls in school after having dropped out due to academic failure will likely continue to experience conditions of failure, unless the problems that cause the failure are removed. Brown (2009) found evidence to support this claim in a sample of dropouts who return in Primary School in Eastern Cape. In Brown's (2009) study, the dropout continues to experience low performance and entertain thoughts of even dropping out of school again.



The academic experience of dropouts in schools face with academic challenges is likely to be unpleasant (Berlinger, 2006). Gay (2000:169) cites studies that demonstrate effective versus ineffective instruction for Black learners. Factors associated with underachievement are discussed by Padron, Waxman and Ruera (2000:11).

Rumberger (2001:3) states that the institutional setting where people learn and work shapes the attitudes that they hold. From this perspective, it could be argued that these same settings could treat dropouts in particular ways that result in different experiences. Fine (1991:81) refers to practices that exclude learners as "institutional rituals". Instructional rituals could ostracise dropouts or hinder their smooth



reintegration experience. For instance, in the USA, research studies characterise American high schools as bureaucratic, fragmented and personal institutions which fail to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse learner population (Shannon & Bylsma, 2006). Reenrolled dropouts suffer from isolation experiences in this kind of context.

Newmann, Wehlage and Lamborn, (1992:19) point that for many learners, schooling signifies institutional hypocrisy and aimlessness, rather than consistency and clarity of purpose; arbitrariness and inequity rather than fairness; ridicule and humiliation rather than personal support and respect; and worst of all, failure rather than success. As a result, dropouts who experience school in this way are more likely to stop out and stay out rather than reenroll. This is because learners reject these experiences. According to Hixson (1993:1), learners are placed at risk when they experience a significant mismatch between their circumstances and needs, and the capacity or willingness of the school to accept, accommodate, and respond to them in a manner that supports and enables maximum social, emotional and intellectual growth development. It can be deduced from this statement that the presence of these factors in school can motivate dropouts to return to school and reintegrate satisfactory.

#### **2.4.5 Repeat dropping out experience and experience in school**

One third of the reenrolled in schools in California, USA, failed to complete even one course after reenrollment (Berliner, 2008). Most reenrolled did not earn enough credits



to graduate (Berliner, 2008). Nearly one-fifth of the reenrollees graduated from these high schools.

Some studies have provided insights into what some dropouts encounter after returning to school. Berliner (2008), for instance, found that dropouts cited academic struggles, the need for additional help to master grade-level content, boredom, and “limited ways to make up failed courses and credits” as factors that led them to drop out. In addition, life stresses such as demanding jobs, parenting responsibilities, and violence in their communities overwhelmingly took a toll on the reenrolled leading them to quit school. Berliner (2008) found, without exception, reports on mental health issues that impeded their ability to attend school regularly—anxiety, depression, and a sense of “hopelessness that take you nowhere far”.

## **2.5 DROPOUT REENROLLMENT AND POLICIES/INITIATIVES**

### **2.5.1 Policy supporting pregnancy girls’ return to school**

Although in many settings having a child marks the end of schooling for girls, a policy formalised in South Africa in 1996 but informally upheld previously by some school principals allows pregnant girls to stay in school and also allows young mothers to do so if they can manage logistically and financially (Kaufman et al, 2001). This policy, although not universally enforced, is credited with the observed lack of gender differences in total educational attainment and is believed to contribute to the observed long delay before the birth of a second child to adolescent mothers in South

Africa (Grant & Hallman, 2006). This policy has encouraged several females to return to school after giving birth to complete pre-tertiary education (Maharaj et al, 2000; Hallman & Grant 2003).

### **2.5.2 No fee school**

A no-fee school policy was implemented in South Africa in 2007. The no-fee policy empowers the minister of education to exempt certain schools from charging fees, based on poverty levels of the area they serve. The government determines which schools qualify to be no-fee schools using data from the Poverty Index supplied by Statistics South Africa (DoE, 2006). The three poverty indicators utilised for this purpose are income, unemployment rate and level of education of the community; these are weighted to assign a poverty score for the community and school. In terms of this policy, a school dropout who wishes to return to school cannot be denied entry on the basis of his/her inability to pay fees charged by the school. In this way, the policy supports dropout return to the formal education system.

Sayed & Ahmed (2008) point out that the no-fee school allocation is developed using five considerations. These are linked the rights of learners, the minimum basic package to ensure quality education, prices of goods and services, national distribution of income difference and poverty, and finally the state budget (DoE, 2006). The emphasis is on allowing the poor and disadvantaged learners access to education, regardless on whether the learners are attempting access for the first or for

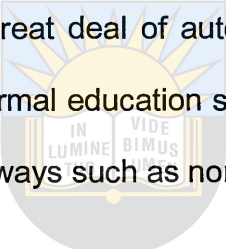
multiple times. Sayed and Ahmed (2008) support this position by asserting that the fee exemption policy was viewed as a way of ensuring that access was not denied to any learner.

The form of exemptions differs. Parents of learners had the opportunity to apply for a full or partial exemption at any school, and this applied to rich and poor schools (DoE, 1998). Dropouts are therefore given a wider option in terms of school choice. This could be interpreted as meaning that dropouts had the flexibility of returning to their previous school or starting at a new one, as desired, particularly if the reason for dropping out of school was linked to geographic relocation.

There are two major categories of learners who have been catered for in the no-fee policy. The first category is of learners who are orphans or abandoned children, and those receiving a poverty-linked state social grant (Sayed & Ahmed, 2008). Learners in this group qualify for a full exemption. The second category is not automatic, and learners may be granted a full or partial exemption based on parental income in relation to school fees. The proportion of parental income to school fees is determined by a set formula which schools need to utilise, upon receiving a written application from a parent. Exemptions in theory permit even the poor to attend rich or fee charging schools (DoE 2006).

### 2.5.3 South Africa School Act

The South Africa School Act (SASA, 1996) sets out the framework for school governance which allows for democratically elected School Governing Bodies as juristic persons in charge of school. All children have a right to education, particularly education up to grade 9, which in the South African context is deemed basic education. The Act insists on compulsory education and allows schools the right to charge school fees and ceded a great deal of autonomy to schools. But the SASA supports a linear transition in the formal education system from grade R to 12. It does not give consideration to other pathways such as nonformal schooling.



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## **2.6 LEADERSHIP ISSUES AND THE DROP OUT REENROLMENT DILEMMA**

### **2.6.1 School leadership**

Cuban (1988:190) says that there are more than 350 definitions of leadership but no clear and unequivocal understanding as to what distinguishes leaders from non-leaders. Leadership is regarded as essentially practical activity. According to Yukl (2002:3) a central element in many definitions of leadership is that there is a process of influence.

Yukl (2002:3) further argues that most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person (or group) over other people (or group) to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation. This explanation suggests, for instance, that school leadership involves the principal having an influence over the educators and learners in a school. The principal is in a position to influence dropouts and their integration in school. Leadership is very important to ensure that every learner gets the education they need to succeed.

Yukl (2003) emphasises that leadership may be exercised by teams as well as individuals by using a "person or group". This view is reinforced by Harris (2002) and Leithwood (2001) who both advocate for distributed leadership as an alternative to traditional top-down leadership models.

Bush (2003) argues however that the understanding of leadership as an influence is neutral because it does not explain or recommend the goals and actions to be sought through this process. According to Wasserberg, (1999) leadership should be grounded in personal and professional values and core values including ideas that: (a) schools are concerned with learning and all members of the community are learners, (b) every member of the school community is valued as an individual, (c) the school exists to serve its pupils and the local community, (d) learning is about development of the whole person and happens in and out of classrooms and (e) people prosper with trust, encouragement and praise (Wasserberg 1999:155). The study by Day, Harris and Hadfield (2001) showed that many of the above values are adopted by school principals.



The emphasis on values in the process of leadership puts the role of the principal, and other school leaders, at the centre of the dropout reenrollment situation. School leaders are obliged to value dropouts as learners and as members of the school community, and must support them to be in school and develop themselves.

One of the important components of leadership is vision. Beare, Caldwell and Millikan (1989:19), for example, state "outstanding leaders have a vision of their school, a mental picture of a preferred future - which is shared with all in the school community". They articulate four emerging generalisations about vision (Beare et al, 1989): (a) outstanding leaders have a vision for their organisations; (b) vision must be communicated in a way which secures commitment among members of the

organisation; and (c) time should be given to institutionalising vision if leaders have to be successful. There is evidence that supports these generalisations. Southworth (1997) summarises the findings of several research projects and commentaries on leadership in primary schools and found aspects of these visions. Nais et al's (1992:46) study shows that primary school heads provide a vision for their staff and the school.

Southworth (1993:47) suggests that school heads are motivated to work hard "because their leadership is the pursuit of their individual vision". The articulation of a vision provides a way for the school leaders to openly support the reintegration of dropouts in school and the kind of school they are striving towards. The high level of support is shown by these projects for the notion of visionary leadership but, there is a big problem when it comes to practice. Kouzes and Posner (1996:24) state that inspiring a shared vision is the leadership practice with which the (school heads) felt most uncomfortable. While school leadership is a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes, Fullan (1992) is even more critical, suggesting that visionary leaders may damage rather than improve their schools (Fullan, 1992:19).

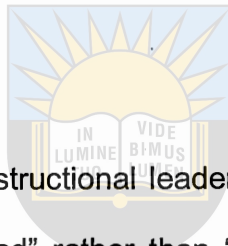
## **2.6.2 Approaches to school leadership and leading with dropouts in school**

### **2.6.2.1 *Instructional leadership***

According to Leithwood, Jantz, & Steinbach (1999:8) instructional leadership... typically assumes that the critical focus for attention by the leaders is the behaviour of



learners and educators and as educators engage in activities directly affecting the growth of learners. Sheppard (1996) claims that there are 'narrow' and broad' conceptions of instructional leadership, including school culture, which may have important consequences for learner and educator behaviour. The fact that school leaders have a duty to provide instructional leadership suggests that they are in a position to shape the educational experience of dropouts. Instructional leadership allows the school leaders to build a school culture that can support drop out integration.



Southworth (2002:78) says that instructional leadership is likely to be more effective when it is conceptualised as "broad" rather than "narrow" because it increases the scope for other leaders and principal to play a role and it recognises how social organisations operate.

Southworth (2002:79) highlights that "instructional leadership is strongly concerned with teaching and learning, including the professional learning of educators as well as learner growth". Leithwood (1994:499-501) claims "instructional leadership images are no longer adequate" because they are "heavily classroom focused" and do not address "second order changes (such as) organization building". Regardless of the debate about instructional leadership, it is evident that the notion of instructional leadership gives school leaders a lot of scope to structure the school curriculum to help dropouts catch up on academic work they might have missed. Instructional leadership involves the school head, educators and the school culture aiming at

improving the culture of learning and teaching in the school. This model differs from others because it focuses on the direction of influence, rather than the nature and source. It is being endorsed notably because of its emphasis on managing teaching and learning as core activities of educational institution.

#### 2.6.2.2 *Moral leadership*

Moral leadership involves the critical focus on the values and ethics of leaders themselves. Authority and influence are to be derived from defensible conceptions of what is right or good (Leithwood, 1999:10). Sergiovanni (1984:10) says "excellent schools have central zones composed of values and beliefs that take sacred or cultural characteristics." Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin, and Collarbone's (2002) research provide some evidence about the nature of values held in school and articulated by heads regarded as "outstanding". The beliefs and values were demonstrated through words and deeds, inclusivity, equal opportunity, equity or justice, high expectations, engagement with stakeholders, co-operation, team work, commitment and understanding. Moral leadership has something to do with values, beliefs and ethics of the leaders.

West-Burnham (1997:239) discusses two approaches to leadership, which may be categorised as 'moral and spiritual. These may well be represented by particular religions affiliation. Such leaders have a set of principles, which provide the basis of self-awareness. The second category is 'moral confidence', the capacity to act in a way that is consistent with an ethical system and is consistent over time.

Sergiovanni (1991:329) argues that both moral and managerial leadership are required to develop a learning community: In the principalship, the challenge of leadership is to make peace with two competing imperatives, the managerial and the moral. The two imperatives are unavoidable and the neglect of either creates problems. Schools must accommodate dropouts so they can have access to education. But for the school to transform itself into a moral institution, an openness to drop out must emerge. This is the moral imperative that principals face.

The South African ACE: school leadership material (Department of Education, 2007:91) refers to the importance of spiritual intelligence and leadership. They also note Fullan's (2005:92) concept of moral purpose. They included that "African society is built on a spiritual world in which answers and meaning are found." Moral leadership has a strong emphasis on values and beliefs that should go a long way into aiding dropouts reintegration in school.

#### 2.6.2.3 *Participative leadership*

Participative leadership assumes that the decision-making process of the group is the central focus of the group (Leithwood et al 1999:12). This normative model is based on three criteria: (a) participation will increase school effectiveness; (b) participation is justified by democratic principles and in the context of site-based management; and (c) leadership is potentially available to any legitimate stakeholder (Leithwood et al 1999:12).

Sergiovanni (1984:13) also points to the importance of a participative approach. This will succeed in bonding staff and learners together and in easing the pressure on school principals. The burdens of leadership will be less if leadership functions and roles are shared and if the concept of leadership density were to emerge as a viable replacement for principal leadership. Participative leadership is an attractive opinion that is supported by democratic ideals. For many years it has been popular in the literature but the evidence of its successful implementation in schools is scattered (Sergiovanni 1984:26).



Participative model is in line with the democratic values of the new South Africa. There is a firm commitment to participative decision making in South Africa. McLennan and Thurlow (2003:6) refer to an emerging paradigm, 'a growing emphasis on building relationships in education'. Bush and Heystek (2003) as well as Karlsson (2002) point to the need for co-operation between principals, learners and educators. Participative leadership should help dropouts to learn to work in teams. In the teamwork, dropouts should learn to have values like respecting other learners' views (Sergiovanni 1984).

#### 2.6.2.4 *Interpersonal leadership*

According to West-Burnham (2001:2) "interpersonal intelligence is the authentic range of intuitive behaviors derived from sophisticated self-awareness, which facilitates effective engagement with others". West-Burnham (2001) stresses the importance of

collaboration and interpersonal relationships, a theme taken up by Touby and Coghlan (1997).

Understanding the changing nature of relationships with young learners, the changing context of their lives and developing appropriate and effective responses to their personal academic needs and constant reflection and adjustment. These pressures are even more evident in the work of school leaders and suggest a requirement for high level personal and interpersonal skills (Johnson & Pickeregill, 1992). Good interpersonal relationships, emphasised by this model, can ensure educators, learners and other stakeholders function harmoniously in the school context. This kind of leadership can help dropouts develop good relationships with their educators and other learners.

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#### 2.6.2.5 *Distributed leadership*

The concept of distributed leadership becomes popular as a property of the collective rather than the individual. Gronn (2002) describes it as significantly more than the sum of its parts, whilst Spillane (2004:3) proposes that from a distributed perspective, leadership practice takes shape in the interactions of people and their situation, rather than from the actions of an individual leader.

Bennett, Wise, Woods, and Harvey (2003) suggest that despite some variations in definition, distributed leadership theory is based on emergent property, that there is

openness to the boundaries of leadership and varieties of expertise are distributed across many, not a few, thus distributed leadership is represented as dynamic, relational, inclusive, collaborative and contextually situated. Spillane, Friesen and Jonk (2004:5) argue that leadership is stretched over the social and situation contexts of the organisation. Leadership has a greater influence on schools and learners when it is widely distributed (Leithwood et al, 2006b). Distributing leadership in schools can be part of a strategy to assist dropouts in school.

## **2.7 SCHOOL CULTURE AND DROPOUT REINTEGRATION**

Culture can be described as the sharing of values, beliefs, understanding and sense making. The above understanding provides a basis to make a sensible and meaningful behaviour (Morgan, 1997:138). School culture focuses on individual beliefs and values. Cultural models focuses on a single dominant culture in an organization but the individual values are not always in harmony with one another because organisations usually have more than one culture (Morgan, 1997:137 & Schein, 1997:14).

If there is a mutual support in schools and learner achievements are celebrated, dropouts should be easily integrated in school life. Leaders can assist dropouts by being aware of the school culture (in staffroom and classrooms), seek to influence it and ensure it supports goals related to dropout reintegration (Davies 2007). Moreover, school leaders can assist dropouts by ensuring that appropriate values are central to the culture and that concepts like respect, fairness, sustainable living, celebrating

achievement and mutual support are articulated in the life of the school and its partnerships with others.

Southworth (2004) notes the features of positive teaching cultures in primary schools and compares their non-linear development and dependency on dialogue within networks to those required in knowledge-creating companies in marketing information technology sectors, from which school leaders might learn some useful tips. Understanding the culture of a school is an important step towards improvement to assist dropouts.



## **2.8 ISSUES OF SCHOOL CULTURE, SOCIAL COMPARISON AND LABELING IN SCHOOL**

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The label “dropouts” automatically puts such learners in a group distinct from those who did not drop out of school. This put learners who never dropped out of school in a position to see their world in terms of 'us' and 'them' (Tafjel, 1978). Tafjel's (1978) social comparison theory draws attention to such comparison. The dichotomous conception of the social world into 'us' (in-group) and 'them' (out-group) is the aspect of Tafjel's work that is of relevance to the study. Of significance is the claim that people often highlight the differences between their group and other groups by focusing on their group's distinctiveness (Tafjel, 1978).

*Social comparison* is the process whereby people compare themselves with others. The unique position of dropouts may put them through such experiences in school.



Petrunik (1991) hypothesised that when objective standards of behaviour are not available or are unclear, people use comparison, to evaluate their abilities and the opinion with others. Festinger (2005) noted that self-evaluation becomes accurate if people compare themselves with those having similar characteristics. Non-dropouts might consider the reasons that push a dropout out of school and use this as the basis to ostracise such dropouts when they return to school.

Schunk (1987) states the appropriateness of these similar actions which produce comparable results. Much of people's learning occurs socially (Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, & van den Bergh, 2002). Social comparison brings both positive and negative motivation depending on one's self-esteem, social standing, and self-efficacy. Other learners may ostracise reenrolled dropouts who had to drop out of school because of their 'thug' life. Furthermore, Braaksma et al (1987) explains that bad habits can be infectious, or being with others who do wrong may result in other people labeling you as wrong doers as well. Braaksma et al (1987) states that observing others failing can lead to people believing that they also lack the competencies to succeed and stop attempting the behaviour.

Butler (1998) found that temporal comparison increased with age, but children only take note of the last outcomes. Butler (1998) further suggests that children need assistance from educators to show them areas of improvement. Social comparison can help dropouts to improve their self-efficacy and be motivated telling themselves that they can do better.

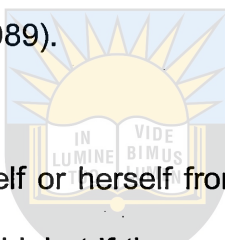
*Labeling:* Labeling theory came into existence from the study of deviance. Labeling theory focuses on the majority of people who tend to negatively label minorities. Dropouts often are in the minority in most schools. Labeling is concerned about how individual's self-identity or behaviour is determined (Keel, 2008). Keel (2008) states that the social labeling approach notices differences between primary and secondary deviances. Dropping out of school could be conceptualised as a deviation from norm of school attendance and completion. Primary deviance arises for a variety of reasons, which may be biological, psychological, and/or sociological (Keel, 2008). Secondary deviants defend attack or adapt to the problems caused by societal reactions to primary deviants (Keel, 2008).



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There is an informal labeling where children are labeled by parents, peers, or educators. The study by Lening, (1994) examined peers' attitudinal responses in the State University of New York. Results show that at a certain level, peers' attitudinal rejection varied significantly with their labeling status (Lening, 1994) but this finding is general as it does not point to particular gender or age group of people. The social context influences everybody, that is, society, community, school, family and individual. It starts with an individual who has low self esteem. He or she grew up being labeled firstly by family up to the society. When a person behaves outside the norm, he or she increases his or her chances of being labeled. This includes dropouts. Research shows that when a person is labeled, he/she eventually behaves in accordance with the label.

Labeling theory can cause an individual to commit deviance. Through interaction with each other, a person can be constructed or reconstructed socially. In the communities people judge others on what they do and label them (Bruce, 1989). When a person is treated differently the person's self image is affected and he/she behaves as a deviant (Tannenbaum, 2009). Some people end up labeling themselves, seeing themselves as what others call them, and their low self esteem drives them to practice this negative behaviour. The society always views the individual in the deviant context once he or she is labeled (Bruce, 1989).



An individual tends to isolate himself or herself from other people once he or she is labeled, lives on his or her own world, but if there are those like him or her, he or she associates with them Tannenbaum, 2009). Due to negative labels, an individual experiences a change in his or herself concept and shows deviant self conceptions. Some people change their attire, the way they talk, their posture and mannerism. These changes in self concepts are consistent with deviant role (Petrunik 1991). This change causes problems for an individual, like he or she be penalised and rejected by the society. Sometime labeling can cause an individual to be blamed for what he or she didn't do. Labeling damages an individual's self-concept and his or her motivation to learn (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994)). Also labeling imposes negative status on an individual. Negative qualities are assigned to these individuals and an individual is treated as if he or she possessed stigmatising characteristics (Knutsson, 1977).

## 2.9 SUMMARY

There is evidence that causes of school drop out can influence the experience that a learner gains after returning to school. Among these dropouts, female learners are more likely to return to school than male learners. Being from poor background has an impact on the lived experience in school. Drop out causal factors help to explain the kind of experiences that dropouts acquire in school as they reenroll and try to integrate. Many dropouts are pushed back to school by socio-economic advantages and labour market experiences. Due to the skill demand, high earnings and recognition of the economic benefits, learners have to go back to school and complete their education. The decision is based on the personal life of the individual and his or her family background. In Africa, especially in Botswana, dropouts who reenroll stayed at school until they received their matriculation certificate unlike in United States where they stay for just about a year after reenrollment. Poverty in areas of Black people is a problem; its conditions confront the reenrollees at school and impede their school achievement.

Within the South African context, nothing has been said in the literature, about admission policies for dropouts in school. Also there are silences about the programmes and strategies put in place by the government to help and encourage these learners to improve their academic performance, as cited in Berliner's (2008:6) study that they are struggling academically and need extra help to fight those factors that led them to drop out.

This study focuses on social experiences of the reenrollees in school. Also the focus is on the side of school leadership, their motivation to these learners to integrate in school and activities they have to keep these learners in school.



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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

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#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter reviewed the literature on the school dropout phenomenon. In this chapter the researcher presents the research methodology used in the study, and how the research process unfolded. The chapter gives an account of the research methods and designs adopted, including measures to ensure trustworthiness, ethical considerations, anonymity/confidentiality, deception, data collection and data processing. These constituted the plan of action of the study and the quality criteria observed in the process. The chapter starts with an explanation of the research paradigm.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

##### **3.2.1 Interpretivist paradigm**

The study adopted an interpretivism paradigm because this paradigm allows the researcher to focus on contextual meaning making. In the interpretivist paradigm, the researcher's interest is in the meaning that people make of phenomena (Peshkin, 1993). This paradigm enabled the researcher to gain insight into the nature of a particular phenomenon, develop new concepts of theoretical perspectives about the

phenomenon, and discovered the problems that exist within the phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). In this paradigm, a researcher may study a situation without prior theory (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). They let the theory to emerge from the data. Interpretivist researchers' knowledge would not be to inform interventions but to develop a deeper understanding of the situation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). In this study, the interpretive paradigm was applied as the approach because it allowed the researcher to take a closer look at dropouts in their naturalistic settings, using methods for in - depth study, instead of surveying. The researcher looked for rich detailed information of a qualitative nature through in depth interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The study was exploratory in nature, thus a qualitative approach was adopted, which is consistent with the interpretive paradigm. The qualitative approach was adopted in this study to get different participants' perspectives and the experiences of the reenrollees.

Qualitative research methodology was used because through its data collection methods, it enabled the researcher to be the primary instrument to collect data. Merriam (1998:7) states that the researcher being the primary data collection instrument enables data collection through human interaction. The researcher rather than an inanimate inventory, questionnaires or computer, acted as instrument and was responsive to the context, that is adapted the techniques to the circumstances.



### 3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The lived experiences of the participants were the main focus of the investigation, making this a phenomenological study. This study allows the researcher to see the world as it is experienced by the participants. This design enables the researcher to use an interviewing method for data collection (de Vos, 1998). This study also helps the researcher to gain an understanding of the typical experiences the participants have had (Tesch, 1994).



### 3.4 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING

The sample comprised of both dropouts who reenrolled in school and school principals. There were 15 dropouts who participated in the study. These participants were recruited from two secondary schools in rural districts in Stutterheim. The sampling method used to select dropouts was purposive sampling. This is because the researcher wanted rich information from participants and individuals who met the sampling criterion of having had the experience of dropping out of school. The participants were chosen from grade 10 and 11. The average age of the participants was 18 years. Some participants spent at least one year out of school, some two years and some, less than a year before re-entering. Educators at the two schools assisted in identifying the participants. Participants in both gender categories were represented.

In addition to the dropouts, the sample also consists of two principals. The principals were heads of the schools from which dropouts were drawn. The sampling method used to select the principals was purposive sampling. The criterion used was simply that the principals were leaders of their schools. The purposive sampling strategy is a non – probability sampling strategy which is consistent with the interpretive paradigm on which the research is based.

### **3.5 ACCESS TO PARTICIPANTS AND RESEARCH SITE**

The data was collected from two secondary schools in Stutterheim area. To avoid revealing the identity of these institutions, the label school A and school B is used to refer to these schools, respectively. To gain access to the research sites and participants, the researcher sought permission from the District Department of Education. A letter was written to the district education office to inform them about the research and to request permission to access the schools (see Appendix A for letter). Permission was granted for the research to be done.

At the school level, the school principal introduced the researcher to educators. The educators assisted the researcher to identify the dropouts who reenrolled. The educators also acted as *loco-parentis* (or substitute parents) and gave consent for the dropouts to participate in the study. In the process of soliciting permission to do the research, the purpose of the investigation was fully explained to all participants. The researcher visited both schools for arrangements to conduct the interviews.

### **3.6 DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH SITES**

School A is a Combined School with an enrolment of 1250 learners from grade R to 12. The school is in a rural area about 35km from the Stutterheim town centre. School B is a Finishing School with an enrolment of 958 learners in grade between 10 and 12. School B is located in Stutterheim Central. School A was established 27 years ago by the Missionaries. The school has 40 educators and 5 support staff. Access to the school is via a gravel road, and learners walk to school. Its surrounding community is largely a farming community. In contrast, school B is within easy reach of the town centre, with tarred road to the school. The school has 35 educators. School B allows visitors only after 14h45. The researcher visited school A and B twice to meet the principals and made arrangements for the interviews. The researcher received a warm welcome from the learners in the schools.

### **3.7 DATA COLLECTION**

#### **3.7.1 Research instrument**

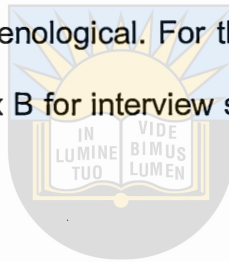
##### **3.7.1.1 *Researcher as instrument***

In the study, the researcher served as the data collection instrument by interviewing the participants. The researcher gave close attention to the participants' own words. She maintained the awareness of where she was situated according to the relevant dimensions of the participant's life-worlds (Sherrard, 1998:253). The researcher perceived herself to be close to the participants socially and culturally which enabled a

smooth interviewing process.

#### 3.7.1.2 *Phenomenological and semi-structured interviews*

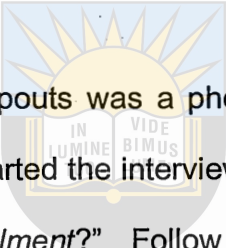
The researcher conducted indepth interviews with the dropouts. She chose this method because it suited the study design and was deemed an appropriate way to access the experiences of the participants. Dropouts were interviewed individually and the interviewing style was phenomenological. For the school principal, the interviews were semistructured (see Appendix B for interview schedules). This is because it was a follow-up.



#### 3.7.1.3 Data collection procedures

To make arrangement for the interviews, the researcher visited the schools and explained the purpose of the research and requested permission to use a tape recorder. Some participants agreed to the use of the tape recorder, while others did not want it to be used because of insecurity about their anonymity – despite being promised fully confidentiality and anonymity. In one instance, where the participants refused to be tape recorded, the researcher had to write down verbatim as the interview developed. Only two participants did not want to be recorded so the note-taking exercise was not burdensome. The researcher maintained a good atmosphere with the participants so they were able to feel free to talk.

Interviews with the participants were conducted at the school. Interviews with the dropouts were conducted during lunch break and after school hours. In some cases, educators gave some participants special permission to be interviewed during teaching time. The principal interview was conducted during their working hours. These arrangements were based on the convenience of the participants. Each interview with the dropouts lasted about 50 minutes. The principal interview lasted about 40 minutes each. The interviews were conducted in the English language.



The interviewing style with the dropouts was a phenomenological one. As a result, there was one question that kick-started the interviewing process: *"Tell me about your social experiences since reenrolment?"* Follow up questions based on the conversation were asked. The interviewing style was non-directive, and a process of not just probing but reflecting was employed (e.g. "Could you tell me more about..."). In this way, the content of each interview was determined by the participants. In cases where the interviews were recorded, the data was transcribed verbatim.

The interviewing style with principals was semistructured. The interview covered the following themes: the behaviour of dropouts in school, policy/measures supporting dropouts' reintegration and reenrolment considerations.

### **3.8 DATA ANALYSIS**

Interpretive phenomenological analysis was employed to analyse the interview transcripts (Smith, 1996). Analysis focused upon identifying recurrent themes across

transcripts. Recurrent themes are similar and consistent ideas, thoughts, images and accounts shared. Being phenomenological, the emphasis in the analysis was on the essences and structures of the phenomenon, that is, the experience. The process of identifying recurrent themes involved seven steps. The researcher attempted to 'see' the world as it is experienced by the participants. Each transcript was read repeatedly (see Appendix C for script).

Both semantic content and language use were examined. Repetition, explanation, justification, vernacular terms, implicit and explicit assumptions, unusual phrases, and personal resonant accounts were highlighted. These were then coded with key words or phrases. In the next stage, themes were compared and consolidated. Repetition in the themes across participants, and across focus group, was taken as shared understandings. A validation check of themes was conducted by my supervisor as another experienced qualitative researcher. The protocol for data analysis was given to an external data analyst who was asked to also analyse the same data (see Appendix D for PROTOCOL). The data from the principals were analysed following the same procedure.

### **3.9 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to validity and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ensuring trustworthiness is important because it evaluates its worth, check whether the findings fit and are consistent, and the functioning of the findings. In this

study, Guba and Lincoln's (1985) model was used to improve the quality of the findings and the trustworthiness of the evidence. The model involves four components as follows: (a) truth value, (b) applicability, (c) consistency and (d) neutrality. For truth value, the following were done in this study: member checking and peer examination (Krefting in de Vos, 1998: 348-349). For applicability, the following were done: nominated sample and dense description (Krefting in de Vos, 1998: 348-349). For consistency, peer examination and code of data and recode procedures were used (Krefting in de Vos, 1998: 348-349), and for neutrality, field notes were taken.

Furthermore, the following strategies to minimise researcher bias was adopted (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997:404): mechanically recording of data; verbatim accounts, in the sense that direct quotations from the transcribed data were used to illustrate the views and low-interference descriptors, and that concrete descriptions from the interviews were used in the research findings.

### **3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **3.10.1 Informed Consent and voluntary participation**

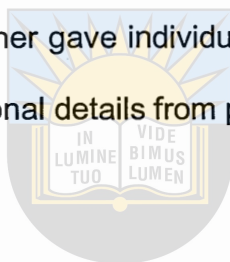
Learners were used in the research. These individuals were minors so their educators, as loco parentis, consented to their participation. In other words, the researcher had to get consent from their educators. Participants were told about the nature of the study and given the choice if they wanted to take part or not (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Only



individuals who volunteered were allowed to participate.

### **3.10.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Privacy and confidentiality of participants were guaranteed. The researcher kept the recordings and notes from participants strictly confidential. The identity of the participants and the research sites were not revealed in the reporting of the findings. To identify participants the researcher gave individual a code number, which only the researcher understood. Thus, personal details from participants remain anonymous.



### **3.10.3 Deception**

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The true purpose of the research was revealed from the start. Participants were not enticed by any incentives for participation in the research.

### **3.10.4 The competence of the researcher**

The researcher recognised the importance of ensuring that this research was conducted in a competent manner. The researcher undertook this investigation by accepting ethical responsibility, to remain sensitive to the needs of the participants in this study, and maintain objectivity and refrain from making value judgements about individual values and points that they shared (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:107).

### 3.11 SUMMARY

In this chapter a report has been given on the research design and methodology. This included a description of the basic research design, an account of ethical measures, and measures to ensure trustworthiness and a description of data collection and data processing methods. In the next chapter the findings of the empirical investigation have been reported.



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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION**

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#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter discussed the research methodology adopted in the study. In this chapter, an account is provided of the findings of the empirical investigation. The chapter begins with an overview of the research questions investigated. It then describes the composition of the research sample, and the main findings of the study. The findings are presented in accordance with each research question, and have been foreground in the literature through an indepth discussion. The chapter ends with a brief summary. The chapter commences with the key research questions.

#### **4.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study investigated the three sub-research questions. These questions were as follows:

- 4.2.1** What factors prompted the dropouts to return to school?
- 4.2.2** What social-life experience characterise dropouts' reintegration in their school context?
- 4.2.3** What are school managers' reactions towards dropouts' experiences, and their implications?

The sequence of the research questions posed above is purely the researcher's judgment of their logical flow. The questions about the learners have been posed first, largely because these individuals are the primary focus in the investigation.

### 4.3 COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE

There were 17 participants in total in the study. Fifteen (15) of these participants were dropouts who returned to school. Two (2) were principals of schools where the dropouts attended. **The fifteen dropouts were subjected to indepth interview sessions.** The school leaders were interviewed individually.



#### 4.3.1 Characteristics of the sample

Of the 15 dropouts interviewed, seven were male, and eight were female. The eight females were between 17 and 19 years of age. The males aged between 18 and 22 years. The participants were either currently in grade 10 or 11, and were pursuing school subjects in either the Sciences/Applied Sciences or Humanity/Social Sciences stream. The majority were in the Humanity/Social Sciences stream.

The participants had been out of school for different number of times and different duration. Two were repeat dropouts, having dropped out of school at grade 9 and again at grade 10. All the others dropped out of school once, though not necessarily at

the same grade level. One participant dropped out of school as early as grade 8, but was currently in grade 10. The others dropped out either at grade 9, 10, or 11. The grade level from which the participants dropped out and the grade level they were currently in are displayed in Table 4.1. Eleven of the fifteen participants spent between one and two years out of school.

The 'head of the household' data of the dropouts, in Table 4.1, makes for interesting reading. Only two of the fifteen participants lived with both of their biological parents. Others lived with relatives (e.g. aunt, grandmother, elder sister, and stepmother) who headed their household. Two dropouts lived as heads of their household, and were taking care of their younger relatives. A summary of the participants' demographic and school characteristics is shown in Table 4.1

**Table 4.1 Participants demographic and school characteristics**

| Participants | Gender | Age (in years) | Current Grade | Grade Dropped out | Number of times dropped out | Duration out of school | Head of household where living | Subject stream            |
|--------------|--------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| L1           | Female | 18             | 10            | 10                | One                         | 6 Mths                 | Aunt                           | Sciences / Applied Sci    |
| L2           | Male   | 19             | 10            | 9 & 10            | Two                         | 2 Yrs                  | Father                         | Humanity / Social Sci     |
| L3           | Female | 18             | 10            | 8                 | One                         | 1 Yr                   | Mother                         | Sciences/Applied Sciences |
| L4           | Male   | 19             | 10            | 9                 | One                         | 2 Yrs                  | Mother                         | Sciences/Applied Sciences |
| L5           | Female | 18             | 11            | 10                | One                         | 2 Yrs                  | Elder sister                   | Sciences/Applied Sciences |
| L6           | Male   | 19             | 11            | 10                | One                         | 1.5 Yrs                | Grandmother                    | Sciences/Applied Sciences |
| L7           | Male   | 22             | 11            | 9 & 10            | Two                         | 2 Yrs                  | Self                           | Sciences/Applied Sciences |
| L8           | Male   | 19             | 10            | 10                | One                         | 2 Yrs                  | Father                         | Sciences/Applied Sciences |
| L9           | Female | 17             | 11            | 11                | One                         | 3 Mths                 | Stepmother                     | Humanity/Social Sciences  |
| L10          | Female | 19             | 11            | 10                | One                         | 2 Yrs                  | Grandmother                    | Humanity/Social Sciences  |
| L11          | Female | 17             | 10            | 9                 | One                         | 1 Yr                   | Self                           | Humanity/Social Sciences  |
| L12          | Male   | 18             | 11            | 11                | One                         | 1 Yr                   | Father                         | Humanity/Social Sciences  |
| L13          | Male   | 18             | 10            | 10                | One                         | 2 Yrs                  | Mother                         | Humanity/Social Sciences  |
| L14          | Female | 19             | 11            | 9                 | One                         | 3 Yrs                  | Father                         | Humanity/Social Sciences  |
| L15          | Female | 19             | 10            | 9                 | One                         | 1 Yr                   | Grandmother                    | Humanity/Social Sciences  |

Key: L for Learner

There was no married participant in the sample. But one female (L14) was placed into an arranged marriage situation which she disliked and had to escape from. Three of the eight females (L3, L5, and L15) were parents, having fallen pregnant in school. None of these 'mothers' lived alone nor were heads of their household. They had either their mother, or elder sister, or grandparent as the head of the household where they lived. Given the significance of household composition – in which an adult female

(aged 25 to 49 or aged 60 and older) is present – to the likelihood of school reenrolment, it is unsurprising that these females were able to return to school to finish up their secondary education.

Of the seven male participants, one (L2) was a parent. This father participant, currently lived with his father, and impregnated a fellow school mate. Like many of the other participants, he dropped out of school before completing grade 9 and dropped out again in grade 10.



#### **4.3.2 Demographic characteristics of the school managers (principals)**

School principals were treated as the sole school managers, though in reality the school is managed by a Senior Management Team (SMT). But the principal is the supreme leader in the school and has the final decision, hence was used. Two principals participated. Both were male, aged between 48 and 55 years. The highest professional qualification of these participants was an Honours degree in Education (B.Ed. Hons). One of the principals (Principal 'A') had been working as school heads for 17 years, while the other (Principal 'B') for 6 years.

#### **4.4 THE FINDINGS OF STUDY**

The findings have been presented in accordance with the research questions posed above. This is presented below.



#### 4.4.1 *Factors that prompted the dropouts to reenrol in school*

All the participants spoke about the factors that influenced their decision to return to reenrol in school and reflected, in the process, on the people who played a role in their decision to reenrol. They also spoke about the way they currently view schooling and its importance subsequent to the drop out experience. The decision of the participants to return to school appeared quite complex involving multiple motives. In general, all the participants returned to school after the circumstances that pushed/pulled them out/in (e.g. lack of financial support, personal health problems, providing caregiving to family, motherhood responsibility, absconding aversive experience at family home, being with sugar daddy, etc) had improved or changed. They also returned because of their aspirations for a 'better life' from the opportunities they deemed education can provide.

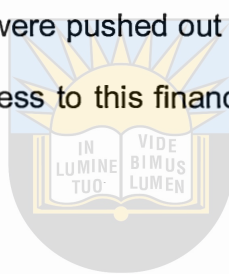
The fact that the participants returned to school to continue their education showed that their drop out behaviour was temporary, or consistent with what Raymond (2008:3) labelled 'stopout', which interrupted their schooling. The temporary nature of their action makes it possible to group the dropouts as follows: the *intentionally-temporary dropouts* (those who deliberately quit school to engage in some other activities but later return) and the *unintentionally-temporary dropouts* (those who were forced by circumstances to quit school but later return when conditions change).

The abovementioned categorisation provides an important **lens** through which to assess dropouts' motivation for reenrolment in school. As discussed below, both push

and pull factors played a role in dropouts' reenrolment in school. These factors included access to pecuniary support, improvement in family and personal health, post-childbirth quest for a better life, and a desire to make a new start in life. These factors are discussed in turn in the section below.

#### 4.4.1.1 *Access to pecuniary support*

Participants L1, L6, and L12, who were pushed out of school by insufficient pecuniary support, returned after gaining access to this financial assistance. Typical comments from these participants were:



Now that I have someone to assist me I decided to come back to school because there is nothing disturbing me now. My aunt is helping me, she is responsible for my school needs, and she is also buying me clothes and gives me food to eat... paid my school fees, bought me a new uniform, bought me books and is responsible for all my school needs. While I was out of school, I did nothing and didn't want to see anyone... Maybe what I went through has an influence in my coming back to school [L1]

I told my grandmother that I am no longer attending school. My grandmother sent me money and I came to stay with her. As it was *not* my intention to leave school, I had to come back to school and start learning. I am happy now that I'm back to school because that is where I like to be. I felt bad when I was out of school because I like school very much. [L6]

When my father was out of jail [for killing my mother] I ask him to send me back to school... my proposal was accepted so I am back to school again. My stepmother has no problem with that. [L12]

Family members gave assistance to the participants to reenrol in school. The financial support helped the participants to meet their school needs. Quitting school was clearly unintentional, as one participant stated. Perhaps for this reason, it was quite easy for them to return. The literature on drop out supports this hypothesis. Using the rational decision making model, Altonji (1993:10) found, in previous study, that as individuals acquire new information about the benefits and costs of schooling, they reconsider their decision and decide to return to school. Similarly, Light (1995:12) reports that as individuals build their credit or savings to relax borrowing constraints, they are able to loosen their borrowing constraints, and reconsider their past decision to quit school or even reverse it. In other words, having access to financial resources allows school reenrollment. Although the participants in this study were not shackled, *per se*, by borrowing constraints, they nevertheless had financial limitations which they had to overcome before returning to school. In this sense, their decision to reenroll is consistent with the perspectives that Altonji (1993) and Light (1995) reported in their study.

But Garnier, Stein and Jacobs (1997:5) found that some dropouts still remain out of school despite having access to financial support. Thus, the question is what added impetus, than the access to pecuniary support, motivated dropout L1, L6 and L12 to reenroll in school. It seems a degree of motivation to complete schooling played a key role. In fact, for participant L1 and L12, the decision to return to school was primarily self-motivated. Their typical comment was that: "...the decision to come back to school was self-motivated, [though] it was not my intention to leave." Both self-

motivation and family pressure influenced participant L6 to reenrol: "...It was both self-motivated and family pressure [for me to come back]. My grandmother was very upset when I told her that I am not schooling. She asked me to come and live with her so that I could go back to school." For these participants, motivation to be in school was high.

The motivation of these participants to be in school was intertwined with their recognition of the value of education. For them, education was crucial to reduce their dependency on others and was a means to a 'better life'. One participant made the point that: "...I wanted to learn and have a good job...and don't want to be like my father who uses much of his money on alcohol" [L1]. A similar point was made when another stated: "...I like schooling because every good job needs a person who has good education. Education is one of the best things a person should have in order to live a happy and comfortable life.... Now that I don't have parents, and my granny is old, I value school more... I have to study hard in order to pass [exams] so that when my grandmother's energy comes to an end, I will be able to stand on my own in order to survive" [L6]. The extrinsic motive and instrumental value, which the dropouts attached to school reenrolment, is evident.

The assumption underlying the comments above is that school completion leads necessarily to a career and ultimately a better life. The link between education and employment (or the better life) is one which is well documented in not only European and North American literature, but also in African writings (Gibbs 2005; Kraak, 2003;

Sen, 1999; Lucas 1988; UNESCO 2005). Educational attainment indeed exerts a powerful influence on issues of access to the labour market (World Bank, 1999). It is thus unsurprising that this sentiment is voiced by these dropouts, who seem to have reached these conclusions based on their lived experience out of school.

It seems from the available evidence that the reenrolment decision of the participants above is related to a combination of not just the access to pecuniary support, but also to, what seems, certain underlying factors linked to both internal and external motivation. The influence of self-motivation is quite interesting. There is a general view in South Africa that many learners, particularly in rural communities, find school 'boring' and uninteresting (Consortium, 2005:5) and would rather be not attending. The decision of these participants to reenrol runs counter to the abovementioned view, and suggests that when the motives for quitting school are investigated an emphasis on the circumstances that underlie the drop out behaviour maybe necessary. Raymond's (2008) point that when dropouts leave school unintentionally, their return is more likely, which perhaps is a further way of accounting for the action of these participants.

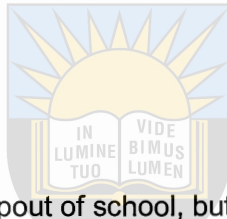
#### *4.4.1.2 Improvement in family and personal health situation at home*

An improvement in the family situation at home enabled participants L7, L9, and L11, who dropped out of school to offer caregiving support to their mother and sister and to have their personal illness treated, to return to school. For these participants too, it was inevitable to reenrol in school because their drop out was unintentional.

Participant L7 explained:

I never decided to dropout of school, but the situation at home (mother's illness; sister's death, and caring for smaller sister) caused me to stop. That has now improved. I did struggle to maintain our home and take care of the kids. I can say the reason for coming back to school is that I want to finish my high school and study further in order to be able to get a job. I want my sisters and my nephew to have good education and everything they want so that they don't feel the absence of their parents. [L7]

Participant L11 stated:



...It was not my intention to dropout of school, but after the death of my mother, I had to care for my little sister. I came back to school now that the baby [little sister] is able to go to the day-care... I am a mother to my sister so I have to study hard and become something in life and be able to take good care of this miracle baby sister. I want to do what is best for her so she doesn't feel her mother is no more.

The above comments show that both participants (L7 and L11) lost their parents. But their situation at home improved, which allowed them to reenrol in school. The health of participant L9 also improved, which also allowed her to reenrol. She explained: "...I came back to school because it was not my intention to dropout. I dropped out because I was sick. I missed school... Education is the key to open all doors in the work industries" [L9].



But data from the school principal interviews suggests that family relations also contributed to some learners quitting school intentionally, and those learners only manage to return after resolving their crisis.

I asked one learner who dropped out last year on re-admission date why did he drop out. With tears on his eyes, he said he wanted so bad to continue schooling but the problem is that he loss both his parents and the people who take care of him have no interest in education. They did not give him a chance to do his school work at home; they did not provide him with clothes, uniform and support of any kind. Whenever he asks for something required by the school, they would tell him that it is not their fault that he loss his parents. The learner decided to drop out, and look for a job, and so only came back after getting money. [Principal A]

The family had a negative influence, after the learner lost his or her parents. It is *not* uncommon, as Raymond (2008:5) found, for personal health and family problems to make school attendance impossible for some learners, who only return to school after getting a relief from such problems.

The interesting evidence above though, is that the participants opted to sacrifice their education for family caregiving and support responsibility. There is no clear explanation for this kind of decision. But one may speculate that it could be cultural or socioeconomic related. It could also be a deep ethical/ubuntu orientation. Culturally, in some traditional African families, a higher value is placed on family concerns than on education (Mbamara, 2009:1). Children leaving school to give attention to family member issues is a way of demonstrating respect and honour for their elders



(Mbamara, 2009:2). It may have been this cultural deed that prompted the decision to quit school, thereby only managing to return once caregiving was no longer necessary.

An alternative explanation is that the decision could be socioeconomic related as in poor families, financial constraints, according to Grant and Hallman (2006) prevent the hiring of house-maids to give care to elders or other family members. Consequently, the child's education is sacrificed to allow him/her to perform caregiving roles (King & Mason, 2001). This alternative explanation is more likely as many of the participants were from rural communities, defined by poverty conditions. But, of course, the possibility that both the cultural and socioeconomic explanations might be at play, cannot be ruled out.



It seems that from the available evidence, related to dropouts who return to school after seeing an improvement in their family and personal health situation at home, one can conclude that although the reenrolment is related to the family and personal health situation improvement, the reason for the decision to interrupt their schooling or later reenrol, had nothing to do with non-recognition of the social and economic value of education, but a great deal to do with cultural acceptability and financial constraints. In other words, in a family context with poverty and ill health of family members, a learner's school attendance is weighed against the availability (and affordability) of others to give care to those who are sick.

#### *4.4.1.3 Future survival strategy to offset the effects of early setbacks for motherhood role*

Participants L3, L5 and L15, who dropped out of school due to pregnancy, and subsequently to perform motherhood responsibilities, spoke about reenrolling in school "...to finish [their] studies, [and] get a good job". There is a greater emphasis on finishing education to get a job among participants with motherhood responsibility, compared to the other dropouts. Two typical comments were:

As I was raising the child I saw the lifetime opportunity I missed. Having a child and not working is very hard... I decided to come back to school, finish my studies and see what to do after matric... I wanted to learn and get a better job... My out of school experience show me that without education I'm nothing. [L3]

My sister made me to see the importance of getting a better education. I have to finish my studies and have a decent job to be able to raise my child on my own. I want to give my child a better future so that she can be proud of me as a mother...From what I have learnt, it was important [to reenrol] because without education I won't be able to live a happy life. [L5]

The participants spoke about reenrolling in school with a hope to succeed. The motherhood experience seemed to have communicated a powerful message of the significance of schooling. For these participants, schooling seemed to take on a strong extrinsic value. They held the view that with the completion of schooling, they would have a chance of achieving a better future for themselves and their children. This perspective is consistent with prevailing notion of formal education which projects it as a prerequisite for both social and labour market access (World Bank, 1999:3).

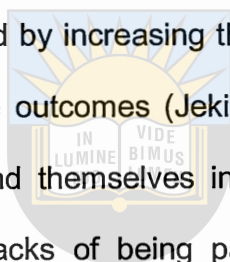
Previous studies have pointed to the direct relationship between employment and

educational achievement – a lesson, which teen-mothers seem to have learnt. Economic scholars, such as Wilson (1999:5), have demonstrated an inverse relationship between unemployment and educational achievement. That is, the more highly educated an individual is, the more unlikely it is that he or she will be unemployed. As South Africa's labour market become less labour intensive and more technology driven, the chance of getting a job without having a secondary school certificate, or higher, becomes lower. The fact that these dropouts had reenrolled in school and had indicated that they were now more keen to complete their schooling, suggests that they had recognised the little prospect for them in the social and labour market, if they do not improve their education.



But the paradox, according to Grant and Hallman (2006:12), is that while the motherhood responsibility may have acted as a source of motivation for these teen-mothers to work hard to succeed in school, there are limited job opportunities in the South African economy (ILO, 2008:34). At the same time, coping with the practical and emotional dimensions of being a mother on the one hand, and a learner on the other hand can frustrate and burnout a person, if the necessary support structure is not in place at home (Grant & Hallman, 2006:34). There is evidence in the comments of participant L3 above that frustration is already being felt as she acknowledged that having a child and being unemployed is a difficult combination. The fact then is that limited job opportunities and the practical task of caring for a child while in school can limit the prospect of achieving the better life that these participants aspire towards.

The emphasis among the teen-mother participants to complete schooling in order to take up employment and to care for their siblings suggests an early transition from adolescence to adulthood roles and responsibilities. Research by Jekielek and Brown (2005) and others (Hagan & Wheaton, 1993) found that many teens experience setbacks early on by becoming parents too soon, dropping out of school, or failing to find work. These experiences not only make the transition to adulthood more difficult, but also have long-lasting effects by compromising a teen's potential to provide for himself or herself in adulthood, and by increasing the risk that a teen's own offspring will experience the same negative outcomes (Jekielek & Brown, 2005:3). The teen mothers in this study evidently find themselves in an early transition to adulthood situation, due to their *triple* setbacks of being parent, school dropouts, and had difficulty accessing the labour market.



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It seems that by returning to school, the teen-mothers were making an attempt to cushion the effects / consequences / problems associated in later life with the early transition to adult roles. Research indicates, for example, that young single parents often struggle for financial stability and independence (Moore, 1997:56), and those who marry as teens are three times more likely to see their marriages end in divorce, compared with marriages that occur at later ages (Martin & Bumpass, 1989).

The reenrolment in school was a mission to defy social stigma about being a failure due to the early setbacks. A typical comment from participant L3 and L15 was that: "...I saw how successful other people are because of perseverance in school. I want

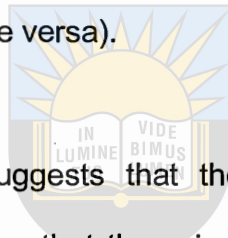
to prove that I can do it; I am not a failure as other people say. I haven't failed in life." The reference to avoiding to be labelled 'a failure' draws attention to the kind of social experiences that dropouts can go through (*cf. chapter 2*). But there is a clear determination among these participants to persist with their schooling.

It seems then that, from the available evidence related to teen-mothers who return to school after childbirth, one can conclude that although the reenrolment is related to a post childbirth quest for a better life, the reason for the decision to return, had nothing to do with an intrinsic motivation to be in school, but a great deal to do with a future survival strategy to offset the effects of the early setbacks experienced. The pathway to realising this strategy however appears fraught with challenges, as teen-mothers negotiate the dual role of 'parent' and 'learner', and pressure from family members to be in school.

#### 4.4.1.4 *Limited labour market opportunities*

A thread that connects all the participants was their desire to complete schooling to have credentials to access the labour market. For all the participants, the reenrolment was not just for the sake of merely going back. The participants wanted to complete schooling to be able to find employment. But the labour market experience was discouraging. One participant explained as follows: "...What I experienced the time I was out of school is that it is not easy to find a job without education...so now I value education more."

It seems then that even if the participants wanted to enter the labour market while they cared for their family, they had little job opportunities that could have attracted them away from school. A recent report shows that youth in South Africa remain among the most challenged in the world when it comes to securing decent and productive employment (ILO, 2008). Thus, the decision to reenroll in school may have been a result of necessity because, as Montmarquette and Briot (2000) found in previous research: in time of employment constraints, people go back to school once there is limited labour market access (or vice versa).



The evidence in the research suggests that the out of school experiences of participants played a part in the way that they viewed education in the aftermath of their reenrolment in school. In general, the dropouts placed a higher value on schooling after reenrolling than they did before their drop out experience. This was a sentiment echoed in the remarks of most participants. Four typical comments were:

My out of school experience helped me to see schooling as more valuable than before. My attitude also changed; I used to be silly and rude towards teachers. [In the past], my grandma used to be called to school [when I did wrong] and punishment [would] be given to me. Since we have rights I knew that no one was going to beat me. But I changed. [L15].

I value school more. At first I thought I was wasting my time [L13].

I value education more because now I know how important it is [L7].

I value schooling now more because I had negative attitude [towards it] at first: telling myself that I am wasting my time - as my friends said so. I used to think that I know much and could do better without schooling. My out of school



experience taught me that schooling is more important than I think; if I have education I can go places, have a good job and earn enough money [L4].

There was a clear change in attitudes toward schooling, and in the behaviour of these participants while in school. The fact that the participants stressed that prior to quitting school, they felt that they were wasting their time in school, but now realised the significance of schooling, suggests that the decision to drop out of school was made without adequate information, for instance, about the consequences of quitting school prematurely. Dropping out is largely characterised in the economics literature as the result of a rational decision, whereby individuals consider the benefits and cost of completing vs. quitting school (Raymond, 2008:12). But rational decision presupposes the availability of perfect information. Lack of information (or inaccurate information) can lead to erroneous valuation, which seems to have happened with these dropouts who saw school initially as unimportant.

The reconsideration of the decision to quit school, after acquiring additional information about the cost of dropping out, supports Becker's model of human capital investment (Becker, 1962). The Becker model of human capital investment can be modified to include such schooling pathways by incorporating imperfect information. In a model which incorporates incomplete information, individuals may leave school without graduating and may later return to school based on new information. Upon the acquisition of new information, individuals can reconsider their past decision and may reverse it. Altonji (1993) used this augmented model to explain change in different fields of study or occupational choice, whereas Light, (1995) used it to explain



schooling interruptions between secondary school graduation and postsecondary schooling. The action of these dropouts is consistent then with the hypothesis of human capital investment model.

The new information that prompted re-valuation of schooling by participant L15, L13, L7 and L4 pertain to the earnings advantage a school graduate has (benefits), the relative instability of employment for a dropout versus a graduate (expected benefits), and preferences about work and school (benefits). But notice however that opportunity cost to reenrollment is not within the discourse portrayed by these participants. Their emphasis is on the benefits in reenrollment. Thus, issues related for instance to the earnings a school dropout gives up to attend school (opportunity cost), or the attendance costs such as school materials and tuition, have not been mentioned. This could be a sign that the benefits of reenrolling out weighted the costs and that they wanted to focus on the advantages to reenrollment. These speculations are consistent with the human capital investment model.

#### *4.4.1.5 Relief in temporal negative life-course event experienced, and issues of motivation and self-regulation*

Unlike participants with motherhood responsibility, disappointment in aspects of social lifestyle pushed some participants back into school. This was evident in the responses of three participants: L4, L10, and L13 who dropped out of school for reasons linked to being with boyfriends (L10), gang robbery (L4), and drug abuse (L13). It seemed each of these participants quitted school intentionally. The contrasting experiences of each

participant can be seen in their comments as follows:

I chose to have a boyfriend instead of education... I decide to come back to school after disappointments and frustrations. I learnt a lesson that it is not good to be dependent because I was used by that person and left with nothing. [L10]

Participant L 13 also explained:

I came back to school because of what I learnt while I was in rehabilitation centre. I want to complete my high school, go to the university and become a mechanical engineer and live a happy life. I find that people who are not working have a lot of stress. [L13]

L4 remarked: "...One of my friends [in the gang] was beaten to death. To me that event was a sign to stop [the robbery] or else I would die".

These three participants had a desire to change their way of life, following their disappointments. They felt being in school and studying toward earning good grade and qualifying in a field of work would improve their life. L10 felt formal schooling would reduce her dependency on other people for things, while L13 believed it would help him become an engineer and live happily. These views about the benefits of formal education were the thread that linked these (and other) participants of the study. The evidence of dropouts' aspiration above supports Ruiz's (2008) assertion that many youths who dropped out of school are in fact learners who would like to (and who often do) return to school to earn a school leaving certificate.

The analysis above suggests a strong sense of the role of education in social mobility and socioeconomic achievement within South African society. The sentiments are consistent with the human capital hypothesis regarding education. The life lesson that the dropouts seem to have learnt is one that scores of research have long provided evidence to support, which is that individuals who attain more education are more successful in economic terms than those who obtain less schooling (Raymond, 2008; Ruiz, 2008). The life-course failures that dropouts experienced seem to prompt them to re-evaluate their life and education. Given the negative consequences associated with being a school dropout (*cf. chapter 2, pg.38-39*), it is perhaps a positive development that the re-evaluation occurred. In school, they might display a greater drive to success as human capital.



It was not just participant L4, L10 and L13 who sought to pursue schooling as a means to make a new start in life, following their disillusionment. Participant L2 and L14 also expressed similar desire, after absconded from home, and school, to avoid aversive experience at home. But they reenrolled in school after receiving forgiveness from their parents. Participant L14 explained:

I asked my aunt to go and tell my father where I was [living when I ran away from home] and to ask [him to] forgive me. I know that they [her parents] were disappointed the time I ran out of marriage... I went back home and asked my parents to allow me to go back to school.

Similarly, participant L12 stated: "...When I see my sister and brother progressing well at school, I decided to go back home and asked my father to give me the last chance

to go back to school. I quitted drugs. I saw myself as a failure [for using drugs and running away] because I should be an example to my sisters and my younger brother at home". Both participants felt remorse. It seemed both the feeling of life-course failure for drug abuse and running away from matrimony motivated these individuals, respectively, to reenrol in school.

A life-course perspective on education, mobility and achievement (Sadovnik et al, 2001:390) can provide the breadth of perspective needed to make sense out of these complex patterns regarding why these dropouts reenrolled in school. Such a perspective draws attention to the distinctive norms and historical events that govern the life course of individuals within a society, community, or family. Individuals' lives are shaped by the distinctive features of time and place, including the culture, norms of their society /community group and the array of demographic events that circumscribe a particular period (Sadovnik et al, 2001:391). All these forces contribute to the course of human lives.

The abuse of drugs, gangster life, involvement in heterosexual relationship and the avoidance of matrimony, which triggered these respondents to quit school, are life course events. Marriage at an early age, for instance, is a social norm in some African culture. The avoidance of early matrimony could be viewed as a protest against the tradition of early marriage and its associated consequences such as educational setback. Previous research, for instance by Huinink (in Sadovnik et al, 2001:392), shows that traditional social norms regarding the appropriate age for a girl to get

married influence the ability of women to complete their education or translate it into labour market success. It could be this history of possible setback with completing their schooling that prompted the escape from early marriage, drug abuse, or gangsterism, and the subsequent return to school once these life course events diminished. The life-course approach emphasises both the temporal sequencing of key events in the life course and the interplay between individuals and institutions.

Self motivation and family pressure were central forces in the decision to return to school. This perhaps is unsurprising given the participants' desire for a new start in life following their failed social life event circumstances. The fact that each participant acknowledged that they "decided to go back to school to learn" following their failure suggest an engagement in self-regulatory activity (Schunk, 2004:381). According to motivation theorists, motivation and self-regulation are intimately linked (Schunk, 2004; Zimmerman, 2000). People motivated to achieve a goal engage in self-regulatory activities (such as ask for forgiveness for wrong-doing, adjust failed strategies, etc) which they believe will help them (Schunk, 2004:382; Zimmerman, 2000:13). The decision to reenrol in school is demonstration of self-regulation.

It seems then that, from the available evidence above, one can conclude that although the reenrolment in school is related to a desire for a new start in life following failure in social life situation, the reason for the decision to return, had nothing to do with the forgiveness received from parents and the life lessons learnt from poor decision making, but a great deal to do with the relief in the temporal sequence of the negative

life-course event experienced and the motivation and self-regulation which underlies these participants' setting and pursuit of the goal to complete schooling. In other words, their parents could have forgiven them or they could have made the transition from the disappointment in their social relationship and gangster activity, without going back to school. The urge of these individuals to reenrol ran at a much deeper level.

#### 4.4.1.6 *Forced to return to school*

Not all the participants in the study were motivated to reenrol in school, or did so voluntarily. There is one exception to the high motivation evident in the remarks of the participants above. Participant L8, who dropped out of school due to his struggle to cope with academic work, acknowledged that schooling has no value to him and that he had no interest to return but was forced:

...I don't value schooling; instead schooling frustrates me. I come back to school because I am forced to do that, no other reason. I had no intentions of coming back because nothing is going to change: I will fail again. It's family pressure why I come back as I want to honor my parents' wish for me to be here but I can't make them happy as am not progressing well at school. It is just a waste of time for me to be at school. [L8]

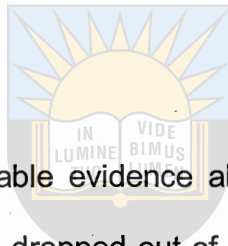
There is an undervaluing of schooling as a result of the fear of failure. But it is a contradiction. Despite the feelings expressed above, the participant returns to school. In fact, his action runs counter to explanation in key theories which address such issues such as the self-worth theory, and its bearing on self-efficacy, self concept and learned helplessness (Schunk, 2004:349).

Self-worth theory draws attention to the way a person reacts to success or failure. It assumes that success is valued and that failure, or the belief that one has failed, is avoided because it implies low ability (Covington & Day in Schunk, 2004:349). In other words, people want to be viewed as able, but failure creates feelings of unworthiness. At the same time, self-efficacy is a belief about what one is capable of doing (Bandura, 2001) and is intertwined with notion of self-worth. Efficacy influences choice of activities (Schunk, 2004), and researchers illustrate that self-efficacy has diverse effect in achievement settings (Pajares, 1996), with efficacious learners more likely to persist and expend greater effort than learners who doubt their capabilities (Schunk, 2004:113). Both self-worth and self-efficacy variables correlate with self-concept (Schunk, 2004:375), and with notion of learned helplessness: a condition resulting from the experience of uncontrollability, that is, whereby people do nothing when they believe they have no control over a situation (Seligman in Schunk, 2004:371). All these forces contribute to the kind of responses people make towards life events experienced.

Repeated failure in academic work forced participant L8 to foster feelings of low self-worth. The declaration by the participant that he 'will fail again' in school suggests that feelings of low self-efficacy and self-concept, permeated his outlook. Based on self-worth theory, these experiences should have kept the participant out of school. But family pressure forced him to reenrol, and suggests that he did not return voluntarily. Family member desire took precedence over personal desire. This counter position seems to suggest a particular perspective which weakens the key assumption of the



self-worth, self-efficacy, and self-concept models. Self-worth and self-efficacy theory stresses perceptions of ability as the primary influence on motivation. But for this participant, the motivation did not lead to the behaviour predicted by the hypothesis. Perhaps cultural context had an influence because cross-cultural research shows that in Asian societies, for instance, expectations for success, motivation, and achievement are attributed to effort, as against ability in Western societies (Stipek, 1998). The placement of family member desire over personal desire is a custom in tradition African cultural milieu.



It seems then that, from the available evidence above, one can conclude that the reenrolment of this participant, who dropped out of school due to repeated academic failure, had nothing to do with a change in prospect of succeeding or performing better academically at school, but a great deal, it seems to do with custom whereby family member desire for him to complete schooling is placed over personal desire. This evidence reflects the significance of context-based explanation for social actions. Yet often educators and school managers treat dropouts as regular learners, thereby ignoring their needs related to the circumstances that push/pull them in and out of school.

Overall, the factors that prompted dropouts to reenrol are quite diverse. Whether these factors actually shape their social experiences at school is discussed in the next section.

#### **4.4.2 The social-life experiences of dropouts in the school**

The analysis above shows that, in general, the majority of the dropouts valued schooling and were determined to complete their education. But while this is the case, the evidence in this section suggests that their social re-integration experience at school was diverse and complex. While some participants had quite positive social experiences, which reinforced their motivation to pursue their education, others experienced the school context as socially hostile. For the latter, the experiences cut across a range of issues from social isolation to negative labeling and name calling. The forms of social experience which the dropouts go through seems linked, in some aspects, to the causes of dropping out.



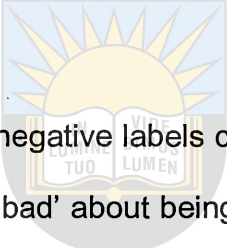
Social hostile was an invasive experience, particularly during the initial stage of reenrolment at school. Both educators and other learners showed hostility toward the dropouts. But some dropouts admitted to being the sources of social hostility themselves. Negative labeling and teasing is one way in which social hostility was expressed. Other ways included bullying, ostracism, and isolation. Each of these is further discussed.

##### **4.4.2.1 *Negative labelling and teasing experiences***

The negative labels ascribed to dropouts differed, it seem, with the problems that pushed the participants out of school in the first place. This is an interesting

development because it draws a parallel between the social image of dropouts before and after their 'stopout' from school. One participant explained:

At first learners hesitated to accept me as a change person who wants to do good things. At first my classmates didn't want to socialize with me because they think I'm still using drugs. I was neglected, hated, given names and seen as a no good person by teachers and learners at my school. The learners use to call me: (a) '*Ntsangwini*' or dagga smoker and (b) *Father*. I felt very bad. But later they saw that I am a new person who no longer using drugs and they accepted me. [L2]



Experiences of neglect, hatred and negative labels characterised the school life of the participant. The participant, L2, felt 'bad' about being labelled 'father' and 'ntsangwini' or dagga smoker. But these ascribed identities were related to his motive for quitting school. The ascribed identities seemed to have been aimed at conveying a message that the participant was different from those who ascribed the label. The label conveyed messages which identified the participant as deviant by virtue of being a school dropout and being linked to drug abuse activities.

The fact that both learners and educators were involved in the negative labeling behaviour toward the participant suggested that he found no social sanctuary at school. The labels 'dagga smoker' and 'father' for instance ascribed as his social identity, were rejected by the participant.

Building on life-course and deviance research literatures (Hagan & Wheaton, 1993), it can be seen that the ascription of labels to dropouts is informed by particular

motivation. Hacker (2008:1) asserts that labelling is concerned with how individual's self-identity or behaviour is defined, and that labels given to children describe particular behavioural issue that the child has. The defining aspect about negative labelling, according to Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, is that negative labels can be devastating for kids (Kurcinka, 1992). What school managers and educators must be cautious about is that social labelling often leads to self-fulfilling prophecy, or according to deviance research (Hacker, 2008; Kurcinka, 1992), the tendency for the individuals affected to live up to the label given to them.

The nature of the label ascribed seems to vary with the dropout in question. For participant L4, the situation was different. He was ascribed the negative social label 'robber', which remains unchanged as his social identity at school. As participant L4 explained, his educators were deeply involved in ascribing the negative label:

My hostile experience is when the teachers told me that the only thing I know was *stealing*. I was angry with 'me' [myself] because I am the one who chose to steal instead of going to school. I knew that I had to report the teachers but I didn't want to create a problem that will lead me to drop out again. [L4]

The negative label caused anger. But the anger was internal: directed at himself, for his decision to engage in robbery. The negative label also caused the participant to tolerate fear, but the fear was not of death, which he witness his colleagues experienced while he served as gang member out of school. The fear was one of dropping out of school a second time. It seemed both this fear and the persistent

reminder of his life as a criminal led participant L4 to experience school-life as socially hostile.

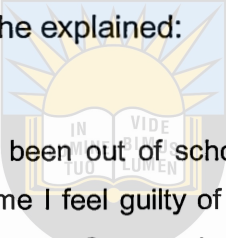
Labelling is detrimental to self-esteem and self concept (McDermott, 1993:269). This may be why participant L4 felt angered by the label. It may also be the reason why participant L2 came to feel "as a no good" person. Learners with a history of engaging in robbing cease to be perceived as trustworthy people. Rather, their deficits are diagnosed and labelled, and they are, as the experiences of participant L2 and L4 illustrate, treated accordingly. Constructed and perceived as "Other", both participants L2 and L4 are denied membership, or are not allowed to reintegrate unblemished, in their school community (Hacker, 2008).



The educator was the main perpetrator of the labelling of this participant. This is unfortunate because educators are important persons in the life of learners at school (Pretorius, 2008:127). At school, educators are responsible for the social and intellectual development of learners. When educators engage in acts of negative labeling, Fairbanks (1992) acknowledges that schooling becomes an agent in impeding intellectual and social growth for the labelled learner(s). Indeed, most connotations associated with the label "stealing" or "dagga smoker" are used in demeaning ways, and according to Hacker (2008:1) are imprecise descriptions of need, ...sometimes are assigned wrongly, ...may not result in the learners' getting appropriate services, and ...are difficult to remove or forget (Kauffman & Pullen,

1996:10). School cannot be business as usual while dropouts experience these social challenges when they reenrol and try to reintegrate in the educational setting.

The nature of the label ascribed to participant L14 was different from those given to participant L2 and L4, but it was related to the cause of dropping out. Because she absconded from her parents' home and had to quit school to avoid marriage, participant L14 was labelled 'Nozimasile'. School mates used her experience to tease her after she reenrolled in school. She explained:

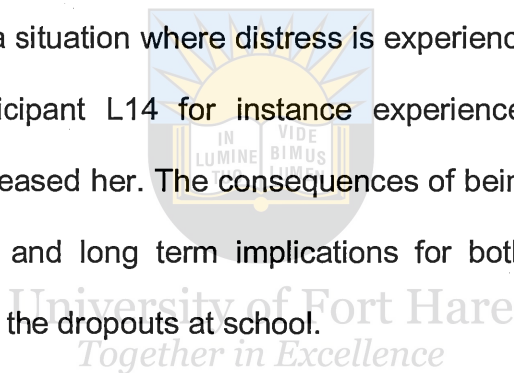


The number of years that I've been out of school affected my re-integration because when people look at me I feel guilty of running away from marriage, though I did that for a good reason. Some school mates call me names, but they are in the minority. *They call me 'Nozimasile'*: the name my in-laws gave me. I don't like that because I'm no longer 'Nozimasile' now. I've been *teased* which I hated most because it reminds me of what I went through. School environment is hostile because of this minority group because they make me feel sad when I see them at school. But I just ignore this minority because I am happy with the relationship I have with the majority of the learners. [L14]

The labelling and teasing negatively affected participant L14, though only a small number of other learners engaged in the practice. There were clear feelings of guilt and hatred experienced. But it does not take many people shouting a negative label for it to have a devastating effect on its intended victim (Hacker, 2008).

Both the hatred and guilt reactions are consistent with deviance and self concept research (Persaud, 2000:1-3). Hallahan and Kauffman (1994) observed that labeling damages self-concept and motivation to learn, as well as resulting in others (teachers

and peers) viewing the learner differently (negatively). This sentiment is echoed in Stainback and Stainback's (1987:67) assertion that labeling is "detrimental and leads to the de-individualisation and stereotyping of learners". Riegel (2008:2) argues that the language and terminology employed is "full of the language of separation, of fragmentation, of removal", functioning to alienate and make passive learners. Evidence from self-concept research further shows that if a learner in the class situation carries a label of "undesirable and unloved", anti-social behaviour readily becomes a response to a situation where distress is experienced (Schunk, 2004:372). This may be why participant L14 for instance experienced sadness when she encountered those who teased her. The consequences of being negatively labelled or teased have both short and long term implications for both the socialisation and cognitive development of the dropouts at school.



But participant L14's reference to feeling guilty "...when people look at me [because of] running away from marriage", suggests that she knew she defied a social custom within her community. But the defiance seemed deliberate because, as she indicated, it was "...for a good reason". In this respect, one could articulate that indeed, the action that led to her being labelled 'Nozimasile' was meant to further her self-interest. The labelling could be a result of the "Peers" not understanding the self-interest motive which drove her to take the decision or not understanding the experiences which she went through. Hacker (2008:1) as well as Kurcinka (1992) makes the point that overcoming a tendency to ascribe negative labels begins with the victims making their perpetrators aware of their thought regarding why they acted accordingly.



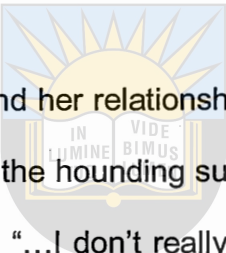
Nevertheless, despite being teased, which exerted tremendous social pressure on a person (Persaud, 2000), there was a determination among dropouts who experienced this form of hostility to rise above the experience and persist with their schooling. Contrary to past research, the motivation of participant L14 or L2 and L4 to be in school and learn was not acutely affected. They all wanted to, it seems, make full use of what Raymond (2008:1) called their “second chance” at school. School managers and educators can use this state of motivation among these dropouts to support their reintegration. Hacker (2008) emphasised the importance of external support to overcoming labelling and teasing.



Another dimension to the negative labelling experience is that girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy and parenting responsibility were labelled “mother” and “parent” at school. Participant L5, for instance, spoke about the situation she faced socially, the negative attitudes experienced, the emotional disturbance as a result, and her motivation to persist in school:

Only a few learners from outside of [my] classroom have a *negative attitude* towards me. Now that I am *having a child* I think they take me as an adult, [thinking] I don't belong in their age group, though we are the same age. They call me mother or parent. The school is a hostile environment. When you talk to someone and [that person] does not respond to you, [but] only [give you] a bad look, that tells you that she has nothing to say to you. It hurts but I always ignore those looks and names [and say] that it did not happen. I console myself by saying that many of the learners like me and those who don't like me are few. I once told myself that I am back to school to learn, I ignore the other things. [L5]

Being labelled a “mother” and being ignored as a consequence evoked negative emotions in the participant. The school was socially hostile because of experiences of “bad look”, and “non-response” from other learners when attempts to socialise with the perpetrators were made. But the negative reaction towards participant L5 is rather peculiar because she was not the only teen-mother at the school, or in the study sample. Yet she was the only teen-mother to report experience of teasing and negative labelling.



The personality of the participant, and her relationship with other schoolmates prior to dropping out, could be a reason for the hounding subsequent to reenrolling at school. The participant made the point that: “...I don’t really talk much at school, that’s how I am even before I dropped out”, suggesting a withdrawn personality. As postulated by Ryan and Powelson (in Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008:280), feelings of relatedness and learners’ relations with peers influence social relations at school. Schunk, Pintrich and Meece (2008:280) identified critical aspects of peer influence that shape social relations. A key aspect is prior social acceptance within a peer group. Learners rejected by peers due to personality clash or other disagreements are at a greater risk of being teased and labelled than those who are socially accepted (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008:281). Thus, for personality and peer attachment reasons, the teen-mothers may have been differentially accepted socially within the school context, and hence the labeling and teasing of some and not others.

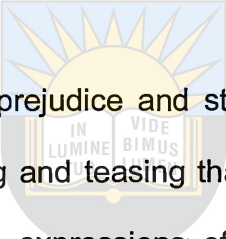
An alternative explanation is that other learners may have been fearful of some teen-mothers. Participant L15 made the point that "...to have a child in our days is a fashion so I see nothing wrong with that", but confessed that:

I have a lot of friends; some are my friends because they are afraid of me. Many of my friends didn't dump me because most of them have babies too. To have a child in our days is a fashion so I see nothing wrong with that. Other learners don't call me name. I think it's because of my behaviour. They know that I will sort them and put them into their place. [L15]

For dropouts who experienced negative labelling and teasing, a theory of prejudice and stigma from the perspective of power dynamics (Twemlow & Sacco, 2006) can provide the breadth of perspective needed to make sense out of their experiences. Twemlow and Sacco (2006:1-4) distinguish between everyday prejudices (involving preferences) and malignant prejudices (serious hateful judgment), with the latter being the more grossly offensive. Both forms of prejudices co-exist, with the malignant form resulting from gender hostility, bullying, et cetera (Twemlow & Sacco, 2006:3). Malignant prejudice is negative prejudice, devolve from stigma. Thus, prejudice functions as a power dynamic involving a coercive victimising force and a stigmatised victim located within a social context of bystanders (Volkan, 1999). The content of prejudice, according to Volkan (1999:29), results from prejudgment, hastiness, or favourableness (or unfavourableness).

The theory of prejudice and stigma thus posit that stigmatising others can serve positive functions for the perpetrators, but quite negative functions for the victims

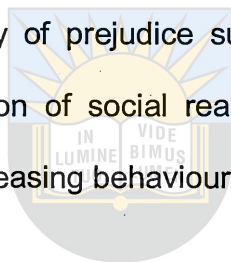
(Bandura, 1999:193; Twemlow & Sacco, 2006:3). Twemlow and Sacco (2006:3) found for instance that perpetrators have their self-esteem boosted from being prejudicial, and that it results in enhancement of a feeling of self-control, and anxiety buffering. At the same time, contrary to psychologists who warn about the danger to self-esteem and self-worth of negative labelling and stigma, Bandura (1999:193) asserts that perpetrators of stigmatisation can use their prejudices and reactions to stigma to live with it without anxiety.



The perspectives in the theory of prejudice and stigma above suggest several key themes about the negative labelling and teasing that the dropouts experienced. The negative labelling and teasing are expressions of prejudices, particular malignant prejudices. While the labels stigmatised the dropouts, the display of this form of social hostility could be a strategy to boost perpetrators' self-interest and coping mechanism. Perpetrators may have applied their prejudices in order to cope socially. Freud (in Twemlow & Sacco, 2006:8) noted that the narcissism of minor difference is a way in which individuals can establish a sense of self by exaggerating small differences from others. By labeling and teasing dropouts, perpetrators may have intention to get their self-esteem boosted, establish social identity, or wanted to feel greater self-control over their social environment at school. Alternatively, it could be that they wanted to buffer deep seated anxiety about particular threat which dropouts pose to them.

Overall, it seems then that, from the available evidence above, one can conclude that although the social experience of some dropouts at school was littered with negative

labelling and teasing, linked to the nature of the drop out causes, these forms of social hostility were differentially applied. The treatment had everything to do with the nature of the dropout causes, dropouts' personality and relations with peers prior to dropping out and after reenrolment. The social image of the dropouts changed as a result. The consequences of the negative labelling and teasing experiences have implications for both the social and cognitive development of the victims of the prejudice, as well as their social or interpersonal relationships at school. These consequences cannot be ignored. At the same time, theory of prejudice suggests that self-interest motives linked to in-group/out-group division of social reality account for why perpetrators engaged in negative labelling and teasing behaviours.

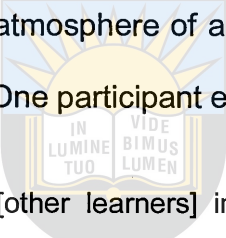


The social reaction towards these dropouts is unfortunate and is not something that school managers can overlook because the literature is clear that the quality of the interpersonal relationships children develop at school has a significant influence on, not only their personality and learning advancement, but also on their preparation to enter society as adults (Pretorius, 2007:127). Persaud (2000:3) reports that the imposition of a negative label on an individual alters his/her behaviour because when labels are assigned, patterns of social interaction changed. Labeling and teasing push individuals into the periphery or margins and into the company of others in a similar subculture. Research also shows that learners who are not socially accepted by peers are more likely to drop out of school later than are those with greater social acceptance (Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl & McDougall in Schunk et al,

2008:280), which suggest that dropouts who had been negatively labelled and teased are vulnerable to repeat-dropping-out.

#### 4.4.2.2 *Experiences of bullying other learners*

In addition to the negative labelling and teasing experience, some dropouts employed bullying tactics at school which seemed to contribute to the climate of social hostility at the school. As a consequence, an atmosphere of antisocial relations prevail between some dropouts and other learners. One participant explained:



I used to be bossy to them [other learners] inside and outside the class. Teachers avoid me because of my behaviour. It was fun to be a bully, but now I realize that it is not good [so] I try to change to be able to get along well with everyone. [L15]

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A clear tactic of bullying was employed. The participant acknowledged being a 'bossy' persona whom educators avoid, and whom would discipline any mates who try to disrespect her at school. Participant L4 also used tactics of bullying. He spoke about how he used to be bossy to others and its effect on social relations with others at school:

I think they [other learners] treated me different because they were afraid of me. I was like a boss and I felt nothing then but when things were right between us I felt worried because I noticed that I was abusive silently [to them]. In group work, I used to keep quiet, not participating in group but because the learners were afraid of me; they said nothing. But after sometime, I talk to them and they felt free to talk to me. We get along well together and do things

together especially school work. I feel happy because they give me a lot of support. [L4]

The disclosure of being a threat to other schoolmates demonstrates that the participant, at one stage or another, acted deliberately to shape his social environment towards his self-interest. His threat to others was demonstrated in aggressive action related to being: “bossy... [and] quietly abusive” towards others, who “...said nothing” in response. In fact, the bullying disposition cultivated deep fear in other learners and made them treat the bully different. Thus, like participant L15, it seemed participant L4 was able to use bullying tactics to control and shape social life at school.

Data from the school principal interviews corroborates instances of bullying behaviours among dropouts, consistent with what the above dropouts have reported.

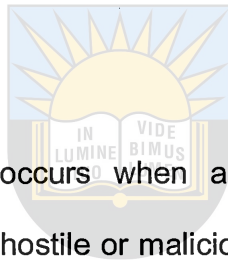
One principal explained:

These dropouts let the younger learners to feel that they are the bosses in class. They are forced to do work for the bigger learners. If a dropout hasn't got a pen he or she took one from the younger learners. They send the young learners to go and buy cigarettes for them and forced them to smoke. We try to reduce this abuse by telling all learners about their rights and responsibilities. We tell the learners to report any kind of bad treatment they get from other learners. The parents are called and we punish the learners. We give them work to do like cleaning the school yard or working in the garden. [Principal A]

The comments reflect what the bullying entails. Bullying is an antisocial tendency, triggered by both heredity and environmental forces. Krueger, Hicks and McGue (2001:397) assert that the tendency to be antisocial is a result of both genetic



influences and environmental influences. Thus, factors innate in participant L4 and L15 as well as factors in their social context could explain their bullying temperament. From the evidence of this study, it is clear that social context into which dropouts reenrolled and had to reintegrate at school was hostile towards some individuals. In the context of the way other dropouts were being treated (*cf. negative labeling and teasing, pp.96-105*), the bullying was perhaps a response to circumstances (e.g. aimed to bring stability or avoid similar treatment) in their environment than anything else.



According to research, bullying occurs when a person wilfully and repeatedly exercises power over another with hostile or malicious intent (Lumsden, 2002:3). The emphasis on the use of bullying tactics seems to allow the participant to define and set the agenda for social relations at school. But what was interesting is that both participants, not only got others to react to their demands, but were willing - as time progressed - to adjust their behaviour, albeit gradually, from an antisocial to a pro-social stance. This change in temperament is consistent with past research, where it is shown that the same individual can exhibit both pro-social and antisocial characteristics. Krueger et al (2001:397), for instance, found that antisocial behaviour and pro-social behaviour are not opposites of each other: they are distinct from each other and often co-exist as tendencies in the same person. The same dropout who bullies other individuals at school has the capacity to be sociable. This is a quality which school managers can exploit.

But not all the reenrolled dropouts engaged in bullying behaviours. In fact, of the 15 participants, two reported bullying tendencies. It seems that the personality of these dropouts and their history of interpersonal relations at school may have contributed to the differential responses. According to research, when educators and administrators fail to intervene in a situation where individuals feel threatened and prejudiced against, some individuals ultimately take things into their own hands, often with grievous results (Lumsden, 2002; Krueger et al, 2001). We see in this study that some educators were themselves perpetrators of the hostility towards some dropouts (*cf. negative labeling and teasing, pp.96-105*) while others supported dropouts in their reintegration (*cf. affable social experiences, pp.119-121*). Since different personalities cope differently with the same frustrating situation (Krueger et al, 2001), bullying for these individuals was perhaps their only strategy to survive (or be entertained) at school.

But for those subjected to bullying, the consequences can be serious. Behavioural psychologists have shown that aggression and antisocial behaviours contribute to dropping out (Schunk et al, 2008). Compared with learners who graduate, those who drop out are rated by educators and peers as displaying more aggressive behaviour (Hymel et al, 1996). The latter learners also have a higher incidence of alcohol and drug use and are more likely to have a criminal record. Thus, if steps are not taken to 'reign in' the bullying tendency among ex-dropouts, they can make the school vulnerable to ongoing drop out problems by either themselves becoming repeat dropouts or exposing non-dropouts to behaviours that could push them out of school.

Overall, it seems then that, from the available evidence above, one can conclude that although dropouts reenrolled and contributed to making the social school context hostile by bullying other learners and educators, their action was not by chance but seem deliberately constructed, influenced by both environmental factors within the school context and personality type, and used as means of survival. This latter perhaps account for the hostile behaviour of some dropouts and not others. But there was no antisocial behaviour fixation among these dropouts but, rather, a willingness to change to more pro-social tendency – a quality that can be used positively at school.

#### 4.4.2.3 *Experiences of ostracism and isolation*

Social ostracism was another way in which hostility was demonstrated toward dropouts in the schools. Here again, the nature of the factor which pushed the participants out of school play a role. Participant L7, who dropped out of school to provide caregiving to his sick sister who had HIV/AIDS, was shunned when he reenrolled because other learners concluded that he too had HIV/AIDS:

I experienced the school as a socially hostile environment for sometime. Some of the learners give me a tough time. They see me as *HIV infected* because I was taking care of [my] sick sister who had HIV/AIDS. The few who do not want to socialize with me because of thinking that I am infected. I felt sad and angry [because of] the fact that they diagnose me without testing me. It made me furious at first because they know nothing about the pain I felt watching AIDS destroying my sister. They don't know that I am not infected but I was affected. But now I'm fine, I forget about the past and focus to the future: Good education, decent job and happy life. [L7]

The stigmatised identity was rejected and the social ostracism treatment incurred feelings of anger. Participant L8 experienced similar treatment of ostracism, but for quite different reason. He explained:

I have no friends in my class. I find my schools as an unfriendly environment; learners at school ignore me as if I do not exist. I was taken to the principal's office as if I am a *criminal*. I hate to see even the school buildings let alone the people in it. My relationship with other learners is not good at all. No one wants to be my friend because I am useless [as I *don't understand my school work*]. If we are together [in group work] I'm always quiet, saying nothing and have no contribution. The only thing I do is to give them a bad look because I don't want them to talk about me. They chase me away from them. I feel sad because now I am lonely. [L8]

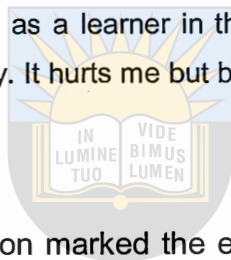
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The participant was ostracised because he was perceived as incompetent and academically weak. Indeed, academic struggle caused participant L8 to quit school. But using his academic abilities as the basis for dealing with him socially meant that the individual suffered a double setback, as both his academic and social development is impaired. There is hostility evident in the reintegration at school as ostracism breakdown attachment to both school and colleagues (Dornbusch, Erickson, Laird & Wong, 2001).

Nowhere was the hostility more evident than in the isolation experienced by participant L12. In contrast to the others, participant L12 was isolated, not because of something he had done, but for a family tragedy he had. This was fully explained:

Other learners call me names. When I am coming towards them I hear the saying “there comes the son of a *murderer*”. School-life is hard for me because learners make a joke about the death of my mother. I am punished because of my father’s sins. Some learners didn’t want me to be allocated in their class. My classmates are neglecting me. The learners make me feel unwanted at school. They all hate me. I am in *isolation*. *I have few friends mostly those who are related to me*. The teachers are fine with me.

I am not taking part in sport because learners do not want to play with me. I feel sad and it hurts me to see that most of the people are against me. Most of the learners do not accept me as a learner in the school. They hate me and said bad things about my family. It hurts me but because I want to learn, I have to accept the treatment. [L12]



Hated, neglect, ridicule, and isolation marked the experience. The interesting aspect in this is that although the issue was a family tragedy, it became common knowledge at school. It seems the participant and his family were demonised in the wider community, and with schools being microcosms of their communities. It was perhaps unsurprising that tragedy became public knowledge at school. The participant was ostracised because “...of [his] father’s sins”. Consistent with previous research (Schunk, 2004:336), the public humiliation impacted negatively on the social image of the participant.

But what is surprising in the evidence is the manner in which the learners reacted towards the participant. It seems they liken the participant to his father, and reacted out of fear that he might have similar temperament. An alternative explanation is that parents may have seen the tragedy as a disgrace and discouraged their children from interacting with members of that family. In either case, the outcome is a treatment of

isolation for the participant. The disruptiveness of peers in school causes learners to feel distracted and unsafe. Disrupting the reaction towards the participant requires some kind of intervention that breaks the abovementioned preconception (Twemlow & Sacco, 2006).

The interesting evidence though is that, consistent with research, the treatment of ostracism and isolation negatively affect all the participants. According to research, ostracism and isolation lead to both immediate and long term psychological injury. Social psychologists have shown that severe and continuous exposure to ostracism impairs the victim's sense of belonging and self-esteem (Williams, 1997; White, 2009), and developmental researchers have shown that, in the short term, when individuals are ostracised, it affects their perceptions, psychological conditions, and behaviour – all of which sometimes lead to aggression (Dornbusch, Erickson, Laird, Wong, 2001:396; Neubert, 2005:4).

Aggressiveness is contrary to group cohesion and collaborative learning in a classroom or school atmosphere. Instead of focusing on academic performance or on interpersonal development, the ostracised and isolated dropouts may use valuable time complaining about instances of their hostile treatment (Williams, 1997:236). Additionally, the morale of excluded learners can plummet as they perceive their low value to the class and the school. The entire situation takes on a domino effect, where the ostracised individual disengages as a functioning class/school team member and becomes distrustful towards their schoolmates (and educators) (White, 2009). Their



efficacy at school drops. If the ostracism and isolation persist, then eventually, as Williams (1997:239) explains, a self-fulfilling prophecy gets created, in which the isolated individual becomes a low functioning, low performing, low valued learner, who may then eventually drop out of school.

Other harmful effects of ostracism and isolation on the victim, in the long term, have been reported in recent research. Williams (2001), for instance, found that individuals who suffered exclusion for long periods of time, self-isolate, perhaps hoping to avoid further rejection. However, more psychologically damaging were reports of depression and suicidal attempts (Williams, 2001:210). From the evidence of this study, there was no sign that the ostracism and isolation that participant L7, L8 and L12 experienced had begun to have any obvious harmful long term effects. But signs of short term effects prevailed, evidenced, for instance, in the hurt, anger, complaints, and silence that they evoked. The view then of participant L12 that he just accepted the treatment of ostracism, or of participant L8 that he just keep quiet, perhaps hide deeper psychological toll, and points to the possibility that they feel little ability to change their situation and have resigned themselves to it.

While the evidence above points largely to short term harmful effects, there was one instance, however, where one dropout self-isolated. Participant L1 isolated herself, as she felt she was being ignored when she attempt to collaborate with others on academic work:

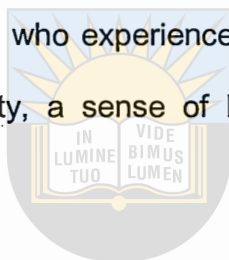


I am getting on well with my teachers... and with other learners *outside* my class. But *inside* my class, I am *not* getting along well with my classmates; they think that I see myself as a better person than they are. They see me as the person who knows everything... when I try to help them with classwork, they don't accept my assistance, and I am unable to ask them for assistance because they think that I'm just testing their knowledge. So *I isolate myself* from them. I used to have friends but today they left me, and in my class I don't have friends maybe because I once dropped out. [L1]

The participant is forced to self-isolate by the attitudes of her classmates, not because of something bad that she had done but because of being perceived as "all-knowing". The self-isolation is perhaps to, as Williams (1997) suggests, avoid further rejection. There is no clear explanation regarding why the classmates ignore the participant or reject her altruism. But it could be that they were jealous about her academic capabilities and did not want her to be seen as elevating herself above them, particularly that, she dropped out (for six months) (cf. Table 4.1) and rejoined the class later. Perhaps, the ego of the classmates got the better of them, as they may have assumed that they should have been the ones assisting the participant, rather than she assisting them. The abovementioned hypothesis is consistent with the drop out literature, which contends that dropouts generally experience difficulty 'catching up' with their academic work once they reenrol in school (Raymond, 2008; Berliner et al, 2008; Light, 1995; Meekers & Ahmed, 1999).

It seems then that, from the available evidence above, one can conclude that the painful effect of the 'cold shoulder' defined the social reality of some of the dropouts who reintegrated at school. Although the ostracism/isolation motif, meted out to both

male and female, was played out in two forms – one whereby other learners excluded dropouts and the other whereby dropouts self-isolate – there was no single consolidated motive for the ostracism. It seems that in instance where other learners excluded the dropouts, the act represented an insidious means of informal (social) punishment / control, and in instance where dropout self-isolate, it seems merely a rejection avoidance strategy. Within the framework of schooling, the hostile social context created by the acts of ostracism put at risk key cognitive, emotional and social development outcomes of dropouts who experience these behaviours as impairment of self-esteem, learning productivity, a sense of belonging, and in the long term depression is possible end result.



#### 4.4.2.4 *Age differentiation tension and distrust experiences*

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An issue linked to the hostility above is that, in many instances, when the dropouts reenrolled in school, they restart outside their age-appropriate grade level (cf. Table 4.1). Consequently, some dropouts found themselves in class in which they were older than their classmates. Participant L10 had to confront this reality, after reenrolling in school. Age differences seem to strain social relationships with peers. She explained:

My relationship with other learners is not good socially because *younger learners don't want to socialise* with me. I feel sad because sometimes I need to socialise with them when others are not there for me. My classmates are all younger than I am so they don't want to socialise with me, but academically they work well with me and I feel happy to be with them.

My classmates and teachers don't like me because I made some to suffer by taking their man. It hurts but I have to accept because I deserve this treatment.

[L10]

It was the social, not the working, relationship that was strained. Thus, collaborative learning thrived while the interpersonal aspect declined. In a school context, the social and educational dimensions are not necessary mutually exclusive. From a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky in Schunk, 2004:292), the social environment is a facilitator of learning and development. The argument is that interactions with persons in the environment (inside and outside the classroom context) stimulate developmental processes and foster cognitive growth (Vygotsky in Schunk, 2004:294). In the interaction situation, there is no question that dropouts bring particular qualities (such as new forms of awareness resulting from their experience gained outside school; and their prior knowledge, having had prior exposure to the grade level curriculum, etc) to the process. Furthermore, growth in a younger-person's *zone-of-proximal development* is speeded up through interaction with older / more competent others (Vygotsky in Tudge & Scrimsher, 2003:211). Thus, by refusing to interact socially with the dropout, other learners might be limiting their own development.

But the refusal to interact socially with the participant may be justified. The decision seems to be a result of distrust of the participant, who, by her own admission, violated a particular social norm, as evidenced in her "taking away their boyfriends". Consistent with research (Dornbusch et al, 2001), breakdown of trust destroys relationships. It

may be the distrust and a desire to prevent a repeat of past incident that prompted other learners - who perhaps were taken advantage of - to refuse to socialise with the participant.

Distrust also strained social relations between participant L13 and his peers. He explained:

I am not getting along well with other learners because they don't trust me. I don't have friends at school; I am not accepted; I am like a stranger to them. Even the teachers don't trust me. They call me '*ihlanya*' or the one who is insane. I feel miserable and unhappy.

The number of years [that] I've been out of school affected my re-integration in school because I struggle to socialise. No one wants to socialise with me. One day I went to my classroom and the two learners were already there, when I got inside they screamed and climbed onto the desks. I was forced to leave the classroom because those learners were so scared. Our class teacher came to check what was happening. I told her that the learners screamed when I entered the classroom so I decided to leave them alone. They were told not to do that again as I am not harmful. The learners think that I'm still that person who used drugs a lot then. [L13]

The distrust is insidious and constrictive, with deep emotional toll on the participant. But the reference to distrust reflected how other learners felt about the participant – a feeling borne out of, it seems, fear and his history of drug abuse. The uncertainty concerning how the participant might behave created feelings of suspicion. These reactions towards the dropout are consistent with evidence in deviance research (Persaud, 2000; Riegel, 2008).

Yet, interestingly, the history of drug abuse did not lead to teasing, perhaps because of the fear of what he might do to the perpetrators. But the distrust was accompanied by the same treatment which all other dropouts in the study sample experienced: name calling, negative labelling, and ostracism. Given the harmful consequences of the above for a person's mentality (Williams, 1997), it is unsurprising that the feelings of distrust triggered the above emotional irking for participant L13.

It seems then that, from the available evidence above, one can conclude that although age differences prevailed between the dropout and their classmates, the breakdown in social relations between them had nothing to do, it seems, with the age disparity, or the type of drug abused, but more to do, it seems, with a breakdown of trust between the dropouts involved and their classmates. The issues at hand affect both parties involved. The socio-emotional development of the dropouts may be hampered by the treatment they experienced. At the same time, by refusing to interact socially with overage dropouts, younger learners might be limiting their own development, socio-culturally.

#### *4.4.2.5 Affable and encouraging Social experience*

Not all the participants experienced the school as socially hostile after reenrolling. Participant L6 experienced the school environment as very friendly, such that everyone wanted to be his friend. He explained:

To me it's like a new start, a new year in a new school. I am meeting new people and I have to make new friends. I am getting along well with other learners inside and outside the classroom. Every one wants to be my friend and I like having many friends. My new teachers like me a lot because I am doing well in my studies. I am also a good soccer player and have many fans at school. It was easy to adjust myself to *my new school*. I am already made friends in my class and outside my class. My school work is satisfactory. I am much comfortable in my school. When we are doing school work we work as a group. Our teachers do not hesitate to assist us when we need help.

When I came they did ask me what grade I was doing and why I chose to come to this school. Some asked me which sport I am playing and which position. Everyone wanted to talk to me. I had to introduce myself to all of them. I do not experience the school as a socially hostile environment at all. The environment is very friendly. [L6]

Joy and enthusiasm characterised the reenrolment and reintegration experience. Reintegration was experienced as though he had been 'enrolling in school for the first time'. Both educators and learners contributed to the affable school climate into which reintegration occurred. The sentiment that both educators and other learners like me a lot and were willing to help me, seem to boost his self confidence and allowed him to experience the school in a positive way. In other words, the school context for him did not consist of forces that remind him of the reason he quitted school and the social position he must occupy as a result. The experience of this participant is in contrast to the hostility and distrust experienced by other participants in this study after their reenrolment at school.

What then accounts for the contrasting reintegration experience of participant L6? A



key factor seems to be his reenrolment at a new school, after migrating from his previous community to live with his grandmother (*cf. Section 4.4.1.1*). Being at a new school meant that, many of the educators and learners were not privy to his drop out history. It seems clear that the new friends of the participant knew nothing about the financial constraint that pushed him out of his previous school (*cf. Section 4.4.1.1*), and were therefore not in a position to tease or ascribe negative labels, even if they wanted to. This may have explained why he had a broad social appeal to both educators and school mates, whereby “...everyone wanted to talk to [him and having] ...to introduce [him] self to all of them”.



Like participant L6, participant L3 also experienced the school context as socially affable after reenrolling. But participant L3 did not reenrol at a new school. As she explained, she went back to her *alma mater* to complete her schooling, where she was welcomed and treated as though she never dropped out:

I find it [school] very exciting than before. Learners in my class are friendly; they like me; we do things together. I have friends inside and outside the class. In my class we are brothers and sisters; we helped each other. As I've said, we learn from our class teacher that we are all learners and we are at school for one purpose: learning. Other learners make sure that everyone feels at home in our classroom. I have no problem with friends as they used to come over to my place [home] when I was out of school [with my baby]. They used to tell me that they miss me at school. Nobody ever call me nicknames. To them I am the same person as I was before dropping out. They know me and they remained my friends even when I was at home. The teachers are also friendly to me; they treat me like other learners. [L3]



An atmosphere of close social bond characterised the interaction and relationship. Both educators and learners contributed to the positive climate into which the participant was reintegrated. It seems the nature of the relationship that the participant had with people at the school prior to dropping out contributed to the positive atmosphere which she experienced after reenrolling. This is evidenced both in the ongoing communication with schoolmates while out of school and their visitations.

But what is interesting is that participant L3 reenrolled in the same school context where other dropouts had been negatively labelled, teased, and treated in a hostile manner (cf. section 4.4.2.1). For instance, although she dropped out of school due to early pregnancy, she was not labelled, unlike other teen-mothers at the school. It seems that in addition to the nature of the interaction she had with schoolmates prior to dropping out, the positive leadership of the class teacher played a role in the way she had been treated.

The class teacher seems to construct a particular vision and value for learners in the class, which actively encouraged and fostered a kind of atmosphere. The participant alluded to this, stating: "...we learn from our class teacher that we are all learners, and we are at school for one purpose: [that is] learning". This sentiment seems to have cultivated a sense of altruism and respect of diversity/differences in the class, hence the affable reactions toward the participant. This active role of the class teacher is something that none of the other participants who experienced social hostility, mentioned.

Studies of school leadership consistently draw attention to the positive influence of educators and school leaders in enhancing positive group interaction in the learning environment (Cuban, 1988; Yukl, 2002). Yukl (2002) makes the point that leadership effects school climate, and school climate effects the learning environment and interactions within the learning settings. This implies that if a school wants to have a school climate in which positive social interaction flourishes, both educators and school leaders are in a position to cultivate this climate. Curriculum will be impacted by the vision, values, and climate/culture of the school.



But crucially, what the evidence above illustrates is that a dropout does not necessarily need to change his/her school in order to have an affable environment in which to reintegrate. From the experience of participant L3 above, it appears that educators can help to make a difference in whether the school is experienced as socially hostile or jovial. The evidence that educators can have a positive influence on the social reintegration process of dropouts after their reenrol in school is good news for school leaders. The positive influence of educators could be the starting point in any strategy to mitigate the social hostility which some dropouts experienced.

It seems then that, from the available evidence above, one can conclude that there were dropouts who experienced the school context as friendly after their reenrolment. Although these dropouts experienced an affable school climate, the experience had nothing to do, it seems, with the nature of the factors which caused them to quit school but more to do with the change of school context and the positive leadership of

the class teacher at dropouts' alma mater. Both of these pathways remain a useful model for dropouts or education leaders who want to assist dropouts reintegrate socially in school.

#### **4.4.3 Findings from interviews with principals**

It can be seen from the issues raised above that a range of social experiences characterised life at school for the dropouts. An interesting evidence is that the factors which push/pull dropouts out and into school contributed to the social experiences that they had. While some dropouts were both victims and perpetrators of social hostility, much of their experiences reflected a certain level of prejudices among learners in the schools.



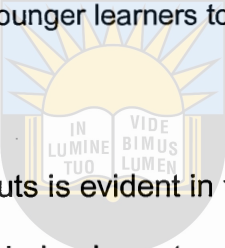
The principals, as school managers, were interviewed to gauge their perspectives on some of the issues that dropouts experienced, policy provisions, and dropouts' reenrolment and integration in school.

##### **4.4.3.1      *Perspectives on the social hostility and over-age issues***

In general, the principals were surprised by the hostile treatment that many of the dropouts experienced but indicated that often, dropouts were the perpetrators of hostility at school.

When they come back to school, some tend to act as if they know everything at the beginning, but as time progresses they realise that they need to work hard to avoid failing. Others became destructive in class, especially those who come to school because they were forced by their parents. [Principal A]

Some [dropouts] develop a positive attitude like behaving well, always neat in their uniform and do well in their school work. Others develop negative attitudes by being more aggressive and lazy. They give disciplinary problems like absenteeism, bullying, and bad behaviour like smoking, bunking classes, fighting, none submission of work and always out of class. When they are in class, they forced some of the younger learners to do their home work for them [Principal B]



The perpetrator identity of the dropouts is evident in these comments. As the evidence above indicates, some dropouts do indeed create an indiscipline school context. But the perception that dropouts are mainly the instigators of school problems perhaps limits these principals from also recognising that some dropouts are victims of hostility at school. This observation is particularly significant because the perspective that [school] leaders can shape the approach that they take to solving school problems (Yukl, 2002). While all the school leaders viewed reenrolling dropouts as “unquestionably the right thing to do, so we do it,” for reasons related to the abovementioned delinquent behaviours, they also reported “disincentives” to reenrollment.

#### 4.4.3.2 *Policy provisions and measures to aid dropouts' reintegration*

The principals were asked in the interviews to consider school policies in place guiding dropout's reenrollment and how their schools assist dropouts to reintegrate. The principals expressed the view that access to school is based on the South African Schools Act, with no specific policy dealing with dropouts in particular.

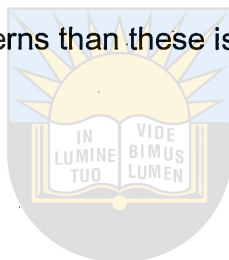
We don't have separate classroom or policy that is specifically planned for them [dropouts]. We don't have specific contents: we just make sure that the learner is reenrolled in the presence of the parent or guardian. The parent is interrogated as to what was the previous problem that resulted in dropping out, so we see if there is any professional assistance the school can offer pertaining to the dropout reason. The curriculum suitability of the learner also as the education system is transforming from Nated 550 system to NCS. We wanted to know if the stream the learner dropped out on is still the same or not.  
[Principal A]

Administrative data then are collected. Without early interventions to assist the dropouts in dealing with the social hostility that they faced, some dropouts might perpetuate indiscipline or even drop out again. Yet apart from the mere routine activities at school, nothing is done. One principal explained:

[We] keep them involved in almost all the school activities, sport, fundraising activities, and checking the uniform in their classes. [We] make them the group leaders on class discussions. Be close to them to show them that though they were down on the previous years, they are not yet out, in as far as the school and community are concerned. The school organise the motivational activities, to motivate them and other learners, try to show them that in life is never going

to be easy, the victories we have we gained them by not falling down but by how many times we rose every time we fell. Prepared lesson to their challenges and assist as to how to overcome these challenges. [Principal A]

The measures applied show no sensitivity to the hostility that some dropouts experienced. It seems that the school principal anticipated that the dropouts would return to school and carry on as normal learners who did not drop out, or assumed that what dropouts needed was motivational talks, support with academic work, or leadership roles. But as the evidence in this research shows, many of the dropouts in the sample had much broader concerns than these issues.



#### **4.5 SUMMARY**

The evidence discussed in the chapter was taken from a sample, consisting of dropouts and school principals, who are leaders in school. In summary, both the factors that prompt dropouts to reenrol in school and the social-life experiences which characterised the reintegration of these dropouts in the school context have been discussed, within the context of prevailing literature. While drawing attention to notable patterns that stand out in the results, the study provides a better understanding of why dropouts in the sample reenrol in school and their social experiences thereof. In general, it seems the school leaders remain largely unaware of these experiences. Educators had a role in the way social life is experienced.

The next chapter discusses key lessons learnt, the conclusions and implications of the findings for school leadership.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **LESSONS LEARNT, KEY CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

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#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The evidence of the research is presented and discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter the lessons learnt, key conclusions and implications of the evidence for school leadership are outlined. The chapter commences with the key lessons learnt from the experiences of dropouts in school, and then focuses on the key conclusions drawn. The implications for school leadership are also discussed. The chapter ends by citing the main limitations of the study.

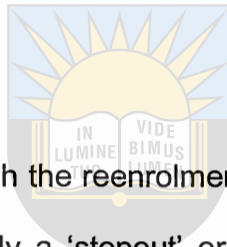
#### **5.2 LESSONS LEARNT FROM DROPOUT EXPERIENCES**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that prompted dropouts to reenrol in school and the social life experiences of dropouts in school. It was also to explore school leaders' reactions towards these experiences, and the implications for school leadership of the dropouts' experiences. From the investigation, a number of lessons pertaining to each of these issues can be deduced. A brief overview of these lessons is outlined below.



### 5.2.1 Factors prompting dropouts' reenrolment

In general, a key lesson is that, as the evidence indicates, dropouts' reenrolment in school, occurred after, not before, the circumstances that pushed/pulled them out of school had improved or changed. This broad observation is consistent with previous research, and the literature surrounding the economic model of drop out, which highlights that removal of constraints, free up people to reconsider previous decisions (cf. chapter 2, pg. 30-40).



It is shown in the study that although the reenrolment of the dropouts is evidence that their time out of school was merely a 'stopout' or a temporary interruption to their education, multiple motives underlie dropouts' reenrolment decision, including access to pecuniary support, personal and family health issues, lifestyle changes, pressured by family, valuing of education, desire to offset early life course setbacks resulting from motherhood role. It is possible to consolidate this range of factors into two broad categories, which collectively shaped their decision to reenrol. These two categories are, on the one hand, associated with *individual characteristics of dropouts* and, on the other hand, associated with the *institutional characteristics of their family and the labour market*.

#### 5.2.1.1 *Individual characteristics of dropouts*

The individual characteristics fall into three areas: (1) attitude change towards schooling, (2) health, and (3) behaviours. *Attitude change towards schooling:* Attitude

change was in terms of the valuing of schooling. From the evidence, it is evident that a key motivating force underlying dropouts' reenrolment was a new sense of the value and importance of schooling. Consistent with previous studies, this seemingly change in attitude appears related to a realisation of the significance of secondary education for their socio-economic mobility. Although a substantial body of research has explored the relationship between learner achievement and a wide range of learner beliefs, values, and attitudes, far less research has explored the links between these factors and school reenrolment by learners who quit school prematurely.



*Health:* Two aspects of health enabled dropouts to reenrol: improvement in personal health, and decreased need to offer caregiving to unhealthy family members. Based on past research, both of the abovementioned health issues (poor health and family illness) are predictors of dropping out of school, thus it is quite unsurprising that a relief from these problems enabled dropouts to continue their schooling.

*Behaviours:* It can be seen in the evidence that three aspects of behaviours enabled reenrolment: escape from drug abuse and gangster lifestyles, breakdown in love relationship, and desires to offset the effects of early motherhood responsibility. It can be seen from the evidence that the replacement of misbehaviour in school and delinquent behaviour outside of school with socially responsible behaviour, contributed to dropout reenrolment. The rational decision making model (*cf. chapter 2, pg. 20-26*) argues that this could be a result of the acquisition of additional information. Because research consistently finds that delinquent behaviours and

misbehaviours are significantly associated with drop out rates, it was unsurprising that a change in these behaviours enabled dropouts to reenrol in school.

As we have seen in this study, and as previous studies have shown, only after there is an effort by dropouts - such as those with childbearing and teenage parenting setbacks - to acquire economic or social capital, or when an effort is made to disassociate from friends who engage in criminal behaviours or friends who dropped out of school, that dropouts are able to redirect their lives onto a trajectory that takes them back into school (*cf. chapter 2, pg. 30-40*). Clearly, then, the individual's characteristics play a critical role in dropouts reenrolment.

#### 5.2.1.2 *Institutional characteristics of their family and the labour market*

But parallel to the individual factors, the evidence of the study points, as expected, to institutional characteristics of dropouts' family and labour market issues as key to their reenrolment in school. The barrier to access the labour market without full secondary education pushed dropouts back into school. But equally important was family. Three aspects of family can be identified in the factors that shaped dropouts reenrolment: (1) family resources, (2) family practices, and (3) family pressure. Family resources are related to financial support, because access to pecuniary support enabled reenrolment. Family members also recognised the socio-economic value of education and actively pressurised dropouts to return to school. Family practices of arranged marriage, aversive treatment for wrongdoings, and the use of siblings for caregiving

during family member ill-health, forced some learners to drop out of school and only able to return once these circumstances had changed.

But while family factors have always been a feature in drop out studies, it is the direction of the influence which makes family factor unique in this study. The evidence shows that learners living with family which experience stressful events such as illness, death, marital arrangement issues, and so on, deliberately 'stopout' or quit school to support their family, returning only after the stressors had been removed. While both economic and cultural explanations may shed light into this behaviour, the action illustrates that family factors can both pull and push learners in (and out of) school.



But what is particularly interesting in the evidence is that in the mix of reenrolment motives, institutional characteristics at the school level were not featured. Yet evidence in the literature has shown that often principals, teachers, sports coaches, and counsellors helped to pull dropouts back into school by offering to immediately provide counselling and academic assistance on their return (*cf. chapter 2, p.40*). The abovementioned insights add a new dimension by broadening our perspective regarding why dropouts' reenrolment in school.

### **5.2.2 Social life experiences**

A crucial lesson taken from the literature study is that the kind of social life that dropouts had, following their reenrolment in school is an area that has not been

written about to any great extent in the literature. From the empirical study, the evidence illustrates well that social reintegration experience at school was diverse and complex, involving negative labelling and teasing, bullying in which some dropouts were perpetrators and others victims, ostracism and isolation, on the one hand, and affable integration, on the other hand. In terms of each of these, the following were key lessons:

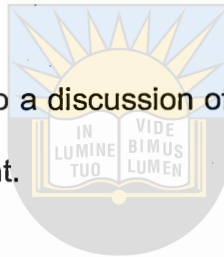
- Overall, it seems that, although the social experience of some dropouts was littered with negative labelling and teasing, these forms of social hostility were differentially applied. The treatment had everything to do with the nature of the dropout causes, but equally everything to do it seems with the dropouts' personality and relations with peers prior to dropping out, and after reenrolment. As a result, there was transformation in social image of these dropouts.
- It seems too that although dropouts reenrolled and contributed to making the social school context hostile by bullying other learners and educators, their action was not by chance but deliberately constructed, influenced it seems by both environmental factors within the school context and personality type, and used as means of survival. But there was no antisocial behaviour fixation among these dropouts. They rather had a willingness to change to more pro-social tendency.
- The painful effect of the 'cold shoulder' defined the social reality of some of the dropouts. Ostracism/isolation was played out in two forms: one whereby other



learners excluded dropouts, and the other whereby dropouts self-isolate. There was no single consolidated motive for the ostracism behaviours. In instance where other learners excluded the dropouts, it seems the act represented an insidious means of informal (social) punishment / control; and in instance where dropout self-isolate, it seems merely a rejection avoidance strategy.

- Although age differences prevailed between the dropout and their classmates, the breakdown in social relations between them had nothing to do, it seems, with the age disparity, or the type of drug abused, but more to do, it seems, with a breakdown of trust between friends and mates. The issues at hand affect both parties involved. Persistent exposure to this treatment has been shown to hamper the socio-emotional development of adolescents. At the same time, by refusing to interact socially with overage dropouts, younger learners may just be limiting their own socio-cultural development. But again, the scale of the problem does not seem sufficient to make this an issue.
- Despite the negative experiences, there were dropouts who experienced the school context as friendly after their reenrolment. Although these dropouts found the school climate affable, the experience had nothing to do, it seems, with the nature of the factors that cause dropouts to quit school but more to do with a change of school context and the positive leadership of the class teacher at the dropout's alma mater.

- A key lesson is that although school principals were actively involved in dropout reenrolment, they seem insensitive to many of the social problems that dropouts experienced as they reintegrate at school. The interventions that school principals put in place for dropouts focus on issues to assist dropouts academically, which perhaps is unsurprising, given their apparent insensitivity to the hostile social issues such as negative labeling, teasing, ostracism, and rejections that dropouts experienced.



The next section below now turns to a discussion of the conclusions and implications emerging from the key lessons learnt.

### **5.3 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

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Based on prevailing literature, interest in the topic of dropping out has grown in recent years both in the local South African context and overseas, yet the social dimension of dropout's reintegration in school has been an under-researched area. From the current investigation into the topic, a number of conclusions regarding motivation to reenrol and the social experiences after reenrolment - can be drawn.

#### **5.3.1 Conclusions**

From the evidence of the study, one can conclude the following:

- Multiple reenrolment motives. No single factor can completely account for all the dropouts' decision to reenrol in school. Dropouts' reenrolment is a result of factors



within the individual characteristics of learners and the institutional characteristics of their family and the labour market. Thus, the decision to reenrol is not simply a result of what happens at home. Clearly, learners' activities and behaviours as pertaining to recognising the value of education and desiring to change their lifestyle or overcome early life-course setbacks – also influence their return. Contrary to the literature, the institutional characteristics of school had little or no apparent influence on motivation to reenrolment. Just as dropouts themselves report a variety of reasons for reenrolling in school, the research literature also identifies a number of factors that appear to influence the decision.

- While some participants had quite positive social experiences, which reinforced their motivation to pursue their education, others experienced the school context as socially hostile – a consequence of multiple factors including personality, prior relations with school mates and so forth. Change in school context and good teacher leadership at the same school helped those who experienced social life at school positively.

For those who experienced social hostility, their experiences cut across a range of issues from social isolation and ostracism to negative labeling, teasing, and bullying. Both educators and other learners showed hostility toward the dropouts. But consistent with the literature, (cf. chapter 2, pg. 31-42) some dropouts were sources of social hostility themselves. Much of the hostility is linked to the issues which cause the drop out. In consistent with sociological and psychological

research, the forms of social hostility experienced have the potential to cause both short and long term psycho-social and emotional effects.

Additionally, it does not appear to be discrimination by gender in the way the dropouts are treated socially. Both boys and girls experienced the hostility.

While school leaders are charged with the whole development of the child/adolescent – cognitive, emotional, social, and physical – they seem insensitive to many of the social integration challenges that confront these dropouts. Contrary to the views held by the school leaders, all but one of the dropouts was keen to be in school. As discussed below, these range of issues have important implications for school leadership.

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### **5.3.2 Implications for school leadership**

#### **5.3.2.1 *Practice / policy implications***

The evidence of the study raises a number of implications for school leadership. Evidently, many of the dropouts return to school in a disadvantaged position socially and need school leaders to help them re-integrate. This disadvantage situation is illustrated in the hostility and consequences thereof experienced.

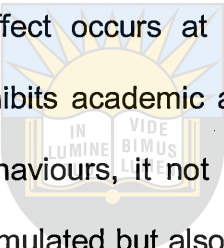
Education leaders cannot ignore the abovementioned reality of dropouts in the school setting. The fact that hostility, as reflected for instance in negative labelling, and bullying, are part of the social reality of dropouts is demonstration that their school life is rife with practices which are impacting on their welfare, self-esteem and socialisation.

In the context of the educational process, this must be a worrying reality, not just for parents but school leaders and educators. School leaders are tasked with ensuring, *inter alia*, moral leadership within a school organisation. Part of moral leadership involves communicating what is right or good (*cf. chapter 2*). Moral leadership is demonstrated in deeds that reflect understanding, co-operation, inclusivity and justice (*cf. chapter 2*). The hostility experienced by dropouts in the school is perhaps a reminder of the need for a sense of understanding, co-operation, and inclusivity to be cultivated and fostered among not just learners, but also between learners and educators.

School leaders must take the lead in this regard. One way of engaging in moral leadership at the school level is by encouraging discussion of moral or ethical issues. School leaders could encourage educators and learners to form ethical committees which raise awareness of ethical issues. Truly effective schools are those with a shared covenant, clearly articulating the school's core values and providing a standard by which actions will be judged. As a leader, the school principal must not only take the lead in formulating the covenant but actively support and enforce it. It is through

such actions that a school culture, which is supportive of dropout reintegration, can be fashioned.

The issue of hostility raised above has a direct bearing on the teaching and learning process. Educative teaching and learning, as core business of school organisations, require an environment conducive to such activities. In a school context, unfriendly experiences lower the self-esteem of the individual affected. When a learner experienced ostracism, a ripple effect occurs at the classroom level. It creates psychological stress which often inhibits academic achievement. Furthermore, when educators engage in prejudicial behaviours, it not only sends a message to other learners that the behaviour can be emulated but also sends a message to victims that they are lesser than others. This impairs the victim's self perception.



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But beyond instructional and moral leadership, the support that is perhaps of immediate significance for some of the dropouts is one of counseling. School leadership cannot continue business as usual while dropouts engaged in bullying or experience other forms of intolerance in the schools. Research is very clear that when children are faced with experiences of prejudice and with feelings of self-doubt, they need counseling support to cope. While the nature of the problem dictates the support strategy required, it is possible that school leaders and counselors could work with parents to reach out to dropouts at an individual level, while they foster an atmosphere of trust and safety at an organisational level. Rather than being confrontational, or

react with conflict when victimised, dropouts could learn alternative behaviours through counseling.

Thus, a key implication of this research is that there are a variety of leverage points for addressing the social hostility problems. Intervention in these secondary schools is clearly warranted. The counselling programme is just one example. Both dropouts and educators involved in the victimisation should be part of the counselling. But given the complex nature of the issues that dropouts experienced, counseling should not be seen as a panacea. It should be seen as part of a broader strategy that might be introduced.



But there are other leverage points as well. School leaders can tap into the motivation that dropouts have, following their return to school.

#### 5.3.2.2 *Issues for further research*

Although a substantial body of research has explored the relationship between learner achievement and a wide range of learner beliefs, values, and attitudes, far less research has explored the links between these factors and school reenrolment by learners who quit school prematurely. This is an important avenue for further research which could provide new insights in the field.

## 5.4 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Two key limitations of this study need to be noted. The first is that the research was a case, involving a sample of dropouts from two schools. Consequently, the findings may not be generalised. Secondly, the data was not disaggregated by gender, thus gender comparisons cannot be made beyond the issues already raised.



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## APPENDICES



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# APPENDIX A

Letter requesting permission to access the schools



University of Fort Hare  
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**Faculty of Education**

**School of Postgraduate Studies**

28 Commissioner Street  
East London

Phone: East London: 043704 7220/19



**University of Fort Hare**  
Together in Excellence

28 July 2009

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

**Re.: Permission To Undertake A Masters Research Study**

This serves to inform you that Mrs Daniwe Jakuja, student number 200806041 is registered for the Masters degree in Education (M.Ed.), in the School of Postgraduate Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Fort Hare.

As part of her studies, Mrs Daniwe Jakuja is required to conduct a research on an approved topic. The approved research is entitled: ***"An investigation into the experiences of dropouts after reenrollment in school in Stutterheim: implications for educational leadership"***.

Mrs Daniwe Jakuja is soliciting information and is seeking permission to undertake this study at your school. Your assistance in this matter is highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Dr Byron Brown  
Study Supervisor  
Ph. 043 704 7285  
Email [bbrown@ufh.ac.za](mailto:bbrown@ufh.ac.za)

## APPENDIX B

### Interview schedule



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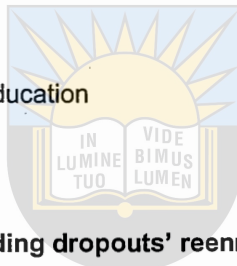
**DROPOUT STUDY, 2009**  
**SCHOOL LEADER**

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**Purpose of the study:** To understand dropout experiences and integration in schools following their reenrollment. The information that you share will be kept Confidentiality, thus, whatever you say will not be shared with others. Your identity will remain anonymity: there will be no mentioning of names or other personal details. If you wish, when the study is completed, I can share the findings with you.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- Your Gender:
- Age:
- Your highest level of professional education
- Years of experience as a principal



**DROP OUT SITUATION**

1. What school policies are there guiding dropouts' reenrollments in school?
2. When dropouts are placed in one class with much younger learners what problems do you encounter and how do you deal with them?
3. What problems does the school encounter with overage learners: (disciplinary problems)
4. What is the attitude of dropouts towards school and school work?
5. How has school leadership assisted the dropouts to re-integrate in the school population?

## **DROPOUT**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**Purpose of the study:** To understand dropout experiences and integration in schools following their reenrolment. The information that you share will be kept Confidentiality, thus, whatever you say will not be shared with others. Your identity will remain anonymity: there will be no mentioning of names or other personal details. If you wish, when the study is completed, I can share the findings with you.

#### **SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- Your grade
- Tell me your age: In which year were you were born?
- Who is the head of the household at home? (and who else were you living with)
- What subjects are you currently doing in school?
- How many times have you dropped out school?
- In which grade were you when you dropped out of school?
- Tell me about your reasons for dropping out:
- Tell me about your reasons for coming back to school:

#### **SECTION B: SOCIAL EXPERIENCES**

**Main question:** Tell me about your social experiences since you have reenrolled  
(Prompts: *how you been interaction, getting along with others inside and outside class; social life with friends, teachers, in the classroom, outside classroom, etc, since you return*).

*Tell more about these hostile experiences (what exactly do you go through)*

*How do you cope? Are there other dropouts in your school? Do you make friends with them?*



## APPENDIX C

Interview scripts



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**DROPOUT**  
**SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**I: Your grade:**

R: I am in grade 10.

**I: Tell me your age: In which year were you born?**

R: I am 19 years old. I was born in 1990.

**I: Who is the head of the household at home? (and who else were you living with)**

R: The head of my household is my father. I also live with my two sisters and one brother and I am the eldest at home.

**I: What subjects are you currently doing in school?**

R: Xhosa, English, Maths Literacy, Physical Science, Geography and Life Orientation

**I: How many times have you dropped out of school?**

R: I dropped out of school twice.

**I: In which grade were you when you dropped out of school?**

R: First time, I was in grade 9.

Second time, I was in grade 10.

First time I stayed out of school for one year and second time I stayed out of school for 10 months.

**I: Tell me about your reasons for dropping out:**

R: (a) First time

I made my girl friend pregnant and I ran away from home because I was afraid of my father. I went to stay with my uncle in Tarkastad for the whole year. It was at the beginning of the year 2006. My girl friend carried on with her studies. Girls are allowed to attend school when they are pregnant.

(b) Second time

I was involved in drugs. I joined a group from the nearby location which is the coloured area. The group sold and smoke drugs. I liked their company and end up doing drugs. It was on February 2008 when I was found in a possession of drugs at school. I was called to the principal's office, my parents were also called. I knew that my father was going to hit me, in the middle of the meeting I tried to escape, but unfortunately for me I was caught before reaching the school gate and it was during break time, my father hit me in front of the learners and it was my last day at school. I stayed at home, but my father takes me to school the following day. I ran away while we were waiting for the caretaker to open the gate. I left home and stayed with a friend who is no longer schooling and stayed alone at his home.

**I: Tell me about your reasons for coming back to school:**

R: When I see my sister and brother progressing well at school, I decided to go back home and asked my father to give me the last chance to go back to school. I quit drugs. I see myself as a failure because I should be an example to my sisters and my younger brother at home, so I want to live a comfortable life. As a father I want to give my child a better life by sending her to the best schools.

It was important to come back to school because every job needs a qualified person with skills. Also education is the key to open all doors in the world, so without education one is nothing.

The family pressure motivated me to come back to school. My parents told me many times to wake up and collect my senses, asking me how I am going to take care of my child if I'm not educated.

My out of school experience does influence the way now I view schooling because I know exactly what I want from school. Now I value schooling more. The first time I was out of school I went to Tarkastad staying there doing nothing for the whole year. Second time I was out of school I worked for the building contractor for six months, I quit the job because I worked very hard there and we earn little money. What I experience has an influence in my coming back to school.

## **SECTION B: SOCIAL EXPERIENCES**

**Main question:** Tell me about your social experiences since you have reenrolled  
(Prompts: how you been interaction, getting along with others inside and outside class; social life with friends, teachers, in the classroom, outside classroom, etc, since you return).

The number of years I've been out of school has affected my re-integration in school. When I came back to school the first time there were experiences I had in the classroom during lessons. (a) The teachers treated me different from other learners, they called me a parent and accused me of bullying other learners because I am a father. I used to be angry, but any way I am a father, but I didn't like to be called a father at school because at school I am a learner.

(b) Learners laughed at me when I did not understand what was said. I was like a fool but the situation was like that I had to keep quiet. When I asked for assistance from my classmates, they used to give me wrong answers then laugh at me. This happened for few months and I was not accepted in the class by my class and teachers. I was hurt but I told my self to stay calm and accept what I'm going through because I want to learn.

The second time: (a) The teachers called me (ntsangwini) dagga smoker and every time I ask for assistance from the teachers they told me not to smoke dagga when I'm coming to school. I felt embarrassed because other learners laughed at me.

(b) Learners used to be afraid of me when there was no teacher in the classroom. They said that a dagga smoker used to be abusive. I was worried and wanted them to see me as a change person. (c) When I asked for assistance my classmates refuse to help me, but as the time went on they change their attitude towards me because they saw that I was no longer using drugs.

*I: Tell more about these hostile experiences (what exactly do you go through)*

R: I was neglected, hated, given names and seen as a no good person by teachers and learners at my school. I felt very sad.

When working in a group, firstly learners didn't want me in their groups. Maybe they saw me as a useless person having that stigma of using drugs, I don't think it is because of age difference. I was angry with myself, because it is my entire fault. I felt neglected and I hated myself. Learners hesitated to accept me as a change person who wants to do good things.

*I: How do you cope? Are there other dropouts in your school? Do you make friends with them?*

R: I am not the only dropout at my school. There are other dropouts in each of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade classes. But we do not group ourselves as friends... no particular reason. I just tell myself I want to learn. They will see that I am serious about schooling.

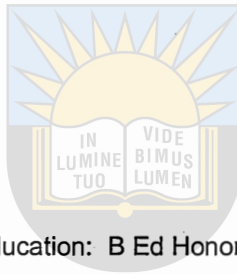
## **SCHOOL LEADER (PRINCIPAL)**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**Purpose of the study:** To understand dropout experiences and integration in schools following their reenrollment. The information that you share will be kept Confidentiality, thus, whatever you say will not be shared with others. Your identity will remain anonymity: there will be no mentioning of names or other personal details. If you wish, when the study is completed, I can share the findings with you.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- Your Gender: Male
- Age: 48
- Your highest level of professional education: B Ed Honors
- Years of experience as a principal: 6 years



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### **DROP OUT SITUATION**

#### **1.What school policies are there guiding dropouts' reenrollments in school?**

The school reenrolls the learners as they come on the enrolment date. Like all the enrolling learners they too should bring their enrolment requirements. We don't have separate classroom or policy that is specifically planned for them.

We don't have specific policy contents. We just make sure that the learner is reenrolled in the presence of the parent or guardian. The parent is interrogated as to what was the previous problem that resulted in dropping out. If there is any professional assistance the school can offer.

But we look at the presence of the parent on reenrollment day is essential; The reason for dropping out; Learner behavioral issues at school before he/she dropped out; The curriculum suitability of the learner as the education system is transforming from Nated 550 system to NCS. We wanted to know if the stream the learner dropped out on is still the same or not.

#### **2.When dropouts are placed in one class with much younger learners what problems do you encounter and how do you deal with them?**

These dropouts let the younger learners to feel that they are the bosses in class. They are forced to do work for the bigger learners. If a dropout hasn't got a pen he or she took one from the younger learners. They send the young learners to go and buy cigarettes for them and forced them to smoke. We try to reduce this rate of abuse by telling all learners about their rights and responsibilities. We tell the learners to report any kind of bad treatment they get from other learners. The parents are called and we punish the learners. We give them work to do like cleaning the school yard or working in the garden.



### **3. What problems does the school encounter with overage learners: (disciplinary problems)**

Carelessness on doing the school work, maybe because they think they know everything as it is the repetition to them. The element of bullying amongst the classmates is also evident in some instances. Dropouts tend to have the ability to instill bad influences in other learners

### **4. What is the attitude of dropouts towards school and school work?**

Some tend to act as if they know everything at the beginning but as the time progresses some realize that they need to work hard so that they might not fail. Others became destructive in class, especially those who come to school because they were forced by their parents.

### **5. How has school leadership assisted the dropouts to re-integrate in the school population?**

Keeping them involved in almost all the school activities: sport, fundraising activities, checking the uniform in their classes. Make them the group leaders on class discussions. Be close to them to show them that though they were down on the previous years, they are not yet out in as far as the school and community are concerned. School organize the motivational activities, to motivate them and other learners, try to show them that in life is never going to be easy, the victories we have we gained them by not falling down but by how many times rose every time we fell. Prepared lesson to their challenges and assist as to how to overcome these challenges.

We discovered that generally the reasons for dropping out are the financial background (money to buy school uniform, books, school fundraising payment, tours etc), failure is also a factor because should they become over aged in a particular class, they tend to believe that they are no longer kids and start behaving strange in class. That resulted in them being cautioned time and again and therefore they will not be happy at school and decide to drop out.

Some of the girls feel embarrassed by the pregnancy and decide to dropout and hide themselves at their homes. Some boys from the initiation school tend to be careless about their schooling and feel that they are man enough to go and look for jobs. This is a challenge for us.

I asked one learner who dropped out last year on re-admission date why did he drop out. With tears on his eyes, he said he wanted so bad to continue schooling but the problem is that he loss both his parents and the people who take care of him have no interest in education. They did not give him a chance to do his school work at home. They did not provide him with clothes, uniform and support of any kind, whenever he ask for something required by the school, they would tell him that it is not their fault that he loss his parents. The learner decided to dropout and look for the job.

# **APPENDIX D**

## **Data Analysis Protocol**



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## PROTOCOL TO CODER

Dear Coder:

Kindly follow the following steps and assist me in analyzing the data of the transcribed interviews. The method of analysis is the comparative method of content analysis

- Read 'carefully' through all the transcripts to get a sense of the whole. 'Carefully' means to read and reread the transcripts to gain familiarity. The aim is to use the data to 'think with'. Identify 'units' of information that can serve as the basis for defining categories. A unit of information can be a sentence or a paragraph that has the following two characteristics: (a) is the smallest piece of information of something that can stand by itself, (b) is focused on the understanding which the researcher needs to have.
- Code the units identified and place them into categories. The aim at this stage is to bring together into provisional categories those units that are apparently related to the same content in order to devise rules that can describe category properties. These properties should be used to justify the inclusion of each unit assigned.
- Underline units of meanings that are related to the identified category and constantly compare the categories.
- Stop coding when categorization is saturated and write memos on your ideas. These memos should be capable of defining each category.
- Compare units within the same category with the properties of that category. Use your judgments to check whether a new unit exhibits the category property that has been identified and note possible relationships.
- Outline the categories found.

Thanks in advance.

Yours truly,

Ms DP Jakuja.