

**GUIDELINES FOR EMPOWERING SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATORS,
IN LOCO PARENTIS, IN ADDRESSING TRUANCY AMONG EARLY
ADOLESCENT LEARNERS**

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**GUIDELINES FOR EMPOWERING SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATORS,
IN LOCO PARENTIS, IN ADDRESSING TRUANCY AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENT LEARNERS**

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that

GUIDELINES FOR EMPOWERING SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATORS, *IN LOCO PARENTIS*, IN ADDRESSING TRUANCY AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENT LEARNERS

is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

M. J. VAN BREDA

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DATE

OPSOMMING

RIGLYNE VIR DIE BEMAGTIGING VAN SEKONDÊRESKOOL OPVOEDERS, *IN LOCO PARENTIS*, IN DIE HANTERING VAN STOKKIESDRAAI ONDER VROEË ADOLESSENTE LEERDERS

Deur	:	MAYNARD JOHN VAN BRED A
Graad	:	DOCTOR EDUCATIONIS
Vak	:	SIELKUNDIGE OPVOEDKUNDE
Promotor	:	DR MA VENTER

In hierdie studie is die aard en voorkoms van stokkiesdraai onder vroeë adolessente leerders by skole in die Onderwysbestuur en Ontwikkelingsentrum (OBOS) van metropool oos in die Wes-Kaap, ondersoek.

Die hoofdoelstelling van hierdie ondersoek was om die volgende kwessie aan te spreek: Hoe kan opvoeders, *in loco parentis*, met die nodige vaardighede en hulpmiddele toegerus word om die probleem van stokkiesdraai onder vroeë adolessente leerders doeltreffend te hanteer? 'n Omvattende literatuurstudie is gedoen wat hoofsaaklik op die veelfasettige aard van hierdie gedragsverkyngsel gefokus het. Daarna is verskeie ontwikkelingsteorieë belig, opgevolg met 'n oorsigtelike aanbieding van sekere aspekte rakende die ontwikkeling van die vroeë adolessent.

Die empiriese navorsing is aan die hand van beide kwantitatiewe en kwalitatiewe metodologieë uitgevoer. Aanvanklik is 'n fokusgroep onderhoud gevoer, waarvan die doel was om die deelnemende leerders die geleentheid te bied om hul eie persepsies en ervaring van stokkiesdraai mee te deel. Semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is met skoolhoofde gevoer, ten einde hul opinies rakende hierdie tipe gedrag te verkry. Vervolgens is 'n vraelys ontwikkel waarmee die volgende vier aspekte rakende stokkiesdraai getoets is: Interaksie met portuurgroep, betrokkenheid van ouers in hulle kind se skoolaktiwiteite, opvoeders se invloed op leerders se skoolwerk en leerders se selfbeeld ten opsigte van hul skoollewe. Die vraelys is deur 'n groep van driehonderd leerders voltooi. Beduidende aspekte wat deur die kwantitatiewe navorsing onthul is, toon dat oorweldigend meer seuns as dogters stokkiesdraai (173 seuns teenoor 26 dogters), stokkiesdraaiers hoofsaaklik uit enkelouergesinne kom, en dat hierdie leerders hul opvoeders en leeromgewing as uiters negatief beleef.

Laastens het twee leerders, onderskeidelik 'n tipiese stokkiesdraaier en 'n nie-stokkiesdraaier, aan 'n diepte-onderzoek deelgeneem. Die doel was om die uitstaande kenmerke van hul onderskeie leefwêrelde in oënskou te neem. Alhoewel die kwalitatiewe data nie veralgemeenbaar is nie, het die bevindinge van hierdie ondersoek beduidende verskille tussen die leefwêrelde van die twee leerders blootgelê. Dit blyk dat leerders wat hulle nie skuldig aan stokkiesdraai maak nie, beter vaar op al hul funksioneringsvlakke as leerders wat dit wel doen.

Die studie is afgesluit met 'n reeks aanbevelings, wat op die huidige navorsing gebaseer is, waardeur sekondêreskool opvoeders in die Weskaap met sy eiesoortige probleme, bemaagtig kan word in die hantering van stokkiesdraai onder vroeë adolessente leerders.

SUMMARY

GUIDELINES FOR EMPOWERING SECONDARY SCHOOLS EDUCATORS, *IN LOCO PARENTIS*, IN ADDRESSING TRUANCY AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENT LEARNERS

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Subject : PSYCHOLOGY OF EDUCATION
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This study examined the prevalence and the nature of truancy among early adolescent learners attending secondary schools in the Education Management and Development Centre (EMDC) in the eastern metropole of the Western Cape.

The main purpose of the study was to answer the following question: How can secondary school educators, *in loco parentis*, be equipped with the required skills and resources in order to deal with the issue of truant behaviour among early adolescent learners? A comprehensive literature review was conducted to explore the character and extent of truancy. Thereafter, various theories of child development were highlighted, followed by a synopsis comprising different dimensions of the development of the early adolescent learner.

The empirical investigation was carried out through quantitative as well as qualitative research methodology. A focus group interview was conducted with six learners, offering them an opportunity to express their perceptions and experiences as truants. Interviews were conducted with principals to obtain their impressions regarding truant behaviour. Thereafter, a questionnaire, which investigated truancy related aspects such as interaction with peers, parents and caregivers' involvement in learners' school activities, educators' influence on learners' school work and learners' self-esteem regarding their schooling, was administered to three hundred learners. The quantitative investigation revealed significant aspects about truant behaviour, indicating that predominantly more male than female learners (173 male and 26 as in the case of the present study) display this type of behaviour, truants generally originate from single parent families, and that they experience their educators and learning environments as extremely negative. Finally, two in-depth case studies were conducted on two learners, one identified as a truant and the other as a non-truant respectively. The purpose of the in-depth

studies was to explore possible differences in their experiential worlds. Although the qualitative data is not generalisable, the findings of the case studies have revealed significant differences in the life worlds of the two learners. Comparatively speaking, it appears that non-truant learners are significantly better adjusted on all their functioning levels than truant learners.

The results of the empirical investigation were compared with relevant findings which emerged from the literature study. Based on the present investigation, the study was concluded by offering a range of recommendations to secondary school educators, *in loco parentis*, empowering them in addressing the phenomenon of truancy among early adolescent learners in the Western Cape with its distinctive problems.

Key words: truancy, early adolescent learners, educators, secondary school, Education Management and Development Centre (EMDC), focus group interview, questionnaire, case studies, personality, self-esteem.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

1.1 GENERAL AWARENESS

In view of my extensive experience as an educator and currently as an Educational Psychologist serving schools in the eastern Education Management and Development Centre (EMDC) of the Western Cape, I have become acutely aware of the occurrence of truant behaviour particularly among fourteen to fifteen year old secondary school learners. On the one hand I am moved by the plight of many learners particularly in the afore-mentioned age group, for whom the education system appears irrelevant or of little value and is apparently failing them. Some communicate this attitude by their frequent and at times prolonged absence from school. On the other hand, many educators have little sympathy with truants, since as professionals, educators feel that consistent school attendance is essential if learners are to make satisfactory progress.

Moreover, it is also my perception that educators' work loads and the organisation of schools, currently ensure that very few educators have the time to become closely acquainted with those individual learners who manifest their displeasure with schools – and them – by truanting. In turn, this breakdown in communication between educators and truants, makes implementing successful reintegration strategies immensely difficult. In fact, such is the pressure on today's educators, that some staff are greatly relieved at the prospect of instructing fewer learners, especially if the absentees are those who may be troublesome, backward, require extra attention in class or behave badly (Reid, 2002:5). Furthermore it has also come to my attention that educators feel that their prime duty and responsibility is to regulate attendees, higher achievers, as well as learners who conform and wish to do well at school. Hence, regular attendance appears to be the best barometer of this conformist attitude.

Furthermore, on discussing the occurrence of truancy in schools with principals and educators of various schools in my service area, it has become increasingly obvious that measures for dealing with truants are failing for various reasons. For example, the schools in question are generally not in a position to exert pressure upon their learners to adhere to any disciplinary measures including regular attendance. Oosthuizen (2002:4) is of the opinion that the abolition

of corporal punishment in schools has left a gap which cannot be filled and this has led to the prevalence of diverse disciplinary problems in schools. Schools are compelled to operate within the regulatory framework of the Department of Education and are obligated to administer punitive measures which comply with seemingly inadequate departmental regulations. To this end, schools are somewhat constrained in combating the rapidly escalating problems with discipline which in most cases includes truancy. In addition, a negative parental attitude toward educators and school authorities exacerbate the disciplinary control in schools due to parents' scepticism towards disciplinary measures.

Through my involvement in the broader community, it has become apparent to me that the phenomenon of truancy is fuelled by factors which lure learners to absent themselves habitually and unofficially from their learning or school environments. These so-called 'pull' factors are identified amongst others, as drug addiction, gangster activity, escapism from the structured school environment and inadequate parental control.

Despite all the afore-mentioned opposing factors, the general conviction of all role-players in education is that schools should function effectively, providing a high standard of education to learners and simultaneously attend to discipline related issues such as high incidence of truancy.

1.2 ACTUALITY OF THE PROBLEM

Truancy is not a form of behaviour that is generally condoned by the public at large. However, the reality of truancy seems very different. Many truants often engage in meaningless activity while away from school. Some are bored, finding it difficult to while away their time. Based on information obtained from a focus group interview conducted with learners in my service area, I have concluded that there is increasing and worrying evidence that truants often become embroiled in an existence where time is engaged in fringe activities such as drug taking, theft, gangsterism, prostitution, joyriding with taxi drivers, violence, watching pornographic movies and participating in organised crime. A strong link is apparent between truancy and the escalation of a culture of lawlessness that is synonymous with certain areas of the Cape Flats and, in particular, in the eastern EMDC, where psycho-educational services are rendered by me.

My interest in the proposed research topic not only originates from my grave concern regarding the possible link between the occurrence of truancy, scholastic failure, juvenile delinquency and social disorder, but also from the unsympathetic attitude of educators to the needs of truants. It appears likely that educators inadvertently reinforce the initial dysfunctional conduct of learners that they are trying to eradicate. This, in turn, may result in the cultivation of negative survival skills among learners as previously mentioned. Moreover, all levels of development of the learner, academically, scholastically, emotionally and socially, may also be adversely influenced by irregular school attendance.

The media has shown an ever-increasing interest regarding truancy and its possible causes. Headlines at times tend to misinterpret the substance of research findings and place the blame on particular 'scapegoats'. For instance, in 2002 reference was made in the press to research on school absence under the following headlines: "Parents and school blamed for truancy" (Weekend Argus, 16 May) and "Survey blames domestic trouble for girls' truancy" (Argus, 12 August).

Truancy has various implications. Legally, parents of truants might be accused of failing to fulfil their statutory duties by neglecting to ensure that their children receive a suitable full-time education. Educationally, truancy is a source of concern because non-attendees generally fall behind in their work. Their attitude and behaviour, particularly in the case of disruptive truants, not only affect other learners, but also educators and themselves. Psychologically, truancy can be symptomatic of learners who are insecure, have low academic and general levels of self-esteem, and/or have personality disorders. These conditions may foreshadow more serious conditions in later adolescence and adult life. Sociologically, truancy is known to be linked with multiple adverse home conditions, low social class and deprivation (Reid, 2002:4).

Given my continuous exposure to cases relating to truancy as well as the lack of previous topical research within my particular working area, suitable mechanisms and structures to address the phenomenon do not exist. Therefore, an in-depth investigation into all aspects of the nature of truancy, predominantly among the fourteen to fifteen year age group of secondary school learners in the eastern EMDC of the Western Cape would be of crucial importance. It is hoped that the proposed study would be beneficial to all stakeholders in effectively dealing with all dimensions of truancy.

1.3 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE STUDY

The concept truancy, sometimes known as mitching or dodging, is not a new phenomenon. It has been known for generations. According to Reid (1985:68), early psychologists held certain basic views about the reasons for truancy. In this regard, Kline linked truancy and running away with man's roving instincts, likening it to the migratory instincts of animals and birds, while Burt, Andriola and Hay, partly influenced by Freudian theory, viewed truancy as an attempt on the part of children:

- (i) To escape from real injuries or from intolerable psychological situations;
- (ii) To avoid the pressures and responsibilities which accompany maturity and adulthood; and
- (iii) To retreat from 'normal' intellectual growth brought about by an unstable ego, possibly caused by developmental and psychological traumas.

According to John (1997:227), truancy is a solution, by many young people, to many life factors which affect them negatively. Some factors are very traumatic, stemming from an earlier age and the young person has no or very little support or assistance in dealing with the issue. These unresolved complications and traumas, followed by new ones which accumulate, simply add to the overall pressures in a young person's life. The simplest solution is to take time out, to have a break – to truant.

It is now nearly 170 years since Webster painted his well known picture of 'The Truant' which depicts two absconders standing outside their small schoolroom nervously peering in at the activities inside. In popular English literature, truancy is sometimes regarded as a natural, impish act of escapism, which is likely to take place at some stage during the normal development of certain children (Reid, 2002:3).

Defining truancy is not without its problems. According to MacGhail (1993:1-20), the term truant is derived from Gaelic 'truaghan' (wretch). Today, truancy or truant is often used as an umbrella term for absenteeism, school disaffection, bunking, school refusal or school phobia (Le Riche, 1995:1).

The majority of the participants in the focus group interview reported that the main reason why they truant was that they did not like school and/or they had quarrelled with particular educators. Yet, as they talked, it became clear that schooling had become problematic for them not solely because of the specific features of educators of the school that they attend, but also because of the ways in which many features of schooling aggravated their existing feelings of social and economic powerlessness.

In this regard Reid (1987:112) is of the opinion that rules are often perceived by learners as petty and this can lead to confrontations in school, some of it totally unnecessary. This is often true when it comes to rules concerning school uniforms, interpersonal relationships, such as no hugging or holding hands on the school premises, or where personal decoration is not allowed, such as braiding hair or long hair.

When students mature and begin to challenge rules that they feel are unfair on them, discord is bound to manifest between themselves and the educators. Many learners at high school level are already young adults who live independent lives outside of school, and expecting them to abide by the same rules as primary school learners, might actually drive them out of school on occasional days, if not permanently (Seerane, 1997:25).

1.4 PROBLEM ANALYSIS

One of the greatest challenges facing educationists today is to make schools rewarding, friendly institutions for everybody concerned. Good relationships – learner-educator and among the staff and learners – are essential to encourage all to respond positively to education.

However, in most secondary schools served by me, educators are overburdened and under pressure to implement current departmental legislation with regard to discipline. The administrative side of their work has vastly increased and this detracts from their standard of teaching, reducing time available for pastoral relationships, lesson preparation and marking. In addition, many educators have little understanding or training about truancy, nor do professionals in other forms of childcare or education support services. Care must be taken about what is said to non-attendees and how it is said: derogative remarks can turn them away from school again just when they have plucked up courage to return after perhaps a prolonged absence (Le Riche, 1995:14).

To complicate matters further for these schools, their surrounding areas are plagued by high levels of long-term unemployment, widespread poverty, poor housing, deprivation, disadvantage and general lawlessness which are conditions in which truancy is more likely to occur. This could particularly be the case among those children who are from large families and living in poor housing and whose parents probably show very little interest in education, as they themselves apparently managed to survive without it. Furthermore, media reports suggest that family values are being eroded and abandoned by society and that this situation is contributing to the truancy problem.

1.5 PROBLEM SYNTHESIS

Those involved in the daily rounds of teaching seem aware that the occurrence of truancy appears to be escalating. Based on a preliminary literature study and also on my personal perception of the problem, there currently appears to be great concern about the large number of mainly secondary school learners who deliberately miss school or certain sessions with different degrees of frequency.

Deprived of schooling, a young person's development – intellectually, socially, emotionally and morally – is limited. Yet many learners do not experience school as a happy place. This may be due to poor relationships with peers or with educators or due to difficulties learners experience with the curriculum.

However, my present experience with non-attendees has been that most truants make a deliberate and rational decision not to attend school regularly and in the majority of cases, the parents and even many educators do not know about it. This pattern of irregular attendance is not only inexcusable, but also unjustifiable.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, the research problem of this investigation is as stated as follows:

How can educators, *in loco parentis*, be equipped with the skills and resources necessary to address the problem of truancy?

The inclusion of the term, *in loco parentis*, in the research problem and in the title of the thesis, refers to the capacity of educators as the parents of learners while in their care at school.

1.5.1 Sub-problems of the study

In order to address the main research problem, the following sub-problems were identified:

1. What is the nature of truancy in the area of the study?
2. Which theories underpin the developmental level and the effect of the environment on the early adolescent?
3. What are important elements of the developmental level of the early adolescent which could relate to truancy?
4. What are the views of educators and school principals regarding the problem of truancy?
5. How do learners in general view the phenomenon of truancy?
6. What characterises the life-world of an early adolescent who plays truant and one who does not?
7. What guidelines can be developed for schools to address truancy and other forms of non-attendance effectively?

1.6 AIMS OF THE STUDY

In view of the main research problem and the subsequent sub-problems, the aims of the study were as follows:

1. To investigate the nature of truancy in the demarcated area of the study.
2. To evaluate various theories which relate to early adolescent development and to explore the possible effect of the environment on the general functioning of these adolescents.
3. To investigate important elements of the developmental level of the early adolescent, which could relate to truancy.
4. To obtain the viewpoints of educators regarding the problem of truancy by conducting interviews with them and with principals.
5. To obtain the general viewpoints of learners regarding truancy.
6. To conduct an in-depth investigation into the life-world of a truant and a non-truant.

7. To develop guidelines that schools could use to address truancy and other forms of non-attendance effectively.

1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on my regular consultation with principals and educators, it appears that truant behaviour, particularly among early adolescents, is rapidly increasing. Currently there exist great deals of concern about the ever increasing number of young secondary school learners who miss classes or certain sessions with varying degrees of frequency.

To investigate the nature and magnitude of truant behaviour, an extensive literature review was conducted. In the first section of the review an attempt was made to present truancy as a multi-faceted problem. Different types and possible causes of truant behaviour were discussed in depth. This was followed by an exploration of various issues closely related to this phenomenon, such as recognising potential truants, delinquency and truancy, consequences of truancy, truants' feelings while away from school as well as parental attitudes towards truant behaviour presented by their children.

The second part of the literature review focussed on various theories of development in general, followed by a specific investigation of the developmental level of the early adolescent learner. To become more acquainted with truant behaviour displayed by learners in this particular developmental level, different environmental elements affecting truancy from an eco-systemic perspective in the demarcated research area were explored.

1.8 EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

1.8.1 Demarcation

The empirical investigation of the present study was based on qualitative as well as quantitative research methodology, which included a focus group interview with truant learners in the area of the study, interviews with school principals, a questionnaire and in-depth case studies. A concise description of these methodologies was presented in 4.2.

1.8.2 Pilot study

A focus group session was conducted at one of the schools where the research was carried out. Six learners, who were identified as truants by one of the secondary schools in my service area, participated in this exercise, of which the main purpose was to highlight the essence of truancy.

1.8.3 Nomothetic research

In order to conduct the nomothetic research a questionnaire was designed and applied.

1.8.3.1 Sampling

For the purpose of the empirical investigation, three hundred fourteen to sixteen year old learners of both genders attending six of the eighteen secondary schools in the eastern EMDC of the Western Cape were included. These selected schools are all situated in low socio-economic areas, since it appears that truant behaviour is more common in these areas. The following factors are indicative of the low socio-economic status of the demarcated area of the study:

- ❑ High rates of unemployment and poverty;
- ❑ The inability of parents to pay school fees; and
- ❑ All these schools belong to a feeding scheme subsidised by the National Department of Education.

1.8.3.2 Data collection

To obtain information regarding learners' perceptions and experiences of truancy, the above-mentioned questionnaire was administered on the three hundred learners.

A questionnaire is an instrument with open or closed questions or statements to which a respondent must react. The different types and uses of questionnaires as a quantitative data collection method were fully discussed in 4.3.

In the present study, the following aspects of truancy – learners' perceptions pertaining to the influences of peer interaction, the nature of parental involvement and responsibilities, the role of educators and learners' experiences of themselves in causing truant behaviour, were included in the questionnaire.

1.8.3.3 Data analysis

The questionnaire was scored quantitatively and included an open question that was evaluated qualitatively. The scoring of the questionnaire was done electronically. Reliability factors were discussed in 4.3.6.6. Four research problems which emerged from the questionnaire were formulated and presented in 4.3.3.6.

1.8.4 Ideographical research

The ideographical research was carried out by means of – focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews with principals of the schools that were involved in the study and two case studies, one of a truant and one of non-truant learner. A brief overview of each of these follows.

1.8.4.1 Focus group interview

According to Flick (2002:114), a focus group interview could be considered a discussion of a certain issue or related issue involving a small group of people with more the less the same frame of reference. The focus group interview for the present study took place at one of the schools included in the investigation in order to find out more about the participants' experiences, thoughts and general feelings regarding the phenomenon of truancy.

1.8.4.2 Interviews with principals of schools involved in the empirical study

These interviews were conducted at the schools that were involved in the study in order to gauge the perception and general attitudes of the principals regarding truant behaviour, particularly among early adolescent learners. These interviews were conducted in the principal's office.

1.8.4.3 Case studies

In-depth case studies of two learners of the population group who completed the questionnaire were carried out for the purpose of ascertaining the nature of their experiential worlds. One of them may be considered a typical truant and the other, a typical non-truant.

(i) Selection of learners

The selection of these two learners was done randomly and also depended on permission granted by their parents and their own willingness to participate in the study. Although there are many indicators of truant behaviour, the following criteria were considered as operationalisable for the study:

- ❑ If the learner has been absent from school without reasonable grounds seventeen times or more during the school year;
- ❑ If the learner has been known to be absent from particular classes regularly without leave from the educators concerned;
- ❑ If the learner has been known to leave the school premise at any time of the day after having been recorded as present in the attendance register; and
- ❑ If the learner has been known to ask permission regularly to leave the classroom and then does not return for the rest of the period.

Based on the information that was ascertained from the questionnaire, one learner who presented as a typical truant and one who could be classified as a non-truant were selected to participate in the in-depth studies. The selection of the two learners is discussed in more detail in 4.4.3.4. Although generalisations cannot be made on the basis of the two case studies, my aim was to determine what characterises the self of a learner who practises truancy and one who has not yet practised it.

(ii) Data collection

To obtain information for conducting the two in-depth case studies, the following assessment media were used:

(a) Interviews

An interview can be considered to be a tactful conversation between a therapist and a client during which a therapeutic relationship is established by demonstrating empathy, sincerity, respect and warmth to the client. The therapist should be very sensitive so that he or she becomes familiar with the client's unique way of communicating thoughts and feelings.

By conducting interviews with the two learners (one truant and one non truant), the dynamics of their inner life world were determined in order to gain insight in how they experience truancy, what kind of meaning they attribute to it and to further explore their involvement or non-involvement in this type of practice.

Individual interviews were conducted with each of the two learners. These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The data that was obtained through this medium was analysed by noting for recurring themes such as domestic dysfunctionality, difficulty coping with scholastic and other academic activities.

(b) High School Personality Questionnaire (HSPQ)

The High School Personality Questionnaire was developed by Raymond and Mary Cattell and is widely used by behaviour science professionals to gain information regarding a series of personality dimensions of a person between the age of twelve and eighteen years old (Visser, Garbers-Strauss & Prinsloo, 1992:1).

Since one's personality plays a major role in behaviour in almost every aspect of life, this questionnaire assisted me to come to a reasonable understanding of the personality characteristics and functioning of the truant which may elicit this type of behaviour.

The application of this questionnaire was conducted at the particular schools attended by the learners who took part in the investigation. Each respondent was supplied with a questionnaire, an answer book, a pencil and an eraser to use in the answering of the questionnaire.

The scoring of the information obtained from the questionnaire was done manually by using the relevant masks.

(c) Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes (SSHA)

This questionnaire developed by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and standardised for South African schools, is considered to be a very valuable sifting and diagnostic instrument that can be applied to learners from grade eight to grade twelve. It is commonly used to evaluate learners' study methods, motivation for study and specific attitudes with regard to scholastic activities in their learning environment (Louw, 1995:107).

The reason for the inclusion of the SSHA in the present study was to determine whether truants' attitudes towards their academic work in general and school attendance in particular, contribute to their divergent scholastic behaviour.

The application of the SSHA was conducted individually and the respondents were allocated forty minutes to complete the questionnaire. The scoring of the questionnaire took place manually and a mask was used for this purpose.

(d) Sacks Sentence Completion Test (SSCT)

This sentence completion test designed to obtain significant clinical material in four representative areas of adjustment, was developed by Joseph Sacks of the New York Veterans Administration Mental Hygiene Service. The four areas covered by the test include family, sex, interpersonal relationships and self-concept (Abt & Bellak, 1959:13)

The test which requires twenty to forty minutes to complete, was administered individually by me. The four responses for each the fifteen categories in the test were analysed jointly and assigned a global assessment mark as explained in 4.4.3.5 (iii).

(e) Self-Esteem Index (SEI)

Brown (1987:49) postulates that self-esteem may be described as the way individuals perceive and value themselves as human beings. It emanates from our life experiences and is grounded to a large degree on perceptions that we may have of how others in our life-worlds deal with us. From this, it is clear that particularly their school experiences may impact on how learners, especially early adolescents' development of feelings about themselves, may be shaped.

The SEI comprises 80 items and is designed in such a way that it elicits adolescents' perceptions regarding their personal features according to the following sub-scales: Family acceptance, Academic competence, Peer popularity and Personal security. Although no time limit applies, for most respondents a thirty-minute testing period is ample.

To administer the instrument, each of two learners was supplied with a copy of SEI response booklet and a pencil and after the instructions were given, they commenced with the answering of the questions.

The data analysis was done by converting the test raw scores into percentile ranks or a self-esteem quotient.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to lend ethical consideration to the empirical study, certain measures have been considered. This was done by obtaining permission from all relevant stakeholders who were involved in the investigation such as the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), the parents or guardians of the learners who participated in the study as well as from the learners themselves. Copies of correspondence in this regard are to be found at the end of the study.

All respondents who participated in the nomothetic research remained anonymous. In the event of the case studies, pseudonyms were assigned to the respondents.

1.10 STUDY PROGRAMME

From the preliminary literature study and my personal exposure to the phenomenon of truancy, an exposition of the problem of non-attendance among fourteen to sixteen year old secondary school learners was presented in chapter 1. The problem formulation, the aims of the study and an outline of the empirical investigation was covered in this chapter.

The focus of chapter 2 was on truancy as a multi-faceted problem that concerns not only educators, but also school governing bodies, psychologists, social workers, child protection units, parents and learners themselves.

In chapter 3 the developmental level of the learner in the junior secondary school phase and an exploration of various environmental elements affecting truancy from different theoretical perspectives, were dealt with.

The research design was described in chapter 4.

Chapter 5 presented an analysis and interpretation of the research data.

In chapter 6 a synthesis of the investigation was made. In conclusion, the findings and recommendations forthcoming from the study were offered.

1.11 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, an exposition of the main research problem, sub-problems and the aims of the investigation have been presented. In the next chapter, truant behaviour as a multi-faceted phenomenon was examined.

CHAPTER 2

TRUANCY AS A MULTI-FACETED PROBLEM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Truancy, or unexcused absence from school, is becoming a matter of concern in many secondary schools. From the time of the first compulsory education statutes, educators have had to contend with truancy problems, since many youngsters are not willing, for one reason or another, to attend school regularly. It appears to be a serious social problem, which directly affects learners, educational institutions and society in general. Therefore, the main aim of this chapter is to review existing literature regarding the phenomenon of truant behaviour, as a multi-faceted problem prevalent among early adolescent learners.

Despite the long history of social work services in schools, research on chronic absenteeism and particularly learner truancy, has received little attention by the social work profession. This, in my personal opinion, may be related to a priority of child welfare needs among the multiple tasks that school social workers are required to perform. This is unfortunate, given that truancy may be the first sign in a series of antisocial behaviours that may lead to negative personal and developmental outcomes. Truancy is associated with sexual promiscuity, alcohol and drug use, delinquency, and dropping out of school (Bell, Rosen & Dynlacht, 1994:203-211).

In order to acquire substantial insight into this phenomenon, chapter two covers various aspects of the problem of truancy. Firstly, different aspects regarding the background to the problem will be discussed, followed by an exploration of diverse types of truancy. Thereafter possible causes of truancy as well as related aspects such as recognising potential truants, truancy and delinquency, the consequences of truancy, truants' feelings while away from school and parental attitudes towards truants, will be addressed.

According to Smith (1996:1) research conducted in United Kingdom in 1991 and 1992 which included 150 schools, revealed that a significant number of learners of compulsory school-going age become involved in truancy. Statistics reported by the research team, based on a survey

which involved questionnaires, suggested that if the results of their survey could be extrapolated to all schools, then a 95 % confidence interval for the mean truancy level in schools is between 29,7 %, and 32,4 %. About two thirds (68%) of all schools would have truancy levels between 22,7 % and 39,3 %, and 96 % of all schools would have levels between 14,4 % and 47,4 %. If these statistics could be used as a guide to estimate an average of truants per school, the enormity of the prevalence of truancy becomes evident.

The fact that truancy directly impacts upon the most fundamental aspects of schooling is reflected in research which has elicited learner perspectives. When asked about the nature and reasons for their truancy, young school refusers identify causes which describe an extremely negative reaction to schooling. According to them, factors such as boring lessons, poor relationships, an unsuitable curriculum, lack of personal attention, feelings of rejection and authoritarianism in schools, either cause or contribute to truancy or school refusal (Rayner & Riding, 1996:445-451).

2.2 BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

2.2.1 Historical perspectives

Despite the new attention, truancy is not a new problem. As Black (1996:32-33) discovered, school officials were expressing concern over truants as far back as 1870. The British Education Act of 1870, provided elementary education for all, and ten years later school attendance was made compulsory. Thenceforth, it was illegal for a young person between the age of ten and thirteen years to be absent from school without a note.

As Collins (1998:25) noted, compulsory education was not accepted in 1880 without opposition, since people felt it threatened their domestic economy. Added to these legislative and economic difficulties, were the unattractiveness of the buildings, the curriculum and the teaching methods. The curriculum, for example, did not cater for the increasing number of less able and disadvantaged learners, who suddenly found themselves with an opportunity to go to school. Sociologically, the distance of the schools away from the home, the lack of transport and of suitable roads, and the hostility on the part of the gentry towards education for the working classes also militated against satisfactory levels of school attendance. It has also been said that compulsory education removed the responsibility of character development from the family and

community, to a depersonalised bureaucratic institution, namely the school. The question of enforcing compulsory attendance at school has thus been a contentious educational issue for more than a century.

In 1932 Broadwin (in Heyne & Rollings, 2002:2) identified a form of truancy characterised by neuroticism. The main features included worry about the safety of mum at home, fear of the educator, nervousness and running back home from school. A decade later Johnson, Falstein, Szurek and Svendson (1941:702-711) noted that there is a type of emotional disturbance in children, associated with great anxiety, that leads to serious absence from school. They referred to this phenomenon as school refusal. The term truancy is however preferred by many authors, as it is more comprehensive than the term school refusal. According to Berg (1996:1104-1110), school refusal differs from truancy in a number of important ways:

- ❑ Truancy customarily entails an attempt to conceal non-attendance from the family. Truants may start out for school, but fail to arrive there or absent themselves during the day. Generally truants will avoid going home. On the other hand, the school refuser's parents might be well aware of the problem and the child often remains at home.
- ❑ Whereas the truant's non-attendance is usually intermittent, the school refuser may be away from school for weeks or months at a time.
- ❑ The refuser is generally a good learner with vocational goals requiring schooling, while the truant is usually an indifferent or poor learner who dislikes school.
- ❑ Truancy often involves antisocial behaviour and truants are more often diagnosed with conduct disorder than with an emotional disorder. Compared with school refusal, truancy is less often associated with anxiety symptoms. Conversely, school refusers seldom display antisocial behaviour. Rather, they exhibit 'unwarranted fear' and display behaviour associated with fear. Such behaviour may include refusing to get out of bed on school mornings, refusing to get dressed in school uniform, refusing to get in or out of the car during travelling to school and clinging to parents.

According to Le Riche (1995:5), the 1944 British Education Act delineated the responsibilities and role of parents and local authorities concerning school attendance, making education the responsibility of the parents stating that:

Parents of children of compulsory school age must ensure that they receive an efficient, full time education, suitable to their age, ability and aptitude...

Parental failure to abide by this law is a criminal offence:

A parent who fails to fulfil this obligation without good reason is guilty of a criminal offence, and this is so even when the parent is in ignorance of the absence...

Until the mid 1970s published research into truancy in British schools appeared sporadically and apart from a few researchers (Hodge, 1968; Mitchell & Shepherd, 1967) truancy was almost exclusively the professional concern of teachers, educational welfare officers, attendance officers and some child psychologists who were more interested in "social phobia". For most other people, truancy was a fairly harmless misdemeanour indulged in by a minority of the school population (Brown, 1983:225-235).

However, since the late 1980s and early 1990s, issues associated with school non-attendance including truancy, attracted considerable media hype and attention from all who are concerned about declining standards in education in the United Kingdom (Carlen, Gleeson & Wardhaugh, 1992:11). Since the beginning of the 1980s much attention has been paid to the problem of truancy in secondary schools in the Netherlands. In 1986 a government policy paper, *Truancy*, expressed anxiety at the nature and extent of truancy in Dutch secondary schools.

In South Africa, the prevalence of truancy in the old racially biased provincial education schooling system of the House of Assembly, could be determined quite accurately, simply by consulting the class register over a period of time. By exploring the circumstances surrounding the absenteeism, the educator could quite easily ascertain whether such circumstances met the criteria for classification of such absentees as truants. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about many schools which were under the jurisdiction of the former Department of Education and Training. Not only were attendance registers not efficiently controlled in some instances to be able to determine how often a learner was absent, but even if attendance records had been controlled properly, the possible reasons for staying away from school, such as political violence,

intimidation, and caring for younger siblings, do also not meet the criteria for classifying such an absentee as a truant.

However, it is also true that large numbers of learners who attended schools controlled by the former Department of Education and Training, might have exploited the prevailing situation at the time and could have absented themselves from schools for reasons that may well have qualified them as truants. Many schools formerly controlled by the Houses of Delegates and Representatives respectively, might have just as seriously been affected by the unstable political climate during the Apartheid era, as the schools served by the Department of Education and Training. The level of absenteeism related to unrest situations in the former House of Delegates and House of Representatives schools, where I was employed for a number of years, made it just as complicated to distinguish between truants and 'bona fide' absentees during those turbulent years.

According to Malloi (2004), social worker of the Department of Community Safety in the Western Cape, a Truancy Reduction Project was launched in 2000 in Manenberg, a residential area on the Cape Flats. This initial attempt to address the problem of truancy in the afore-mentioned area, constituted a partnership effort, undertaken by the Departments of Education and Community Safety and was initiated with the following aims in mind:

- ❑ To cultivate a culture of regular school attendance;
- ❑ To improve school attendance; and
- ❑ To address the prevalence of criminal behaviour so as to reduce crime statistics with regard to youth and younger children.

Schools in the Manenberg area identified as high risk learning sites are serviced by the Truancy Reduction Project through trained learning support officers, of whom each one is responsible for one secondary and one primary school. Since no standardised criteria exist according to which truants are identified, learning support officers pay visits to the homes of learners who are not attending lessons or who absent themselves from school for more than three days per week, irrespective of the reason(s).

While negotiations are currently taking place with the Department of Education in order that the Department may take sole charge of the project, it is temporarily under the auspices of the Urban Renewal Programme. It is hoped that the outcome of the negotiations will result in the improved structure of the Truancy Reduction Project and its implementation not only in the rest of the Western Cape, but also on a national basis.

2.2.2 Defining truancy

Truancy, the most popular term used to describe school absenteeism, is usually defined as:

Deliberate absence from school on the part of the learner without the knowledge and consent of the parent, or absence of a learner from school for which no reasonable or acceptable excuse is given (Kee, 2001:21-38).

However, it appears from the literature to be easier to describe truancy than to define it. May's (in Masithela 1992:6) assertion that truancy is difficult to define and even more problematic to measure with accuracy, is supported by Reid (1986:28) and Rumberger (1987:108), who argue that truancy could be considered to be a multicausal, multidimensional phenomenon and that each absentee is unique with combinations of various social, psychological and institutional factors contributing to a learner's truant behaviour. The implication here is that truancy cannot be studied in isolation, since there are social, educational and psychological problems associated with it.

Although truancy has several definitions, they all focus around action by children in choosing not to participate in the school day. According to Whitney (1994:51), not all 'unauthorised absence' can be regarded as truancy (if the parent has deliberately kept the learner away from school), and not all truancy is likely to be recognised as unauthorised absence (if the learner leaves lessons/ school after registration in the morning). Different studies use different criteria, however, the researcher is of the opinion that it is helpful to distinguish between truancy for whole sessions or days on the one hand and that which involves only missing individual lessons or parts of sessions on the other hand. In the latter case truancy can happen even if the learner never actually leaves the school premises.

Thus, defining truancy is not without its difficulties. According to MacGhail (1993:24), the term truant is derived from the Gaelic 'truaghan' (wretch). Today truancy or truant is often used as an umbrella term for absenteeism, school disaffection, bunking, school refusal or school phobia. In this study, however, I prefer to adhere most closely to the definition of Le Rich (1995:1) who states:

A truant is a girl or boy who might be absent from school altogether or from a particular lesson or lessons, with or without parental knowledge...Truancy can be broadly defined in terms of "blanket" truancy and "post-registration" truancy. "Blanket" truancy is...the absence of a child from school per se. This might be with or without the knowledge and/or consent of the parent or guardian...the "post-registration" truant does register at school. He or she may then fail to turn up at a particular lesson or lessons during the school day.

2.2.3 The reality of the problem of truancy

According to Kube and Ratgan (1992:348-350), it is a given that learners are absent from school due to illness, family emergencies, accidents, funerals, and so forth. It is also a given that some learners miss school to avoid scheduled tests or assignments or because of general appointments (including sunbed sessions and haircuts), good weather, bad weather, lack of or too much sleep, a vacation or just mere boredom.

Many truants often engage in meaningless activity while away from school. Some are bored, finding it difficult to while away their time. Private conversations with many truants, as in the case of the focus group conducted by me, show that if they had their time over again, they would never start truanting. From this, the deduction could be made that for many persistent cases, the truants have become victims of their own misguided practice. Therefore, many truants do not only recognise the error and foolishness of their ways, but they also appreciate that they are long term victims and losers in life. Hardened by their own experiences when in school and since leaving school, these young adults are often more receptive to second-chance opportunities.

According to Reid (2000:2), truancy during the 1960's was reported to be 'an isolated activity' undertaken by most children 'on their own'. These days the evidence is that much more truancy is organised, pre-planned and takes place in groups. One estimate is that group truancy

accounts for roughly 70 to 80 % of cases, with the remainder of truants spending their time on their own. The evidence also shows significant differences in how boy and girl truant groups spend their time. Girl groups of truants often focus their activities within a person's home or in town centres. Male truants on the other hand, will also spend time in groups in town, but they are more often to be found outdoors – playing football or perhaps hiding out of sight in order to smoke and/or drink alcohol. Likewise, girl truants also contain a high proportion of smokers.

As far as relationships with authority are concerned, boys seem to experience immense problems compared to girls. The early adolescent boys in the junior high school may be expressing their striving for independence and autonomy more openly in conflicts with educators and school rules and regulations. Therefore it may be largely fair to consider truancy as merely one of their behaviour problems (Le Rich, 1995:13).

Moreover, there is increasing and disturbing evidence that some truants spend their time engaging in fringe activities such as drug taking, prostitution, joyriding, violence, watching video nasties and participating in organised crime. Thornberry (in White, Fyfe, Campbell & Goldkamp, 2001:507-532) found that weak school commitment and poor performance in school, both common among truants, were associated with increased involvement in delinquency and drug use. Further evidence supplied by the same author indicates that chronic truants are likely to drop out of high school. These learners are later associated with lower earnings, increased risks of unemployment, reliance on welfare and possibly serving time in prison for crimes committed, as compared to successful high school graduates.

In view of the fact that truancy may short-circuit opportunities to learn and also expose or further involve young high school learners in a delinquent subculture characterised by the avoidance of responsibility and disdain for legitimate achievement, consideration of how to address truancy successfully and the underlying problems that lead to it, has become increasingly important.

2.2.4 A socio-economic account

The clear link between socio-economic disadvantages and truancy has been established in the literature. It appears that the majority of truants emanate from the lowest socio-economic class grouping.

2.2.4.1 The home background of truants

Reid (2000:78) provides a summary of research findings dealing with the home background factors that are related to truancy, proposing that truants are most likely to come from:

- ❑ Broken homes (in which divorce, separation, cohabiting and 'mixed' siblings are often the norm);
- ❑ Families where the father or father-figure is away from home for long periods;
- ❑ Families with an above average number of children;
- ❑ Families living in overcrowded conditions;
- ❑ Families where the parent(s) are unable to cope with a single or variety of social pathologies that threaten their lifestyles and lead to abnormal conditions within the home: these factors include alcoholism, physical illness, violence, abuse, familial conflicts, and associated stress factors;
- ❑ Families in which the parents are un-cooperative and/or hostile to authority in general and are frequently hostile to external professional support, including educators, principals and education social work interventions;
- ❑ Families where the parent(s) are not interested in their children's progress at school;
- ❑ Families that do not insist on their offspring's prompt attendance at school, as manifested by their children oversleeping, being late and failing to turn up for school buses; and
- ❑ Families where the parent(s) are passive victims of a very poor environment and unsure of their constitutional rights.

However, as a minority of learners from the lower social class groupings become truants, the afore-mentioned domestic factors contribute to one segment of a complex phenomenon.

It is very clear that most truants endure a considerable degree of social deprivation in their everyday lives, which is often compounded by their educational disadvantages at school. Many truants endure a regular diet of failure at school and a fight for survival at home and find themselves having to cope in situations where the 'laws of the jungle' often apply.

2.2.4.2 The socio-economic backgrounds of truants

Reid (2000:79) notes that truants are likely to emanate from:

- ❑ Families at the lower end of the social scale where the father and/or mother are unemployed or perform unskilled (labouring, cleaning) or semi-skilled work;
- ❑ Families where paternal unemployment or irregular employment is the norm;
- ❑ Families on low incomes;
- ❑ Families with severe financial (and/or financial management) difficulties;
- ❑ Homes caught in a poverty trap in which the culture of social exclusion is the norm;
- ❑ Homes where the children are poorly clothed and eat cheap, low-quality food; and
- ❑ Families with transport difficulties (especially in rural areas).

I am of the opinion that it could be difficult for educators who have often been raised with middle-class social values, to appreciate the full extent and meaning of the deprivation of some of the learners they teach. The daily lifestyle for many truants is one in which they receive little or no parental support, guidance and encouragement at home, since their parents in many instances tend to display anti-education values. As many truants live in families in which the father or mother or both were truants themselves, this is not surprising.

On numerous visits to the homes of truants, it has also become clear to me that they have limited resources with which to undertake their schoolwork, have little space to do their homework and frequently live in an atmosphere where reading literature is unusual. In most cases they also form part of a social environment dominated by television, alcohol and drug abuse.

2.3 TYPES OF TRUANCY

There appears to be several types of truancy. Whereas the public at large tends to think of truancy as having only one specific cause, a desire to bunk school, in reality there are several different kinds and even more different causes as will be now be closer examined. Each type of truancy also has its own specific features.

2.3.1 Specific lesson absence

'Specific lesson truancy', sometimes called specific lesson absence, is probably the fastest growth area. According to Carlen, Gleeson and Wardhaugh (1992:66), some learning areas are not particularly appropriate to less able learners, especially those learners who present with multiple special, social and educational needs. Examples of learning areas in this category often reported in school surveys to be less popular with underachievers like some truants are most frequently conceptually sequential subjects like mathematics, science and modern languages.

On the other hand some learners dislike particular educators, which could possibly explain why some learners attend most classes, yet regularly miss others. Reid (2000:24) suggests that learners dislike four particular traits in educators namely:

- ❑ Educators who are 'inhuman' and interpret their role too literally;
- ❑ Educators who treat learners as anonymous beings. Despite existing high educator-learner ratios, it is vital that learners are treated as individuals. Learners like educators to know something about them i.e. which football team they support, which pop/girl/boy band they like and what they are good at outside school;
- ❑ Educators who are inconsistent; and

- Educators, who are 'unfair', 'biased' and make unreasonable demands on learners. Learners particularly dislike two extremes: educators who are 'weak' and those who are regarded as bullies. Many learners who feel that they are being 'picked upon' by educators often seek revenge by staying away from their classes.

Furthermore, research evidence has indicated that specific lesson truancy could undoubtedly be related to the quality of teaching and educators' abilities. Learners will attend classes that they consider to be well taught, relevant and interesting and are more likely to miss classes that are dull, irrelevant and 'boring' (Whitney, 1994:58).

2.3.2 Post-registration truancy

Specific lesson truancy means learners missing particular lessons, whilst post-registration truancy occurs when learners register as being present at school and subsequently skip school. Whereas specific lesson truants miss particular lessons, post registration truants will miss whole clusters of classes, on different days, for different reasons, sometimes on the spur of a whim (Reid, 2000:26).

Following interviews with principals at schools where various psychological services are rendered by me, it surfaced that post-registration truancy probably accounts for much or most of the actual truancy that takes place in some schools. Truant learners may report to their register class in the morning, but could disappear from school any time during the day. This could possibly explain why official statistics based on attendance registers tend to underestimate the scale of the problem, since learner attendance is not controlled throughout the day.

Human nature being what it is, there can be little doubt that some educators may be secretly relieved when certain disruptive, difficult, less able or disinterested learners fail to attend lessons. This is understandable. Condoning post-registration truancy can, however, place the educator in a very invidious position. Should anything happen to that learner, either when out of school or out of lessons, but on the school premises, the educator could be held responsible. Condoning post-registration truancy also sends very mixed messages both to the learner(s) as well as those who attend regularly.

Post-registration truancy is often related not only to educators' attitudes, but also to their personal conduct. For example, regular lateness to lessons provides an indication to learners that there is something wrong with an educator's attitude towards his or her job or towards them.

2.3.3 Parental-condoned truancy

A considerable debate exists in the literature as to whether parental condoned absence can in fact be regarded as truancy. Often, parents will ask their offspring to stay at home for a variety of reasons. These reasons include – at the lowest level – for company, but at the highest level they include protection, especially in families where violence or abuse is the norm (Collins, 1995:92). According to Le Riche (1995:10), some parents do not consider education as important as they have apparently managed to survive without it. Condoned absence is particularly common amongst girls because of their domestic usefulness. Some parents go so far as to say that they are giving their daughters practical domestic education in the home – caring for younger siblings and performing household chores (Gomersall, 1988:56). In such cases the parent send a note to school citing sickness or some other factor as the reason for absence – irrespective of the real cause.

Sometimes, parents believe that by allowing their children to stay at home they are helping them (Masithela, 1992:11). In my opinion, this is a totally false and misguided belief. Regular attendance at school matters and is critically important for a child's schooling and personal, social and academic development. Occasionally, a short break from school, perhaps to help a neurotic or very intense child to overcome irrational fears, pressures or worries, can be justified, especially when parents are keeping their children at home to prevent physical and sometimes mental bullying at school.

The media, on the other hand, frequently blames truancy on weak parenting, lack of discipline and uncontrollable children. It portrays some parents as not knowing or even caring what their children are doing during the day. Checking up on children is considered to be a sign of responsible parenting and love. In short it would appear from media reports that family values are being eroded and abandoned by society and that this situation has largely contributed to the truancy problems (Oosterwyk, 2002:18). In another media report it was cited that after examinations, learners are likely to stay away from school, because their parents want to save on transport fares (Keating, 2005:1).

According to Hickley (2005), principal of a secondary school in Blackheath, Western Cape: "Parents are to be blamed for allowing their children to stay at home after the termination of examinations during a time when they can learn something about mathematics, technology or even drugs and peer pressure".

Technically, parental-condoned truancy occurs when the parent is aware of the child's absence from school, but is unwilling or unable to do anything about it.

2.3.4 Negativistic truancy

This involves the deliberate rejection of pressure to conform. Here the learner is subjected to serious pressure usually from parents and educators, whether perceived or real, to be successful. In response to this pressure, the child does the complete opposite and rejects the expected behaviour by absenting himself or herself from school.

This may be about trying to demonstrate power within the family or group (mastery negativism), or it may be intended to invoke sympathy (sympathy negativism). Often there is an unresolved conflict of some kind, with either the parent or educator.

2.3.5 Opportunistic truancy

This refers to occasional truants who just take time off when they feel like it, or when some other alternative is available. Learners will skip school when the fair is in town or when there is something else more fun to do, but otherwise they attend regularly (Whiteney, 1995:55).

2.3.6 Psychological absence

Psychological truancy occurs when a learner physically attends school, yet fails to participate in any meaningful way. For example, a learner may 'switch off' in lessons, allowing his mind to wander. As the rest of the class is taught, a learner may mentally be thinking of his or her weekend activities, forthcoming pop concert or next date.

Reid (1999:41) suggests that there are four categories of psychological absence, all related to withdrawn behaviour. These are:

- ❑ Those who make themselves invisible by avoiding all contact with the educator;
- ❑ Those who refuse to acknowledge what the educator asks them to do;

- ❑ Those learners who appear to be concentrating on tasks, but on closer inspection would appear to be doing something else. Some do this by remaining on the periphery of an activity, others through an inappropriate focus. In the latter case, this means that a learner would be involved in an activity that would bear little or no relation to what the class had been asked to do; and

- ❑ Those learners who appear to be paying attention but whose minds are, in reality, focused on 'external' events.

Research further indicates that there are common threads between physical truancy and psychological absence. This link includes low academic self-concepts, a general lack of self-confidence and higher than average levels of anxiety about schoolwork. A high proportion of psychological absence involves learners who are very shy (Bos, 1992:381-395).

Occasionally, psychological absence can be related to disruptive behaviour, as some disinterested or disaffected learners may enjoy creating a confrontation between educators and their class almost as a form of sport. However, psychological absence is rarely an overt problem within schools, except when it is related to disruptive learners. According to Fredericks (2004), principal of a secondary school in Kleinville, Western Cape, most learners who are prone to psychological absence are excellent attendees in every other way.

2.4 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO TRUANCY

An examination of the literature reveals that there appears to be no single factor causing truant behaviour. If there was, finding a solution would probably be easy. Every truant is unique and so is every school and every family unit.

Some research locates the problem in macro-societal factors, such as the nature of the class system; the environment (i.e., poverty, unemployment) and inadequacy of judicial penalties. Other research locates it in the micro-societal factors, such as individual family structure, family

attitudes and standards of behaviour. Truancy has also been attributed to possible personality traits, physical and psychological characteristics or poor educational attainment. However, other authorities believe there are causal factors within the school itself (Le Riche, 1995:9).

In the following section, possible causes of truancy will be examined under the following headings: societal variables, chaotic family life, an unsupportive school environment and personal deficits.

2.4.1 Societal variables

The education system operates in a society controlled by powerful cultural, political and economic forces. In his review of the literature on truancy, Bell (1994:203-211) offers three explanations which clarify different societal variables that are involved in the etiology of truancy.

The first is the correspondence argument, which states that societal norms or pressures seem to cause schools to be structured to encourage absenteeism with certain learner groups (minority or lower socio-economic status learners) as a function of the social order. The second explanation is the citizenship argument, stating that society as a whole, and the school specifically, fail to recognise the needs of learners, who are fulfilling their requirements outside the education system. The final societal reason is the articulation argument which states that the learners see the school a less likely place to fulfil their needs than other societal institutions, so they put less effort into school.

Masithela (1992:12) found through interviews with parents that truants were often living in multiply disadvantaged circumstances compared to regular attendees. Similarly, many studies have revealed high correlations in fathers' social economic status and truancy among learners (Bell, 1999:203-211). Consistent with this argument is the high absentee rate particularly amongst grade eight and nine learners attending the secondary schools served by the researcher, on the grounds that in most cases they are from economically disadvantaged communities. Recent research conducted through the University of Cape Town, which analysed education service provision between 1995 and 2003, found that school fees remained a barrier to school attendance, even though some seven million learners paid less than one hundred rand per year for schooling. Commissioned by the Education Department, the 2004 Education Service Delivery Indicators Report states that a situation where a lack of financial resources

underlies school non-attendance cannot be tolerated because it results in the transmission of poverty from generation to generation. However, the report strongly suggests greater state involvement in making education more affordable and accessible to poorer individuals (Govender, 2006:10).

Holmes (1993:56) argues that truancy rises when unemployment and poverty rises. As many educators readily testify, many learners 'switch off' (psychological truancy) in schools and opt out if they feel they have no employment prospects. If they are poor they do not like to appear disadvantaged in front of their peers and resultantly start truanting. In the same vein, Young (2006), acting principal of a secondary school in Eerste River reported that the majority of learners' parents attending the school that he manages are unemployed or perform unskilled labour. As a consequence of this situation, school fees are poorly paid and parents generally seem not interested in supporting their children with regard to improving their lives.

2.4.2 Chaotic family life

Rohrman (1993:40-45) cites the home life of truants as often being characterised by overcrowded living conditions, frequent relocations and weak parent-child relationships. Older children may be asked to remain at home to care for younger siblings, or to work to supplement family income.

Many educators would argue from their experience that truancy is more likely to occur among children of working-class parents. This is particularly the case among those children who are from large families living in poor housing and whose parents probably show little interest in education. Some truants' parents do not regard education as important, since they have apparently managed to survive without it. These parents are actively colluding in their children's truant behaviour, because of their hostility to, or lack of interest in education, encouraging attitudes that often reflect their views of their own school days (Le Riche, 1995:10).

Other social pathologies that are found to be endemic among the families of truants include alcoholism, mental and physical illnesses, violence and family disorganisation. Bell (1994:203-211) found that 55 % who were either truants or runaways had substantiated histories of abuse and maltreatment, mainly emanating from parents. Placed under this stress, families such as

these may find it difficult to stay together and some studies have found that truants came from homes in which at least one parent is missing. In this kind of environment one finds people

...unable to cope with their own lives, with budgeting for the family, with it's medical problems...perhaps unable to summon up sufficient energy and authority to urge their recalcitrant children to attend school (Brown, 1983:225-235).

As far as parental control and discipline is concerned, inconsistent handling and defective parenting has been reported in families of truants. Young (in Ryan, Adams, Gullotta, Weissberg & Hampton, 1995:275) compared samples of truants and non-truants and found that the truants were significantly more likely to come from homes where discipline was defective. Ryan et al. (1995:276) reported excessive parental control, evidenced by the use of corporal punishment in the homes of truants.

According to Rohrman (1993:40-45), parents and schools often have different ideas about what constitutes a quality education. The result of such mutual misunderstanding is that barriers of mistrust may turn potential allies into enemies. It is imperative that, whenever possible, such barriers be eliminated, since meaningful contact between the school and the family of the truant learner is beneficial.

In a comparison of the intactness of truants' and non-truants' families, Sommer and Nagel (1991:379-392) found that the truants were less likely to live with both parents. Ryan et al. (1995:275) reported that in one third to one half of all cases of truancy, the child lived in a home disrupted by separation, divorce, desertion or death. Collins (1988:76) reported that more than half of those charged with school non-attendance in his study were from a home in which at least one parent was absent. According to Reid (2000:10), individuals with larger numbers of siblings and only one parent present, are more likely to demonstrate truant behaviour.

Early adolescents living with both mother and father were less likely to present with truant behaviour. In addition to this, researchers have also identified certain factors and principles, related to the number of parents in the family unit, which may appear to influence truant behaviour particularly among early adolescent learners. The ordering from least to most likely to play truant among early adolescents is as follows – live with both parents; live with mother; live with father; live away from parents. In households handled by a single parent there seems to be too much pressure to bear on the individual, to the extent that he or she may not be able to bring

up the children to best of his or her ability and society's expectations (Reid, 2000; Bosworth 1994 & Masithela 1992).

Furthermore, Ryan et al. (1995:276) found that learners who were persistently absent, were more likely to have experienced some form of family disruption (e.g. parental separation, divorce or death) than a control group of regularly attending learners and a second control group of academically superior learners.

2.4.3 An unsupportive school environment

According to Smith (1996:54) theoretical and empirical sociological knowledge suggests that the school system itself may be an important influence in generating truancy, and that there may be identifiable factors within schools that are closely associated with the development of truanting behaviour amongst school children. This view was shared by O'Keefe (1994:17), who also found that there is a body of theoretical and empirical literature which looks at the school itself as a cause of truancy.

Goldberg (1999:49-63) concurs that some factors may play more important roles than others in causing truancy or dropout for various populations, for example, school factors. Beliefs about the importance of various causal factors influence efforts to remediate the problem. In this regard, Bosworth (1994:243-264) reported that school personnel usually attributed truancy to individual, family and community factors outside their control, which led to hopelessness and lack of efforts to change school variables. This was particularly unfortunate, because Bosworth's research showed school factors to be the most important.

Learners who are truant say attending school is one of the lowest priorities for their time. It is important for all learners to feel they 'fit in' with their peer group. However, truants tend to see themselves as outcasts and rejected at school. Most of the learners, who participated in the focus group discussion, say they often feel confused and do not know where to turn to for help. It is not surprising then, that truants consider social factors to be one of the main reasons they do not attend school.

Bell (1994:203-211) postulates that student and family factors may contribute to truancy, but found in her study that the primary cause was the school system. She concluded that several

contributing factors of truant behaviour are within the school's control including areas such as policies, rules, curriculum and educator characteristics.

Baer (1999:238-248) cited that educators of truants score higher on ratings of rejection and overprotection than educators of non-truants. Moreover, Bell (1994:203-211) concluded that classrooms rated high in competitiveness and educator control and low on educator support had high truancy rates. According to Brown (1983:225-235), truants feel that educators are authoritarian, unfair and excessively concerned with minor rules and that administrators are punitive and ineffective in their handling of truancy. O'Keefe (1994:19), revealed that 27 % of the learners who formed part of the research to which he refers, cited educator unpleasantness and antipathy towards certain learners as playing a significant role in their demonstration of truant behaviour. He also found that fear of an educator may be a contributory factor in a learner's deliberate absence from school.

A survey by Reid (in Bell, 1994:203-211) found that institutional factors that tend to be universally present in all schools contributed to 86 % of the reasons for truancy. Among these reasons were bullying from other learners, wanting to avoid and the desire to leave school. Capps (2003:34) investigated the structure of junior high schools and found that those with the highest rates of truancy were those with more open attendance policies. Learners in these open-policy schools were reportedly more likely to believe that educators and administrators did not care about them or their attendance. The same researcher also found that school truancy policies often lack adequate reporting, recording, follow up or consistent enforcement of consequences.

Hargreaves (in Masithela, 1992:17) notes that schools' emphasis on streaming learners also contributes to truancy. The schools assume that there are learners with potential to follow the Arts, Science and Commerce streams respectively and within these categories there is an assumption that there are intelligent and dull learners. The science learners and the 'intelligent' learners are accorded higher status. The truant behaviour can be justified under these circumstances, because the truants feel rejected by the school and therefore they believe it is only fair for them to reject the school in return.

Masithela (1992:18) agrees that schools are more rewarding places for academic learners than for those in the lower streams. They found that when learners perpetually receive low grades in

schools, their academic self-concept may be reduced to such a point that to absent themselves from school becomes a source of relief.

According to Epstein and Sheldon (2002:308-318), truancy is more prevalent in schools that have inconsistent enforcement of truancy policy, poor interaction between parents and school personnel, unsupportive educators, unchallenging class and homework assignments and low sensitivity to diversity issues. Truancy has also been linked to differences in teaching and learning styles, educator absenteeism, poor learner-educator relations, low educator expectations and inconsistency in discipline.

Despite the new outcomes-based approach of teaching in South Africa according to which educators have a facilitating role to play in the classroom, certain educators still employ traditional teaching methods with insistence on the maintenance of certain rules, use of corporal punishment, the emphasis on factual acquisition of knowledge and the adoption of an authoritarian style of teaching. These teaching practices could result in learners absenting themselves from school. The authoritarian style of teaching by its nature instils fear in the subordinate and it is this fear that gives learners a reason to truant.

2.4.4 Personal deficits

The reasons for truancy can lie within the school or society as well as within the individual child. Some young people are more predisposed to truancy than others, since they experience difficulty identifying with the values and standards by which a school encourages and rewards learners, and therefore regard themselves as failures, non-achievers or non-performers (Le Rich, 1995:11).

A great deal of research has been conducted on the personal characteristics of truants. According to Levine (1984:133-150), factors about the individual learner that may contribute to truant behaviour include: school phobia, poor social and emotional functioning, ethnic or racial dissonance, failure to learn, a learning style not in pace with the classroom, learning disabilities and health problems, which often may be symptomatic of underlying social or emotional problems. Schultz (1987:117-130) explained that truants generally do not have separation anxiety or a fear of school, they often engage in delinquent or antisocial activities when not in school and as a group tend to score below other non-attendees on measures of achievement. A

review by Brown (in Bell, 1994:203:211) revealed that male truants were likely to be conduct-disordered youth for whom impulsivity and disregard for social norms were prominent features, while female truants were likely to be in conflict over autonomy issues. Bools, Foster, Brown and Berg (1990:171-181) examined differences between truants and school refusers and reported that truants were more likely to have conduct disorders, especially the boys, but not neurotic or psychiatric disorders. Academic differences have also been found between truants and non-truants. Farrington (1984:3-16) found that educators described truants as having poor skills in reading, vocabulary, arithmetic, English and verbal reasoning.

Truants nearly always experience feelings of alienation, footlessness, hopelessness and estrangement from their school, home, neighbourhood and society at large. The fact that truant learners often experience alienation from their school may hold far-reaching implications for their attitude towards, as well as their thoughts and feelings about school attendance (Smith, 1996:63).

According to Rohrman (1993:40-45), who has also conducted extensive research on the personal 'defects' of truants, these learners could be labelled as: "mentally ill, mentally retarded, unable to persevere at tasks, learning disabled, school phobic, lacking in self-esteem, lacking in social skills and neurotic". Rohrman further cites that in terms self-esteem, truants often consider themselves less powerful, virtuous, physically attractive and competent than regular attendees.

2.4.5 Attitudes

Attitudes and feelings of the truant towards school may also contribute to truant behaviour. Bell (1994:203-211) found that some of the major differences between junior high school truants and non-truants were in their attitudes towards school.

Truants reported that they were more bored and disliked school more than non-truants. Rood (1989:21-25) explained that many truant students experience an inability to feel a part of their school culture. Moreover, they feel frustrated with school work because they perceive the school's expectations as too high. One study revealed that the factors particularly junior-high-age truants dislike most about attending school are their educators and the authority schools exercise over them. On all dimensions in this study, truant boys and girls perceived their experiences at school more negatively than non-truants (Zieman & Benson, 1981:197-205).

According to Rood (in Bell, 1994:203-211), there is some evidence to suggest that boys have greater absentee rates than girls, while girls were absent twice as often with parental consent. However, contrary to this, it was also found that girls have a higher truancy rate than boys during the first three years of secondary school. Spooner (in Collins, 1998:26), the head educator of a Leeds comprehensive school, reviewed 'truancy figures in a large city', and found that:

The absence rate was greater in 'down-town' localities, it increased as learners grew older, it was greater among girls, it increased dramatically on Fridays, it grew as the term went on and it was markedly greater among below average learners. On Fridays, towards the end of term, in down-town girls' schools, it was likely, therefore, to be dramatic and demoralising.

Spooner's suggestion that truancy may be greater among girls is supported in a review of literature by Carlen (in Collins, 1998:26):

In terms of gender, at both lower and secondary levels, girls are more frequently truanting than boys although 'illegitimate' truancy rates are virtually the same for both. These higher legitimate truancy for girls (if accurate) may be explained in terms of different gender roles, especially the expectation that young women will fulfil domestic commitments, along with the lower social value placed on education of females.

Another gender difference that emerged from prior studies is that female truants demonstrated less antisocial behaviour than male truants and that females had more variable attitudes and behaviours. Parallel with the present study, it was learnt that truant boys perceived their school experience more negatively than truant girls (Zieman & Benson in Reid, 2000:4).

2.5 RECOGNISING POTENTIAL TRUANTS

Although a high level of uncertainty exists with regard to the extent to which psychological events in schools may impact on learners' emotional, intellectual and behavioural state, it is more apparent that some learners, who manifest certain traits, tend to miss school more than others who do not have these characteristics.

Reid (2000:5) asserts that persistent absentees and truants are more likely to be delinquent, less able, have lower general levels of self-esteem and academic self-concepts, be more anxious and have lower career aspirations than the normal school population. For this reason, three possible checklists are provided by Reid (2000:10). These are neither exhaustive nor all-embracing, yet they provide warning or tell-tale signs for which educators and other caring professionals should be on the look out. Any one or more of these comparatively minor warning signs could be masking more serious problems, or could indeed be a 'hidden' plea for help.

2.5.1 Warning signs

According to Reid (2000:7), the following signs might be indicative of learners who could be prospective high risk truancy cases. Has the learner experienced any of the following?

- been severely punished or bullied recently;
- been unduly moody or tearful;
- been under pressure from examinations;
- experienced a dip in his/her scholastic attainment;
- quarrelled seriously with an educator;
- become withdrawn;
- fallen out with peers; and
- overreacted to teasing or to other classroom situations.

In addition to the fact that the afore-mentioned warning signs could be associated with truancy very closely, they may also be linked to emotional stress and psychological difficulties suffered by all learners occasionally. It could also be a manifestation of severe traumatic encounters that learners may experience in their broader social context from time to time, as stated by the truants during the focus group interview (August 2004). For example, some of their responses

included the following verbatim statements: “all we do is argue at home”, “everything has got worse since my father died”, “my parents’ divorce”, “being unhappy at home”, “my parents attitude towards my boyfriend”, “my father is an alcoholic”, “my father’s unemployment”, “my sister being unmarried with a baby”, “my parents just hate me” and “I can not get over my father dead on the floor”.

2.5.2 Characteristics of truants

Reid (2000:7) states that a higher proportion of truants than the normal school age population:

- ❑ Have higher levels of anxiety when in school and about school work in general;
- ❑ Tend to have fewer friends in school;
- ❑ Fail to undertake their homework when it is given;
- ❑ Have lower long-term career aspirations;
- ❑ Enjoy school life less;
- ❑ Are prone to periods absent from school due to ill health; and
- ❑ Prefer fewer and different subjects to learners from similar socio-economic backgrounds who are good attendees.

It is worth stressing that every truant is unique and not all may present with the afore-mentioned characteristics. In my personal dealings with truants I have learnt that they are not loud-mouthed and unpleasant learners. Rather, truants tend to be shy, inward-looking people, many of whom are grateful for any interest and assistance which they receive from empathic sources.

Most truants know failure and like most humans yearn for success. Their opportunities for success, however, are limited as they come from low income families and usually do not have the intellectual capacity to succeed with academic tasks in school.

2.5.3 The personality of truants

Reid (2000:8) cites that a higher proportion of truants than the normal school-age population have:

- ❑ Lower academic self-concepts;
- ❑ Low general self-esteem;
- ❑ Greater patterns of alienation from school over certain issues;
- ❑ Higher levels of neuroticism; and
- ❑ Higher levels of anti-social behaviour.

Furthermore they feel more confused, less part of a community, generally helpless at school and unable to influence decision making. It also appears that they stay absent from school for trivial reasons, are not liked much by other children, often appear miserable, tearful, unhappy or distressed, have poor concentration or short attention span, are often disobedient, often tell lies and have stolen things on one or more occasion.

As reflected in the afore-mentioned list as well as the further description of personality features truants might have, it is clear that the reasons for truancy can lie within the individual, but it can also lie within the school or broader society. Some learners are more predisposed to truancy than others. They feel they cannot identify with the values and standards by which a school encourages and rewards learners, and they therefore regard themselves as failures, non-achievers, non-performers. The following comments from the focus group interview conducted by me with truants and former truants (August 2004), are familiar to educators:

“I just drop out altogether.”

“I just didn’t bother going.”

“I couldn’t learn so there didn’t seem any point in going.”

"I couldn't read or write properly, so I started bunking classes."

2.6 DELINQUENCY AND TRUANCY

Blyth and Milner (1999:57) point out that the link between delinquency and truancy has long been established, stating that the first published study took place in 1915. Since then, numerous researchers have reported that, like truants, delinquents often come from an unfavourable and deprived home background, characterised by multiple adversities and tend to have well-known anti-social and deviant lifestyles in and out of school.

Research conducted in the United States of America has found that delinquent behaviour within school can be a major reason for truancy. One study that was conducted in Philadelphia, reported that a large percentage of youngsters felt unsafe during the time spent both travelling to school and on the return journey. In fact, a majority of parents in the study were fearful that their children could be injured or robbed while at school. In New York and Chicago, studies have reported that many educators feel unsafe in their own schools. Cases of educator assault and even rape are not unusual. There are scores of cases of educators who have reported being assaulted on their way to schools, on playground duty even while teaching in classes during the day and in the evenings (Reid, 2000:9).

Also in Britain, the number of cases of educators being assaulted in some extended urban areas has increased drastically in the last twenty years, as has the amount of publicity that has been given to this topic by the media (Blyth & Milner, 1999:58).

2.7 CONSEQUENCES OF TRUANCY

Whatever the precise causes, the consequences of truancy are enormous. Consider a few simple facts: 40 % of all street robberies in London, 33 % of car thefts, 25 % of burglaries and 20 per cent of cases of criminal damage were committed by 10 to 16 year olds in 1999 and are blamed on truants (Bimler & Kirkland, 2001:75-102).

School truancy is listed by Reid (2000:3) as the greatest single predictor of juvenile and of adult crime and of psychiatric problems. Two-thirds of offenders begin their criminal activities while truanting. Hearly (in Smith, 1996:2) notes that all misdemeanours such as theft, running away

from home, use and distribution of drugs, burglary, vandalism, assault and robbery are rooted in truancy, to the extent that it may be described as “the kindergarten of crime”. In 1944 Burt (in Smith, 1996:3) already referred to truancy as “the first step on the downward stair to crime”.

The implication of non school attendance thus becomes more worrying when concern is drawn to instances of truancy leading to delinquency, social disorder and educational failure. Research focussing upon this relationship has added weight to the traditional view that truancy leads to criminality or social alienation according to Devlin and Wilkinson (in Rayner & Riding, 1996:445-451).

Other difficulties in adult life that truancy may also be linked to include: the inability to settle into routine work and/or marriage, frequent job changes, isolationism, pathological disorders, poverty, higher separation and divorce rates, living upon income support, illiteracy, depression, temper tantrums and involvement with social workers and the Social Services. Truancy is also associated with a significantly higher likelihood of becoming a teenage parent and of being unemployed or homeless in later life. Males who truant are more likely to marry girls who played truant at a similar age at school. ‘Truant families’ then tend to have sons and daughters who also play truant, thereby perpetuating a truancy syndrome into the next generation (Reid: 2000:4).

According to Dupper (1993:141-149), the most serious implication of truancy is its correlation with dropout rates. Bell (1994:203-211) found a correlation of not less than 81% between truancy and dropout rates, while McCaughlin and Vachu (1992:66-68) found a less strong but significant correlation of 25 %. Moreover, dropouts are characterised by many of the same traits that truants possess. Both are associated with low academic achievement and failure to obtain credit.

Thus, it would appear that the prognosis for truants in terms of completing their schooling, securing stable employment and fulfilling responsible citizenship, without being a burden to their future spouses, families, communities and the state, is uncertain. Against this background, there can be little argument that the phenomenon of truancy is serious enough to warrant a counselling programme that will be effective in treating truants in the light of their difficulties in such a way that they will obtain a balanced perspective of the value of regular school attendance.

2.8 TRUANTS' FEELINGS WHILE AWAY FROM SCHOOL

According to Tansey (1995:12-15), the psychology of being away from school illegally is in itself an interesting phenomenon. Irrespective of the reason(s) for non-attendance, it appears that missing school is a profoundly unsatisfactory experience for the vast majority of absentees and truants. In one study, a small proportion of truants even indicated that they wished circumstances could be found whereby they could start again in school with a clean sheet. This indeed, poses an interesting psychological question, namely: why do so many absentees elect to miss school, when their behaviour causes them considerable short-term anxiety, worry, fears and guilt?

Although this concern is self-imposed, there can be little doubt that the resultant worry may at least be equal to any pressure exerted on the learners by educators in schools. Seen in this light, the plight of regular truants is even more pitiful.

The following verbatim statements of learners who participated in the focus group investigation (August 2004), indicate the sort of mental pressure to which persistent truants feel subjected:

“I know I’ve got to go back sometime...the longer I carry on the worse I make it for myself.”

“I worry all the time in case a teacher or someone else sees me walking around and I get caught.”

“When ever I bunk school, I feel terribly guilty about coming back to school... you have to make up some stupid lies about why you were away...I keep telling them I’ve had the flu... they know it’s not true.”

Upon enquiring into what they do when they are away from school, most truants report that boredom is a major problem to them. Some of the activities referred to by the truants for how they spend their time when away from school include: domestic chores, watching television, staying in bed, looking after siblings, visiting relatives, wandering around streets, walking around the city centre, smoking, listening to music, playing cards or going to dancing classes (Capps, 2003:34).

These activities can be divided into broad categories namely: domestic, wandering and social. I am of the opinion that it is somewhat ironic that in this technological age, the kinds of activities undertaken by truants have not changed much over the last few decades. However, the general picture that emerges is that:

- ❑ Missing school can be a profoundly unsatisfactorily experience for truants;
- ❑ Most truants are bored while out of school;
- ❑ Being away from school can lead to criminal activity; and
- ❑ The longer the absence the worse the problems get.

Therefore, truancy could be regarded as a sign of educational failure not only for the learner, but apparently also for the family and the community at large. Educators, parents and most of all the truants themselves know it. Yet, despite recognising their own failure and being bored while truanting, they continue to miss school. It is precisely for this reason that truancy can be regarded as such a serious problem with enormous consequences.

2.9 PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS TRUANCY

2.9.1 Parental rejection

According to Stine (1989:25-47), there is some evidence suggesting that parents of truants may be more likely to reject their children. In a retrospective study of truancy cases, Andrioli (in Reid, 1995:48) found that almost four fifths, or eighteen of a total of twenty five cases had been rejected by one or both parents. Reid (1995:48) commented that this finding was particularly notable, as seven of the truants had received little or no treatment, making it impossible to determine whether they too were rejected. More recently however, Reid (2000:89) noted a pattern of maternal rejection prior to age five and paternal rejection after age five in a group of truants.

2.9.2 Parental overprotection/ overindulgence

Although a comparison study of truant and non-truant learners suggests that the former are more often overprotected and overindulged (Little & Thompson, 1983:285-291), a comparison study of truants and school phobics (refusers) found that the school phobics were more likely to be overprotected by both mothers and fathers as compared to the truants.

Little and Thompson's (1983:285-291) finding that the truants in their sample were more overprotected than the non-truants, appears to contradict the findings of Stine (1989:25-47) that truants tend to be rejected by their parents. Reid (1995:50), and more recently Capps (2003:34) suggested that overprotection may actually be rooted in underlying feelings of rejection for the child. This contradiction thus may be more apparent than real.

2.9.3 Parental control and discipline

Inconsistent handling and defective parenting have been reported in families of truants (Ryan et al. 1995:275). In a comparative of samples of truants and non-truants it has been found that the truants were significantly more likely to come from homes where discipline was defective. Cooper (Ryan et al. 1995:275) reported excessive parental control, evidenced by the frequent use of corporal punishment, in the homes of truants.

In a comparative study of truants and school phobics, Ryan et al. (1995:276) found that the use of corporal punishment was more evident among the truants versus school phobics. In an earlier comparison study of school phobics, truants and controls, it was found that "over-anxious discipline administered by a dominant mother", distinguished the school phobics from all other children in the study (Cooper, 1986:14-20).

2.10 CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this chapter was to review existing literature regarding the phenomenon of truancy as a multi-faceted problem. It is evident however, for a host of different reasons that it is not uncommon for many learners, particularly those entering the junior high school phase, to accumulate numerous days of unquestionable absence. Truancy from school may hold dire consequences for the learner's school career, such as possible underachievement and dropping

out of school, which could in turn affect his/her, career opportunities and chances of realising his/her potential as a human being to the full. Furthermore, it has emerged that each truant is unique, a victim of his/her social, psychological, familial and educational circumstances. It would therefore appear that the effectiveness of truancy intervention could be increased by utilising a multimodal or a systemic approach, combining all of the afore-mentioned target areas as opposed to treating truancy as having only one particular cause.

In the next chapter an overview of various developmental theories will be supplied. Thereafter the developmental level of the learner in the junior secondary school phase will be dealt with.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROFILE OF THE EARLY ADOLESCENT LEARNER

3.1 INTRODUCTION

One frequently used definition refers to development as *patterns of change over time which begins at conception and continues throughout the life span* (Keenan, 2002:2). According to Crain (2000:38), development occurs in different domains such as the *biological* (changes in our physical being), *social* (changes in our social relationships), *emotional* (changes in our emotional understanding and experiences), *cognitive* (changes in our thought processes), and *personality* (changes in our enduring characteristics).

Since this chapter examines the early developmental level of the adolescent in the junior secondary school, a number of the most important theories of child development will be reviewed briefly. This discussion will be followed by an exploration of the ecological systems theory, which views the child, including the truant learner, as developing within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from immediate settings of family and school to broad cultural values and programmes (Berk, 2003:27). Thereafter, an analysis of the early adolescent phase will be offered under the following headings: Physical, Social, Cognitive, Emotional and Conative development.

3.2 THEORIES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

3.2.1 Psychoanalytic theory

Psychoanalytic theorists view development to be primarily unconscious – that is, beyond awareness – and to be heavily coloured by emotion. For them behaviour is merely a surface characteristic and to truly understand development, the symbolic meanings of behaviour and the deep inner meaning working of the mind need to be analysed (Santrock, 1996:36).

Sigmund Freud, one of the most influential exponents of this perspective, stressed the formative nature of early experiences and of biologically based drives. His belief was that children move through a series of developmental stages in which they confront conflicts between biological

drives and social expectations. The way these conflicts are resolved determines the individual's ability to learn to get along with others and to cope with anxiety. Freud further believed that over the course of childhood, sexual impulses shift their focus from the oral to the anal to the genital regions of the body. In each stage, parents walk a fine line between permitting too much or too little gratification of their child's basic needs. Should parents strike an appropriate balance, then children may grow into well-adjusted adults with the capacity for mature sexual behaviour, investment in family life, and rearing the next generation. Freud's psychosexual theory highlighted the importance of family relations for children's development and was also the first theory to stress the role of early experiences (Berk, 2003:16).

Psychoanalytic theory, however, has been revised significantly and has spawned many offshoots or schools of thought such as object related theory. Modern psychoanalysts emphasise the role of unconscious processes in our behaviour, but place less emphasis on sexual and aggressive instincts and spend more effort highlighting the importance of experience and an understanding of one's life history (Keenan, 2002:21).

According to Feldman (1998:20), some of the most basic principles of Freud's psychoanalytic theory have been called into question, because they have not been validated by subsequent research. In particular, the notion that people pass through stages in childhood that determine their adult personalities, has little definitive research support. Relying mainly on the use of methods such as free association and the use of dream analysis, make scientific testing of Freud's theory difficult, if not impossible. In addition, because much of his theory was based on a limited population of upper-class Austrians living during a strict, puritanical era, its application to broad, multicultural populations is questionable. Since Freud's theory focuses primarily on male development, it has also been criticised as sexist and may be interpreted as devaluing women.

Several of Freud's followers took what was useful from his theory and improved on his vision. One of the most important of these neo-Freudians in the field of child development is Erik Erikson, whose psychosocial theory has, in certain respects, stood the test of time better than Freud's psychoanalytic theory (Feldman, 1998:21). He emphasised that development continues throughout the life span, whereas Freud argued that our basic personality is shaped in the first five years of our life. In Erikson's theory, eight stages of life unfold as we go through the life span. Each stage consists of a unique developmental task that confronts individuals with a crisis that must be faced. For Erikson, this crisis is not a catastrophe, but a turning point of increased

vulnerability and enhanced potential. The more an individual resolves the crises successfully, the healthier development will be (Santrock, 1996:39).

Thus, we see that within one area of personality theories, viz. the psychodynamic perspective, there appears to be a difference in the prognosis for adolescents experiencing major problems, of which truancy is no exception. While the psychoanalysts on the one hand are less optimistic about the possibility that behaviour can change, Erikson, on the other hand, offers a much better prognosis. Therefore, it would appear that Erikson tends to be more optimistic than Freud with regard to the child experiencing problems in his or her life. In addition, Erikson also offers the so-called 'moratorium' (time for the adolescent to recover and 'to catch up' with developmental phases that were negatively experienced).

Although these theories differ in some respects, both primarily focus on hereditary as a biological factor, without stressing environmental factors as determinants of human development and behaviour. According to the psychodynamic theories, particularly the psychoanalytic perspective, human beings are "at the mercy of internal and external forces. From within, the unconscious drives exert pressure on the individual. From the outside, there are societal demands that place further limits on the individual's functioning" (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1997:357). Thus, there are limited possibilities for the adolescent, other than using various defence mechanisms, to find compromises between the demands of the psyche and those of the personality. It will be interesting to note how much hope for change the other theories provide to adolescents presenting with behaviour problems such as truancy.

3.2.2 Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory

If one individual has influenced the contemporary field of child development more than any other, it is Swiss cognitive theorist, Jean Piaget. Piaget's theory of development stressed that children actively construct their own cognitive worlds and that information is not just poured into their minds from their environment. However, knowledge is constructed by children as they manipulate and explore their worlds (Moshman, 1999:8).

Piaget's view of development was greatly influenced by his early training in biology. Central to his theory is the biological concept of *adaptation*, according to which the structures of the body

are adapted to fit with the environment. Likewise, the structures of the mind develop to better fit with, or represent the external world.

In Piaget's theory, as the brain develops and children's experiences expand, they move through four broad stages, each characterized by qualitatively distinct ways of thinking. In the *sensorimotor stage*, cognitive development begins with the baby's use of the senses and movement to explore the world. These action patterns evolve into the symbolic but illogical thinking of the pre-schooler in the *preoperational stage*. Then cognition is transformed into the more organised reasoning of the school-age learner in the *concrete operational stage*. Finally, in the *formal operational stage*, thought becomes the complex, abstract reasoning system of the adolescent and adult (Berk, 2003:21).

Despite Piaget's overwhelming contributions, in recent years his theory has been challenged. Rogoff and Chavajay (1995:859-877) point out that Piaget underestimated the competencies of infants and pre-schoolers. These researchers postulate that when young children are given tasks scaled down in difficulty, their understanding seems closer to that of the older child and the adult than Piaget believed. This discovery implies that the maturity of children's thinking may depend on their familiarity with the task and the kind of knowledge sampled. Ultimately, the greatest criticism levelled at Piaget's perspective is that his stage-wise account of development pays insufficient attention to social and cultural influences and the resulting wide variation in thinking that exists among same-age children.

An implication of Piaget's theory is that children seemingly have more liberty to attach any meaning to their life-worlds, than the deterministic view held by the psychoanalytic perspective. On the other hand, this theory may underestimate a child's ability to comprehend problems that may occur in his or her life-world.

3.2.3 Behaviourism and social learning theory

According to Feldman (1998:20), behaviourists believe we should examine only what can be directly observed and measured, emphasising that development is observable behaviour learned through experience with the environment. Rather than looking inside the organism at unconscious processes, the behavioural perspective suggests that the keys to understanding development are observable behaviour and outside stimuli in the environment. If we know the

stimuli, we can predict the behaviour. Behavioural theories reject the notion that people pass universally through a series of stages. Instead, people are assumed to be affected by the environmental stimuli to which they happen to be exposed. Developmental patterns, then, are personal, reflecting a particular set of environmental stimuli, and behaviour is the result of continuing exposure to specific factors in the environment.

3.2.3.1 Traditional behaviourism

American behaviourism began with the work of John B. Watson who cited that the environment was the supreme force in child development. He believed that children could be moulded in any direction desired by adults if they carefully controlled stimulus-response associations. Development consists of a gradual increase with age in the number and strength of these associations. Watson and his fellow behaviourists rejected all notions that cognitive processes intervened in the shaping of the individual (Berk, 2003:19).

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chef, and yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities...
(Feldman, 1998:21).

With these words, Watson, one of the first American psychologists to advocate a behavioural approach, summed up the behavioural perspective, arguing that by effectively controlling a person's environment, it is possible to produce virtually any behaviour.

To a certain degree it seems that these theories ignore the underlying and often 'invisible' driving forces such as needs and personality characteristics, since children in similar circumstances do not respond likewise to the same environmental stimuli. To this end, it is therefore clear that behaviour is not as predictable on the basis of environmental factors as portrayed by the afore-mentioned behavioural theories.

On the other hand it appears that changes in the environment (stimulus) could result in changes in the behaviour of human beings. Hence, it would be possible for young children to learn new behaviour patterns.

3.2.3.2 Social learning theory

Social learning theory emphasises behaviour, environment and cognition as the key factors in development. For them, cognitive processes are important mediators of environment-behaviour connections. These theorists believe that we are not like mindless robots, responding mechanically to others in our environment. Rather, we think, reason, imagine, plan, expect, interpret, believe and compare. When others try to control us, our values and beliefs allow us to resist their control.

Several kinds of social learning theory have emerged. The most influential was devised by Albert Bandura and his colleagues. Bandura (in Berk, 2003:20) demonstrated that modelling, otherwise known as imitation or observational learning, is an important basis for children's behaviour. The baby who claps her hands after her mother does so, the child who angrily hits a playmate in the same way that he has been punished at home, and the teenager who wears the same clothes and hairstyle as her friends at school are all displaying observational learning.

Bandura's work continues to influence much research on children's social development. However, like changes in the field of child development as a whole, today his theory stresses the importance of cognition or thinking. Bandura has shown that children's ability to listen, remember, and abstract general rules from complex sets of observed behaviour, affects their imitation and learning. In fact in the most recent revision of his theory, he places such strong emphasis on how children think about themselves and other people that he calls it a social-cognitive rather than a social learning approach (Bandura, 1999:117-148).

According to this view, children gradually become selective in what they imitate. From watching others engaged in self-praise and self-blame and through feedback about the worth of their actions, children develop personal standards for behaviour and a sense of self efficacy – beliefs about their own abilities and characteristics – that guide responses in particular situations. For example, imagine a parent who often remarks, "I'm glad I kept working on that task, even though it was hard," who explains the value of persistence, and who encourages it by saying, "I know you can do a good job on that homework!" Soon the child starts to view him- or herself as hardworking and high achieving and selects people with these characteristics as models. Similarly, in a negative sense, a learner who becomes aware that his or her friends truant, without being penalised, may also start engaging in this practice (Bandura, 1999:117-148).

Nevertheless, modelling and reinforcement do not provide a complete account of development (Horowitz, 1992:360-367). Many theorists believe that behaviourism and social theory offer too narrow a view of environmental influences. Finally, behaviourism and social learning theory have been criticised for underestimating children's contributions to their own development. In emphasising cognition, Bandura is unique among theories whose work grew out of the behaviourist tradition in granting children an active role in their own learning.

3.2.4 The ethological and evolutionary perspective

According to Keenan (2002:26), *ethology* is concerned with the adaptive, or survival value of behaviour and its evolutionary history. Its roots can be traced to the work of Darwin. Ethology stresses that behaviour is strongly influenced by biology, is tied to evolution, and is characterised by critical and sensitive periods (Santrock, 1996:48). Two European zoologists, Konrad Lorenz and Niko Tinbergen, laid its modern foundation. Watching diverse animal species in their natural habitat, Lorenz and Tinbergen observed behaviour patterns that promote survival. The best known of these is *imprinting*, which refers to the 'following behaviour' of a certain species of birds that ensures that the young will stay close to the mother and be fed and protected from danger. Imprinting takes place during an early restricted time period of development. If the mother bird is not present during this time, but an object resembling her in important features is, young goslings may imprint on it instead (Santrock, 1996:49).

Ethologists' observations of imprinting resulted in a major concept that has been widely applied in child development: *the critical period* which according to Berk (2003:24) refers to a "limited time span during which the child is biologically prepared to acquire certain adaptive behaviours, but need the support of an appropriately stimulating environment." Many researchers have done studies to explore whether complex cognitive and social behaviours must be learned during certain time periods. For example, should children be deprived of adequate food or physical and social stimulation during their early years, will their intelligence be impaired? If language is not mastered during early childhood, is the child's capacity to acquire it reduced? (Geary, 1999: 115-120; Bjorklund & Pellegrine, 2000:1687-1708).

Inspired by observations of imprinting, British psychoanalyst, John Bowlby (1980:98) applied ethological theory to the understanding of the human infant-caregiver relationship. He argued

that attachment behaviour of babies, such as smiling, babbling, grasping, and crying, are built-in social signals that encourage the parent to approach, care for, and interact with the baby. By keeping the mother near, these behaviours help ensure that the infant will be fed, protected from danger, and provided with stimulation and affection necessary for healthy growth.

In order to generate an increased understanding of child development, a new arena of theory and research has been forged called *evolutionary developmental psychology*. According to Geary and Bjorklund (2000:57), this approach refers to the “genetic and ecological mechanisms that govern the development of social, emotional and cognitive competencies common to all human beings and the epigenetic processes that adapt these competencies to local conditions.” Evolutionary developmental psychologists ask such questions as: “What role does the newborn’s visual preference for facelike stimuli play in survival? Does it support older infants’ capacity to distinguish familiar caregivers from unfamiliar people? How do children come to play in sex-segregated groups? What do they learn from such play that might lead to adult gender-type behaviours, such as male dominance and female investment in caregiving?” (Berk, 2003:25).

As these examples suggest, evolutionary psychologists are not just concerned with the genetic and biological roots of development, but they are also interested in how individuals learn, because learning lends flexibility and greater adaptiveness to behaviour. Moreover, they recognise that today’s lifestyles differ so radically from those of our evolutionary ancestors that certain evolved behaviours (such as adolescent life-threatening risk taking and male-to-male violence) are no longer adaptive, according to Geary (1999:115-120). By clarifying the origins and development of such behaviour, evolutionary developmental psychology may help spark more effective interventions.

In sum, the interests of evolutionary psychologists are broad. They want to understand the entire organism-environment system (Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2000:1687-1708). The next contextual perspective that will be discussed, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, serves as an excellent complement to the evolutionary viewpoint, as it highlights not only the social, but also the cultural dimensions of children’s experiences.

3.2.5 Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development

Like Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky was a firm believer that children actively explored their environment and are influential in shaping their own knowledge. Since his perspective is referred to as the sociocultural theory, it focuses on how *culture* – the values, beliefs, customs and skills of a social group – is transmitted to the next generation. According to Vygotsky, *social interaction* – in particular co-operative dialogues between children and more knowledgeable members of society – is necessary for children to acquire the ways of thinking and behaving that make up a community's culture. As children internalise the essential features of these dialogues, they use the language within them to guide their own thoughts and actions and acquire new skills (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992:548-557).

Vygotsky's theory has been especially influential in the study of children's cognition. It seems to a large extent that he agreed with Piaget that children are active, constructive beings. But unlike Piaget, who emphasised children's independent efforts to make sense of their world, Vygotsky viewed cognitive development as a *socially mediated process* – as dependent on the support that adults and more mature peers provide as children try new tasks (Berk, 2003:26).

In Vygotsky's theory, children undergo certain stage-wise transformations. For example, with the acquisition of language, their ability to participate in dialogue with others is greatly enhanced and mastery of culturally adaptive competencies surges forward. When children enter school, they spend much time discussing language, literacy and other academic concepts – experiences that encourage them to reflect on their own thinking. As a result, they show dramatic gains in reasoning and problem solving.

Vygotsky's theory and research stimulated by it, reveals that children in every culture develop unique strengths. At the same time his emphasis on culture and social experience led Vygotsky to neglect the biological side of development. Although he recognized the importance of heredity and brain growth, he said little about their role in cognitive change (Berk, 2003:26). Furthermore Vygotsky's focus on social transmission of knowledge implies that he placed less emphasis than did other theorists on children's capacity to shape their own development. However, contemporary followers of Vygotsky grant the individual and society more balanced roles (Rogoff, 1998:679-44; Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992:548-557).

3.2.6 Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory

A view which has received an increasing amount of attention from developmental psychologists is that of Urie Bronfenbrenner, an American psychologist, known as the bio-ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998:993-1028). Bronfenbrenner's approach has risen to the forefront of the field of developmental psychology over the past two decades. He offered a conceptualisation of the child's ecology as a multi-layered set of nested and interconnecting environmental systems all of which influence the developing child, but with varying degrees of directness. As well as being a contextualist, Bronfenbrenner could also be seen as a constructivist, since he emphasised the need to view the developing person as "a growing, dynamic entity that progressively moves into and restructures the environment in which it resides" (Greene & Moane, 2000:122-137). In view of the fact that the bio-ecological systems theory offers the most differential and complete account of contextual influences on children's development, I have decided to use this particular approach as the basis for the empirical investigation of this research.

Previously known as the ecological systems theory, but since the child's biological dispositions join with environmental forces to mould development, Bronfenbrenner recently characterised his perspective as a *bio-ecological model* (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000:115-125).

According to Berk (2003:27), the bio-ecological perspective envisions the environment as a series of five nested structures or systems that includes but extends beyond home, school, and neighbourhood settings in which children spend their everyday lives. Every layer of the environment is viewed as having a powerful impact on children's development. The five systems in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem of which each will now be considered in turn.

3.2.6.1 The microsystem

The microsystem is the immediate setting in which children live. It refers to family, peers, school as well as the activities, roles and relationships in their immediate surroundings. The child, according to Bronfenbrenner, is not a passive recipient of others' attention and actions, but must be viewed as an active force, exerting an influence on other people around him or her and on the relationships he or she has with others. Thus, in order to understand child development at this level, one must keep in mind that that all relationships are *bidirectional*. That is, adults affect children's behaviour, but children's characteristics – their physical attributes, personalities, and capacities – also affect adults' behaviour. For example, a friendly, attentive child is very likely to evoke positive and patient reactions from parents, whereas a distractible youngster is more likely to receive restriction and punishment. When these reciprocal interactions occur often over time, they have an enduring impact on development, according to Bronfenbrenner (Berk, 2003:28).

Third parties also affect whether parent-child relationships enhance or undermine development. If other individuals in the setting are supportive, the quality of relationships is enhanced. For example, when parents encourage one another in their child-rearing roles, each engages in more effective parenting. In contrast, marital conflict is associated with inconsistent discipline and hostile reactions toward children. In response, children typically become hostile, and their adjustment suffers (Hetherington, Bridges & Insabella, 1998:167-184).

3.2.6.2 The mesosystem

The second level of Bronfenbrenner's model is called the mesosystem. It involves relationships between microsystems such as home, school, neighbourhood, and child-care centres. According to Keenan (2002:30), one could think about the mesosystem as the connection which brings together the different contexts in which a child develops. For example a child's ability to learn to read may not only depend on learning activities that take place in school, but also on the extent to which those activities carry over to the home environment, such as the presence of books in the home or how much time parents spend reading with their children. In another connection, a child whose parents have rejected him or her may have difficulty developing positive relations with educators.

Developmentalists increasingly believe it is important to observe behaviour in multiple settings – such as in family, peer, and school contexts – in order to obtain a more complete picture of an individual's development (Santrock, 1996:50).

3.2.6.3 The exosystem

The exosystem refers to social settings that do not contain children, but nevertheless can have a profound impact on their development. These include formal settings such as community health services, parks, recreation centres, and informal groups such as one's extended family, social support networks, and the workplace (Keenan, 2002:31). For example, flexible work schedules, paid maternity and paternity leave, and sick leave for parents whose children are ill, are ways that work settings can help parents rear children and, indirectly, enhance their development.

Negative impacts on development can also result when the exosystem breaks down. For example, families with few personal or community based ties, or who are affected by unemployment show an increased incidence of child abuse and neglect (Emery & Billings, 1998:121-135).

3.2.6.4 The macrosystem

The outermost level of Bronfenbrenner's model, the macrosystem, consists of the ideology, values, laws, regulations, customs, and resources of a given culture. Cultural influences can have a powerful effect on children's development (Keenan, 2002:31).

Kamerman (2000:96-99) maintains that the priority which the macrosystem gives to children's needs, affects the support they receive at inner levels of the environment. For example, in countries that require high-quality standards for child care and workplace benefits for employed parents, children are more likely to have favourable experiences in their immediate settings, for example, at home or in school.

3.2.6.5 The chronosystem

According to Bronfenbrenner (in Berk, 2003:29), the environment is not a static force that affects children in a uniform way. Instead, it is ever changing. Every time important life events such as

the birth of a sibling, the beginning of school, or parents' divorce, existing relationships are modified between children and their environments, producing new conditions that affect development. In addition, the timing of environmental change affects its impact. The arrival of a new sibling has very different consequences for a homebound toddler than for a school-age child with many relationships and activities beyond the family. Also included in his model, Bronfenbrenner cited the notion that development occurs in historical time. He called this temporal aspect the chronosystem, which involves all aspects of time, and how they impact on development.

Changes in life events can be imposed on the child, as in the examples just given. But they can also arise from within the child, since as children get older, they select, modify, and create many of their own settings and experiences. How they do so depends on their physical, intellectual, and personality characteristics and their environmental opportunities (Keenan, 2002:31).

From the discussion on the bio-ecological systems theory, it emerged that development is neither controlled by environmental circumstances nor driven by inner dispositions. Instead, it appears that children are both products and producers of their environments, in a network of interdependent effects. This means that children may be considered to be active participants in their own development. For example, if a child perceives his or her world as basically threatening he or she will be less likely to engage in interactions that might promote his or her development. According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2005:53), the opposite would be true of a child who feels secure and confident in his or her ability to engage in new situations.

In the following section, the developmental level of the early adolescent will be discussed.

3.3 THE EARLY ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE

Spear (2000:419) notes that adolescence precludes precise characterisation of its ontogenic time course, with no single event signalling its onset or termination and is considered the developmental stage that lies between childhood and adulthood. It commences and ends imprecisely, starting just before the teenage years and ending just after them. This imprecision generally reflects the nature of society's treatment of the period. According to Hoffman (1996:777-780) "adolescents are considered to be no longer children, but not yet adults". Clearly

though, adolescence is a time of considerable physical, social, cognitive, conative and emotional growth and change.

However, if one specifically considers the early stage of adolescent development, one is focussing on the ages of between eleven and thirteen for girls and twelve and fifteen years for boys. According to Whitmore (2003:3), this is an awkward developmental stage, marked by noticeable physical changes as well as a yearning for the approval of peers and emotional liability. In view of the fact that the truant learners who participated in the empirical investigation fall in the fourteen to fifteen year old age group, this section focuses on the early-adolescent phase. Therefore the following areas of development during this particular phase will be considered namely – physical, social, cognitive, conative and emotional.

3.3.1 Physical development

During early-adolescence, boys and girls undergo a surprisingly rapid transformation in physical appearance from children to young adults. Their overall physical growth can be breathtaking and constitute the *adolescent growth spurt*, a period of very rapid growth in height and weight, nearly as quickly as during infancy. In only a few months, an adolescent can grow several inches and require an almost entirely new wardrobe. Boys and girls' adolescent growth spurts begin at different times. On average, girls start their spurt two years earlier than boys, and they complete them earlier as well. Girls usually begin spurts around twelve, while boys generally do not start until about age fourteen (Feldman, 1998:416).

3.3.1.1 Puberty – the start of sexual maturation

During puberty, young people become physically mature and capable of producing offspring. Accompanying rapid changes in body size and proportions are changes in physical features related to sexual functioning. Some, called *primary sexual characteristics*, involve the reproductive organs (ovaries, uterus, and vagina in females; penis, scrotum and testes in males). Others, called *secondary sexual characteristics*, are visible on the outside of the body and serve as additional signs of sexual maturity (for example, breast development in females and the appearance of underarm and pubic hair in both sexes). Girls start puberty at around eleven or twelve, and boys begin at thirteen or fourteen (Tanner, 1990:27).

Although it is known what happens when puberty begins, the reason why it begins at a particular time, has not yet been identified. However, it is clear that environmental and cultural factors play a role. For example, menarche (from the Greek word *arche*, meaning beginning), the onset of menstruation, and probably the most conspicuous signal of puberty in girls, varies greatly in different parts of the world. Santrock (1996:182) cites that in poorer, developing countries, menstruation begins later than in more economically advantaged countries. Even within wealthier countries, girls in more affluent groups begin to menstruate earlier than less affluent girls. According to Feldman (1998:417), it appears that girls who are better nourished and healthier are more apt to start menstruation at an earlier age than those who suffer malnutrition or chronic disease.

Berk (2003:195) states that the first sign of puberty in boys is the enlargement of the testes (glands that manufacture sperm), accompanied by changes in the texture and colour of the scrotum. Pubic hair emerges a short time later, about the same time the penis begins to enlarge. Comparatively speaking, boys' height gain is more intense and longer lasting than that of girls. When it reaches its peak, at about age fifteen, enlargement of the testes and penis is nearly complete and underarm hair appears soon after. Just after the peak in body growth, facial and body hair also emerges and gradually increases for several years. Another noteworthy landmark of male physical maturity is the deepening of the voice as the larynx enlarges and the vocal cords lengthen. Voice change usually occurs at the peak of the male growth spurt and is often not complete until puberty is over.

While the penis is growing, the prostate gland and seminal vesicles (which together produce semen, the fluid in which sperm are bathed) enlarge. Then, around age fourteen, *spermarche*, or first ejaculation occurs (Jorgensen & Keiding, 1991:177-193).

3.3.1.2 The psychological impact of pubertal events

Unlike infants, who also undergo extraordinary rapid growth, adolescents are well aware of what is happening to their bodies, and they may react with horror or joy. Few though are neutral about the changes they are witnessing. Puberty can to a certain degree affect the young person's emotional state and social behaviour. A very common belief is that pubertal change has something to do with adolescent moodiness and the desire for greater physical and psychological separation from parents.

(i) Adolescent moodiness

Research conducted by Buchanan, Eccles and Becker (1992:62-117) on the role of sex hormones in adolescent emotional reactions, showed that higher hormone levels are related to greater moodiness, in the form of anger and irritability for boys and anger and depression for girls. In this particular study, the mood fluctuations of children, adolescents and adults were tracked over a week by having them carry electronic pagers. At random intervals, they were beeped and asked to write down what they were doing, with whom they were with and how they felt.

As expected, adolescents reported less favourable moods than did school-age children and adults. Negative moods were often found to be linked to a greater number of negative life events, such as difficulties getting along with parents, disciplinary actions at school and breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend. A steady increase in the number of negative events from childhood to adolescence also emerged and teenagers seemed to react to them with greater emotion than did children.

Furthermore, compared with the moods of adults, adolescents' feelings were less stable. They often varied from cheerful to sad and back again. However, teenagers also moved from one situation to another more often and their mood swings were strongly related to these changes. High points of their days were times spent with friends and self-chosen leisure activities. Low points tended to occur in adult-structured settings, for example in class, school halls, school libraries and religious services.

According to Larson and Richards (1998:37-57), adolescents' emotional high points are Friday and Saturday evenings, especially at older ages. As teenagers move from junior high to high school, frequency of spending time with friends and romantic partners – movies, sports events, and parties or just cruising around town – increases dramatically, so much so that it becomes a 'cultural script' for what is supposed to happen. This implies that teenagers who fall short of the 'script' – who spend a weekend evening at home – often experience profound loneliness.

An additional contributor to adolescent moodiness is change in sleep schedules. Teenagers need almost as much sleep as they did in middle childhood. Yet they go to bed much later than they did as children. Carskadon, Viera and Acebo (1993:258-262) say: "Biological changes may

underlie this bedtime delay, as it strengthens with pubertal maturation. But evening activities and part-time jobs also contribute. Sleep-deprived teenagers often suffer from depressed mood and achieve less well in school.”

(ii) Parent-child relationships

Steinberg and Morris (2001:83-110) cite that puberty is related to a rise in parent-child conflict. As children enter adolescence, they often resist spending time with the family and become more argumentative. Although the rate of conflict declines with age as parents and children spend less time together, its emotional intensity rises into mid-adolescence. During this time, parents and teenagers report feeling less close to one another.

According to Adams and Laursen (2001:97-110), adolescents’ new powers of reasoning may also be a contributing factor to the rise in family tensions, stating that friction rises because children have become physically mature and demand to be treated in adult like ways. Parent-adolescent disagreements largely focus on mundane, day to day matters, such as driving, dating partners and curfews. However, beneath these disputes are serious parental concerns – efforts to protect their teenagers from substance abuse, motor accidents, and early sex. The larger the gaps between parents and adolescents’ views of teenagers’ readiness to take on developmental tasks, the more arguments arise.

3.3.2 Social and personality development

During early adolescence children become increasingly conscious of their own and others’ psychological processes. As a result, they both become more introspective and more self-conscious, while questions such as: “Who am I?” and “Where do I belong?” gradually begin to take a front seat. A related change may be termed *identity formation* and is described by Flavell (in Fein, 1978:453) as follows:

Children gradually come to think of themselves and others as stable human beings who conserve, over time and circumstances, their personhoods, personalities, social and sexual roles and identities, and many other attributes. Day to day changes in one’s own or another’s mood and behaviour come to be construed as variations on an enduring theme, rather than as a succession

of unrelated melodies.

Why should issues of identity become so important during adolescence? According to Feldman (1998:476), one possible reason is that adolescents' intellectual capacity becomes more adult like. They can now comprehend and appreciate such abstract issues as the importance of establishing their position in society and the need to form a sense of themselves as individuals. Another reason could be that the dramatic physical changes during puberty make adolescents acutely aware of their own bodies and the fact that others are reacting to them in ways to which they are relatively unaccustomed.

Erik Erikson (in Feldman, 1998:478) says that the search for identity inevitably leads some adolescents into substantial psychological difficulties as they encounter the adolescent identity crisis. He emphasises adolescence as a crucial stage in the development of an individual's identity, stating that the adolescent must become an individual in his or her own right, independent of his or her parents and aware of his or her role in society. Erikson's theory regarding this stage suggests that adolescence is the time of the identity – versus identity-confusion stage, since role confusion can occur if the adolescent does not know where he or she belongs, what is expected of him or her, or how to integrate his or her various roles (Smith, 1982:26).

Adolescents in the identity – versus identity-confusion stage, seek to determine what is unique and distinctive about them. They strive to discover their particular strengths and weaknesses and the roles they can best play in their future lives. In short, they seek to understand their identity. In Erikson's view, adolescents who stumble in their effort to find a suitable identity may follow several dysfunctional courses. On the one hand, they may adopt socially unacceptable roles, such as that of deviant, or on the other hand, they may have difficulty forming and maintaining long-lasting personal relationships later on in life. In general, their sense of self becomes "diffuse", failing to organise around a central unified core identity.

During adolescence there is usually a shift in allegiance from the family to the peer group. According to Le Francois (in Smith, 1982:26), this is sometimes a source of conflict, however, it is not necessarily so. Conflict is less common than is widely supposed. Despite the greater attachment to peers during adolescence, ties with the family are not necessarily weaker and adolescent values and beliefs tend to be highly similar to that of their parents. Adolescent

conformity to peers is greater in highly visible areas such as dress or other matters of taste. Friendships are clearly an important feature of adolescence as they provide models, contribute to self concept and identity formation, and allow considerable emotional satisfaction from developing interpersonal relationships especially with the opposite sex.

Berk (2003:444) postulates that in early adolescence, young people unify separate traits, such as “smart” and “talented” into higher-order, abstract descriptors, such as “intelligent”. But these generalisations about the self are not interconnected, and often they are contradictory. For example, thirteen to fifteen year olds might mention such opposing traits as “intelligent” and “airhead” or “shy” and “outgoing”. These disparities result from social pressures to display different selves in different relationships – with parents, classmates, close friends, and romantic partners. As the adolescent’s social world expands, contradictory self-descriptions increase, and teenagers frequently agonise over “which is the real me” (Harter & Monsour, 1992:251-260).

According to Damon (1990:90), by middle to late adolescence, teenagers combine their various traits into an organised system and they begin to use qualifiers (“I have a fairly quick temper,” “I’m not thoroughly honest”), which reveal their awareness that psychological qualities often change from one situation to the next. Older adolescents also add integrating principles, which make sense of formerly troublesome contradictions. For example one young person remarked, “I’m very adaptable. When I’m around my friends, who think what I say is important, I’m very talkative; around my family I’m quiet because they’re never interested enough to really listen to me”.

Compared with school-aged children, teenagers also place more emphasis on social virtues, such as being friendly, considerate, kind, and co-operative. Adolescents are very preoccupied with being liked and being viewed positively by others, and their statements about themselves reflect this concern (Berk, 2003:445).

3.3.2.1 Psychological difficulties in adolescence

Although by far the majority of teenagers weather the search for identity as well as the other challenges presented by the period without any major psychological difficulties, some find adolescence particularly stressful. Some even develop severe psychological problems. Two of the most vexing are adolescent depression and suicide.

(i) Adolescent depression

No one is immune to periods of sadness and bad moods, and adolescents are no exception. The termination of a close relationship with someone, failure at an important task, the death of a loved one and so forth, may result in feelings of sadness, loss and grief. In situations such as these, depression is a fairly typical reaction.

As is the case among adults, adolescent females, on average, experience depression more often than males. Although depression has several causes, in cases of severe long-term depression, biological factors are often involved. Some adolescents seem to be genetically predisposed to experience depression. However, environmental and social factors relating to extraordinary changes in the social lives of adolescents are also an important cause. For example, an adolescent who experiences the death of a loved one or grows up with a depressed parent is at a higher risk of depression. In addition, being unpopular, having few close friends and experiencing rejection are all factors associated with adolescent depression (Vernberg, 1990:187-198).

One of the most puzzling questions about depression is why its incidence is higher among girls than boys. For Feldman (1998:482), some psychologists speculate that stress is more pronounced for girls than for boys in adolescence, due to the many, sometimes contradictory aspects of the traditional female gender role, such as the inconsistency between academic success and popularity which some girls perceive.

There may also be other causes of girls' generally higher levels of depression during adolescence. They may be more apt than boys to react to stress by internalising it, thereby experiencing a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. In contrast, boys more often react by externalising the stress and acting more impulsively or aggressively or by turning to drugs and alcohol and truancy.

(ii) Adolescent suicide

According to Gelman (1994:44-49), the rate of suicide is higher for boys than for girls, although girls attempt suicide more frequently. Males are generally more successful, because of the

methods they use, since they tend to use more violent means, such as guns, while females are more apt to choose the more peaceful strategy of drug overdose.

Although an explanation for the increase in adolescent suicide has not been found, it is clear that certain factors heighten the risk of suicide. One major factor is depression. Depressed teenagers who are experiencing a profound sense of hopelessness are at greater risk of committing suicide. In addition, social inhibition, perfectionism and a high level of anxiety are all factors related to a greater risk of suicide. Further cases of suicide are closely associated with family conflicts and adjustment difficulties, while others follow a history of abuse and neglect. The rate of suicide among drug and alcohol abusers is also relatively high (Garland & Zigler, 1993:169-182).

Hazell (1993:653-665) cites that some suicides appear to be caused by exposure to the suicide of others. In cluster suicide, one suicide leads to attempts by others to kill themselves. For instance, some high schools have experienced a series of suicides following well publicised cases. As a result, many schools have established crisis intervention teams to counsel learners when one learner commits suicide.

In view of the above discussion on the psychological difficulties in adolescence, it seems that boys are comparatively speaking, more prone than girls to escape from their difficulties by readily engaging in the problematic. It also appears that the common action in suicide is egression. "Egression is a person's escape or exit from a stressful situation, the suicidal person's action to terminate the pain by changing the scene" (Shneidman, 1985:28). It would therefore appear that truant behaviour among adolescents is preceded by the same pattern, namely an intense desire to escape from stressful situations, which may not only include their school environment, but also epitomise a general need for egression, away from certain life-situations.

A question to be posed at the end of this discussion is whether escapist behaviour is typical of adolescents and why, or does it also occur among other age groups?

3.3.3 Cognitive development

According to Piaget, the capacity for abstract thinking commences around the onset of adolescence, as the young child reaches the formal operational stage of development (Berk, 2003:245). This developmental stage marks the beginning of the adolescent's ability to reason like a scientist searching for solutions in the laboratory. Concrete operational children can only 'operate on reality', but formal operational adolescents can 'operate on operations'. In other words, concrete things and events are no longer required as objects of thought, since the adolescent is able to escape from his reliance on concrete actions and understand the world through mental transformations (Smith, 1982:27).

At adolescence, young people become capable of *hypothetical-deductive reasoning* (Berk, 2003:245). When faced with a problem, they start with a general theory of all possible factors that might affect an outcome and deduce from it specific hypotheses (or predictions) about what might happen. These hypotheses are then tested in an orderly fashion in order to check which ones work in the real world. It is clear from this approach that problem solving begins with possibility and proceeds to reality.

A second important characteristic of the formal operational stage is propositional thought. Adolescents can evaluate the logic of propositions (verbal statements) without referring to real-world circumstances. In a study conducted by Osherson and Markman (in Keenan, 2002:129) adolescents and younger children were given two types of problems. The participants were shown a pile of poker chips of different colours and were told that they were going to hear statements about the chips and that they should try and state whether these were true or false. In one condition, the experimenter concealed a chip in her hand and said:

"Either the chip in my hand is green or it is not green" or

"The chip in my hand is green and it is not green"

In this case only adolescents were able to state that the first statement was true and the second false. In another condition, the experimenter held either a red or a green chip in full view and made the same statements. School-age children focused on the concrete properties of the poker chips rather than on the logic of the statements. As a result, they were uncertain about both statements when the chip was hidden from view. When it was visible, they judged both

statements to be true if the chip was green and false if it was red. In contrast, adolescents analysed the logic of the statements as propositions. They understand that the “either – or” statement is always true and the “and” statement is always false, regardless of the poker chip’s colour.

According to Gouws and Kruger (1996:51), other abilities of the adolescent who has reached the level of formal-operational thought processes, may include: abstract thought processes, formulating problems and hypotheses, recognising incomplete conclusions, verifying results of personal reasoning, revision of personal thought processes, distinguishing between fact and fiction, managing many possibilities simultaneously, predicting possible consequences and the ability to perceive logical contradictions.

The preceding discussion reveals that adolescents are capable of higher order thought processes. However, at times, an impulsive and irrational decision is taken by learners in this particular age group, to stay away from certain classes or even to miss an entire school day, without taking into account the repercussions of their behaviour. Actions of this nature in fact contradict adolescents’ ability to engage in hypothetical-deductive reasoning. Therefore, the question to be posed at this juncture is why so many of them so readily partake in inappropriate scholastic behaviour such as playing truant.

Could it possibly be because the early adolescent, due to age or certain environmental factors, has not yet reached the level of formal-operational reasoning? Is it that adolescents occasionally engage in egocentric reasoning and other times are incapable of objectively approaching a matter and are largely pre-occupied with themselves? Could it be attributed to the fact that many of them have never acquired effective strategies from their parents to deal with pressure and thus imitate the escapist behaviour of parents who may indulge in substance abuse due to the inability to face parental obligations? Another possibility may be that many adolescents have not acquired certain life experiences necessary to distinguish between variables despite being cognitively advanced. Is there a possibility that their identities have not been fully established to resist the pressures of their peer group, or is it simply the environment which is the primary contributing factor?

However, given the large number of challenging transformations faced by the adolescent, one should consider that it is a stressful developmental phase. Spear (2000:417-463) suggests that

the adolescent is in a chronic state of threatened homeostasis and that the adaptive processes experienced during this period are crucial. These adaptive processes may take the form of neuro-behavioural and hormonal responses to external social and interpersonal expectations.

With recent developments in the field of brain imaging, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) has been used to follow maturing brain patterns in adolescents. Dr. Jay Giedd of the National Institute of Mental Health Clinical Centre in Bethesda, Maryland, suggests that the best estimate for when the brain is fully mature, is at the age of 25 years. He continues to comment that it is debatable as to how much conscious control teenagers have, as there is scientific evidence that the adolescent brain is 'not up to scratch' (Wallis 2004:53). By this Giedd implies that on certain social and biological grounds, adolescents have increased difficulty in making mature decisions and understanding the consequences of their actions.

The physiological development of the brain is also a factor to be examined. According to Wallis (2004:49), brain development takes place in stages from back to front, so that some of the regions that mature first, through the process of proliferation and pruning, are those situated in the back of the brain. These areas are in control of the sensory functions, hearing, vision, touch and spatial processing, environmental stimulus gathering and processing. The final section that develops is the prefrontal cortex, which is referred to as the home of executive functioning, planning, setting priorities, organising thoughts, suppressing impulses and weighing consequences. This theory of immature brain physiology could possibly be an explanation for the emotional reactions of early adolescents, risky behaviour evident in much teenage functioning and errors in decision-making and judgement.

When evaluating, one could conclude that the part of the adolescent brain which transmits signals of responsible behaviour, has not yet developed as well as the part of the brain which gathers information from the environment. Although the brain is developed enough to process information, it is not able to make sound, responsible judgements with the information it has received, which may lead to adolescent dysfunctional behaviour, such as gangsterism, drug abuse and truancy.

Although Piaget did not view language as playing a key role in children's cognitive development, he acknowledged that it is more important during adolescence. Abstract thought requires language-based systems of representation that do not stand for real things, such as those that

exist in higher mathematics. Secondary school learners use these systems in algebra and geometry. Formal operational thought also involves verbal reasoning about abstract concepts. Adolescents demonstrate their capacity to think in this way when they ponder the relations between time, space and matter in physics and wonder about justice and freedom in philosophy and social studies (Berk, 2003:246).

3.3.4 Socio-emotional development

Emotions are one of the most salient aspects of experiences and it is therefore not surprising that the study of emotion has captured the attention of developmental researchers of virtually all theoretical persuasions. It plays an extremely important role in our everyday behaviour.

Upon becoming an adolescent, the child faces a paradox: He or she must remain in the role of son and daughter while at the same time gradually moving away from the position of a dependent child to that of an independent adult (Moshman, 1991:5). For most adolescents, this transition is accomplished without extreme conflict. Their autonomy shows striking differences, yet they do not abandon their emotional ties to their parents. This, however, is especially true for girls.

Adolescents apparently settle for 'ritual signs of independence' such as holding part-time jobs, having some money of their own and having a social life independent from that of their families. Although parents are thought to become more restrictive during their children's teenage years, Bandura (in Berk, 2003:505) found that parents tend to relax their control over their children as the children become increasingly able to take responsibility for their own behaviour. Although parents and adolescents are supposed to be in continual conflict, Bandura found that such conflicts are greatly reduced during the teenage years. Moreover, although parents are supposed to disapprove of their adolescent children's friends and companions, Bandura postulates that the peer group actually reinforces parental standards of behaviour and thus serves as a substitute for parental control. Hence, in the eyes of numerous parents, the most fitting symbol of adolescence is the telephone, since it appears to be an indispensable lifeline, sustaining ties to friends with whom they may have already spent many hours earlier in the day.

There are several reasons for the prominence of peers during adolescence. According to Feldman (1998:490), peers provide the opportunity to compare and evaluate opinions, abilities

and even physical changes – a process called *social comparison*. Because physical and cognitive changes are so pronounced, especially during the early stages of puberty, adolescents turn increasingly to others who share and consequently can shed light on their own experiences.

Parents are unable to provide social comparisons. Not only are they well beyond the changes that adolescents undergo, but adolescents' questioning of adult authority and their motivation to become more autonomous make parents, other family members and adults in general inadequate and invalid sources of social knowledge.

At the very start of adolescence, groups tend to mirror the makeup of middle childhood groups, in that they are composed almost universally of same-sex individuals. Boys hang out with boys; girls hang out with girls. Technically, this sex segregation is called the *sex cleavage*. However, the situation changes in short order as members of both sexes enter puberty. Both the hormonal surge that marks puberty and causes the maturation of the sex organs as well as societal pressure suggesting that the time is appropriate for romantic involvement, lead to a change in the ways the opposite sex is viewed. Rather than seeing every member of the opposite sex as 'annoying' and a 'pain', boys and girls begin to regard each other with greater interest, in terms of both personality and sexuality (Keenan, 2002:491).

Feldman (1998:491) cites that as soon as this change occurs, boys and girls' cliques, which previously had moved along parallel but separate tracks, begin to converge. Adolescents begin to attend boy-girl dances or parties, although most of the time the boys still spend time with boys, the girls with girls. A little later, however, adolescents increasingly spend time with members of the opposite sex. New cliques emerge, composed of both males and females. Not everyone participates initially: Early on, the teenagers who are leaders of the same-sex cliques and who have the highest status, pilot the way. Eventually, however, most adolescents find themselves in cliques that include boys and girls.

In view of their greater concern with what their friends think of them, early adolescents seem more likely than younger or older individuals to give in to peer pressure. Berk (2003:617) states that early adolescents whose parents are supportive and exert appropriate oversight, hold their parents in high regard, and this attitude of respect acts as an antidote to antisocial peer pressure. In contrast, early adolescents who experience extremes of parental behaviour – both too much or too little control and monitoring – tend to be highly peer orientated. They more often

tend to rely on friends for advice about their personal lives and future and are more willing to defy not only parents' rules but also those of the school. In this regard, Steinberg (2001:1-19) maintains that early adolescents' personal characteristics also make a difference. Young people who feel competent and worthwhile are less likely to fall in line behind peers who engage in early sex, delinquency, frequent drug use and truancy.

3.3.5 Conative development

Conative constructs are among the most interesting and potentially useful constructs that reflect human motivational behaviour and will power. There are of course also important cognitive and affective constructs, as discussed earlier. However, the distinction between cognition, conation and affection is convenient and historically well-founded in psychology, though it should be regarded as a matter of emphasis rather than a true partition, since all human behaviour, especially including instructional learning and achievement involves some mixture of all three aspects.

By way of formal definition, conation represents

... that aspect of mental process or behaviour by which it tends to develop into something else; an intrinsic 'unrest' of the organism ...almost the opposite of homeostasis. A conscious tendency to act; a conscious striving...Impulse, desire, volition, purposeful striving, all emphasise the conative aspects (Richard & Douglas, 2005).

Differently stated, conation could be regarded as the will or the longing function of the human psyche. It works outwardly and longs to change the status quo – actively striving for transformation in the surrounding reality of the person.

Among the constructs placed in the conative category are several kinds of achievement motivational distinctions, including need for achievement and need for fear of failure, but also various beliefs about one's abilities and their use, feelings of self-esteem and self efficacy, and attitudes and interests concerning particular subject matter learning; volitional aspects pertaining to persistence and academic work ethic, will to learn, mental effort investment and mindfulness in learning; intentional constructs reflecting control or regulation of actions leading toward

chosen goals, attitudes towards the future and self awareness about proximal goals and consequences; and many kinds of learning styles and strategies hypothesised to influence cognitive processes and outcomes of instruction. Many other, more traditional personality or style constructs such as intellectual flexibility, conscientiousness, extraversion or reflection-impulsivity, could also be added to the list. Many of these constructs and measures may prove extremely useful not only in understanding early adolescents' commitment to learning or lack thereof, but also their general functioning (Richard & Douglas, 2005).

During early adolescence, the child at secondary school is not only in the process of learning and becoming as well as progressively orientating him- or herself in regard to people, objects ideas and him or herself, but is also actively involved with these entities in his or her life world. For the young adolescent, this involvement implies being drawn closer to and therefore being involved with other people and situational issues he or she is confronted with.

Involving him- or herself, at least requires a modicum of functional knowledge. Lazarus (1991:38) notes that one cannot be involved with an issue of which one knows nothing and with which one has no concern. Involvement not merely implies that one wants to be involved, but is also based on one's intention to know more and one's desire to be involved.

To be able to best understand the early adolescent's urge for involvement with people, issues and situations, we need to understand the connection between involvements and will. Kuypers (in Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2002:375), defines the will as the longing function of the human psyche. It works outside and longs to change the status quo or the existing circumstances. Kuyper further stresses that the will must not be seen as a separate entity, since it is simply a function of the soul, a specific, active aspect of the personality. This is confirmed by May (in Feldman, 2002:375), who sees the will as the basic intentionality of human existence. He describes the connection between the person in totality and the world he or she is conscious of: "Meaning has no meaning apart from intention. Each act of consciousness is the turning of the early adolescent toward something, and has within it, no matter how latent, some push toward a direction or action". In other words, May underscores the intrinsic interaction between an objective – seen as a value to which meaning has been attributed – and the will. It is therefore the person and particularly the early adolescent in his or her totality, who wants to assign meaning.

Despite this involvement of the-in-totality with all psychological functions, the conative functions may be distinguished by the following properties:

- Knowledge – the conscious cognitive process is essential to all conative processes;
- Setting an objective – an objective includes all the possibilities of which a person can be aware, everything that has value for him or her. In the broadest sense, values comprise whatever satisfies or means happiness to a given person at a given time;
- Choice – once objectives are known and their implications have been considered, a decision is then taken. This is the objective: “I want to achieve”. This completes the preparation and action now follows; and
- Conative action – as soon as the decision is taken – the objective selected – internal or external action begins either psychological or motor action. What is then involved is a conative attitude, an attitude of the will, by which the action is maintained over a long period.

The task of the will lies in the action by which the self is actualised and its life-world structured. For the early adolescent, it includes the dynamic progressive orientation, shaping and re-shaping of an entire life that is constantly in transit, by way of change and improvement, to a more structured and integrated existence.

Every child, particularly the early adolescent, wants to be grown-up and this means that he or she is involved in every task of learning or becoming. Not only must he understand its purpose – he must also see how to perform the conative action. This certainly calls for educational assistance, to expose not only the meaning of the objective – the where to – but also the how. The educator working with the early adolescent must help him or her to get involved in assigning meaning to the task of becoming and in carrying it out. Involvement therefore presupposes a valued objective to the early adolescent learner. He or she sees himself or herself as grown-up, when certain tasks can be successfully performed (Reisenberg & Schönphlug, 1992:175).

However, should an early adolescent learner experience discouragement as a result of the absence or poor environmental support structures, he or she may become totally subjected to a lack of motivation and despondency. The central and deep-rooted feeling in such a child is that

of uninvolved, hopelessness and demotivation, which may tarnish his or her personal development. For such a learner, school may evolve to become a secondary aspect of life, because his or her future aspirations seem bleak which in most cases serve as a catalyst for truant behaviour particularly among early adolescents.

Involvement in the actualisation of cultural values and norms constitutes an empirical-educational category. The intensity of early adolescent's involvement is particularly evidenced by the degree of attention, absorption, interest, perseverance, dedication, expectation and practice in the activities he or she engages with.

From the above research regarding the different aspects of development, one can see how the early adolescent to a greater or lesser extent may be influenced to opt for truancy as an alternative to sound and more responsible problem-solving strategies. In essence, the child in this developmental stage has to adjust to rapid physical transformation that may influence his or her perception of him or herself and identity figures surrounding him or her. All of this could be complicated even further by uncontrollable hormonal changes. Also, the early adolescent is no longer a child or an adult and seeks solitude and freedom from parental or authoritative control which they are in most cases denied. Furthermore, parents' ignorance in dealing effectively with their early adolescent child, may lead to the child feeling insecure, with the end result being seeking peer group refuge and acceptance as an option. On the other hand, negative experiences during the early critical developmental phases, resulting in identity confusion, may pave the way for escapist behaviour which manifests itself in antisocial acts of substance abuse, suicide, gangsterism and truancy. Despite the fact that the adolescent has reached the level of abstract reasoning, proof exists that cognitive development during the early adolescent phase is not yet complete. However, given the immature brain physiology of the early adolescent, it poses poor judgmental functioning mechanisms, which may predispose itself to the inability of more responsible behaviour. On an emotional level the early adolescent is caught between the uncertainties of finding an identity, making social peer groups an attraction which nourishes his or her search for identity. Finally, the adolescent may be overwhelmed with internal and external factors which could result in him or her becoming completely discouraged, losing confidence in his or her abilities, withdrawing from scholastic responsibilities as well as adopting a care free attitude in general.

3.4 CONCLUSION

The main aim of this chapter was to analyse the developmental level of early adolescents, who specifically fall in the fourteen to sixteen year old age group and find themselves in the junior secondary school phase, since all the learners who are involved in the proposed empirical investigation, fit this profile.

Firstly, in order to come to a better understanding of the particular developmental phase of the early adolescent, various theoretical perspectives on child development were explored. The diversity of theories makes understanding children's development a challenging undertaking. However, in this exploration, it has become very clear that each theory has contributed an important piece to the child development puzzle. Although the theories sometimes disagree about certain aspects of the developmental phase of the early adolescent, much of the information is complementary rather than contradictory. It has furthermore occurred to me that children's development is a complex, multifaceted topic, and no single theory is able to account for all its aspects. Yet, the various theories offer the opportunity to view the total landscape of children's development in all its diversity and richness.

Secondly, it has emerged from the discussion on the process of change during the early adolescent developmental phase that it takes on added significance, since the beginning of the transition to adulthood has commenced. Many important changes take place in adolescents. Physically, they are growing rapidly and maturing sexually. Intellectually, they are becoming able to use more abstract means of thought and expression. Socially, they are breaking ties with parents and forming intense relationships with peers.

Also noteworthy is that adolescence is a critical period of human development for the early adolescent, not only because of the physical, sociological and psychological transformations that take place during these years, but also because it can be a vulnerable time for the child, since it is a new and sometimes frightening experience. Finally, it has also become clear that the physical, intellectual, emotional and social changes of early adolescents are highly interdependent. Physical and social changes in particular, interact to produce what to many parents and educators seem to be a completely unfamiliar and unpredictable creature, namely, the teenager or early adolescent.

The chapter to follow will present the research design and methodology for the empirical investigation that was used to explore the phenomenon of truancy among early adolescent learners. These learners attend various secondary schools in the eastern metropole of the Western Cape Province and the inquiry aims to determine the causes, nature and prevalence of this escalating problem in the demarcated area.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

A critical determinant of the quality of any empirical study and the significance of its findings lie in its research design. From the preceding literature study it is evident that the problem of truant behaviour among early adolescent learners is sufficiently complex to warrant a carefully planned procedure for its investigation. This complexity arises out of the degree to which a given condition or social reality, in this particular case, truancy, is regarded as problematic.

My perception of this problem is that currently there is great concern about the increasing number of mainly early adolescent learners, who intentionally engage in truant behaviour with various degrees of frequency. Hence, this study poses the following research question within the current context of truant behaviour particularly presented by early adolescent learners in the eastern metropole of the Western Cape: *How can educators, in loco parentis, be equipped with the skills and resources necessary to address the problem of truancy?*

In seeking an answer to the above research problem, the following sub-problems were addressed in this study:

- ❑ What is the nature of truancy in the area of the study?
- ❑ What are important elements of the developmental level of the early adolescent which could relate to truancy?
- ❑ How do learners in general view the phenomenon of truancy?
- ❑ What characterises the life-world of an early adolescent who plays truant and one who does not?

- What guidelines can be developed to be used by schools to address the problem of truancy and other forms of non-attendance?

Leedy (1993:139) states that all research methodology rests upon a bedrock axiom: *The nature of the data and the problem for research dictate the research methodology*. All data, all factual information, all human knowledge must ultimately reach the researcher either as words or numbers. Leedy (1993:141) subsequently identifies qualitative research methodologies as dealing with data that are principally verbal, and quantitative research methodologies as dealing with data that are principally numerical.

4.2 TYPES OF RESEARCH

The direction of the research process and the research methodology of any investigation are determined by the choice of the researcher between a quantitative or qualitative, or combined quantitative-qualitative approach. According to Schutt (2004:15), social scientists often combine these methods in order to enrich their research. For example, Hampton and Wellman, (in Schutt 2004:16) used surveys to generate counts of community network usage and other behaviour. However, to interpret these behaviours, they also observed social interaction and recorded spoken comments. In this way, qualitative data about social settings can be used to better understand patterns in quantitative data (Campbell & Russo, 1999:141).

The use of multiple methods to study one research question is called triangulation. The term suggests that a researcher can get a clearer picture of the social reality being studied by viewing it from several different perspectives. Each will have some liabilities in a specific research application and all can benefit from combination with one or more other methods.

The distinction between quantitative and qualitative data is not always sharp. Qualitative data can be converted to quantitative data, when the frequency of particular words or phrases in a text is counted or when the time that elapses between different observed behaviour is measured. Surveys that collect primarily quantitative data may also include questions asking for written responses, and these responses may be used in qualitative, textual analysis (Schutt, 2004:17).

The empirical investigation of the present study was based on qualitative as well as quantitative research methodology. The following methods were applied in order to carry out the investigation:

- (ii) Focus group interview – to obtain data that was used qualitatively, but also to gather quantitative information that could be used to structure the questionnaire;
- (iii) Interviews – with school principals in the area where the investigation was conducted to obtain their views with regards to truant behaviour by learners attending their respective schools;
- (iv) Questionnaire – to ascertain the general feeling among early adolescents with regard to their peers, school experiences and parental influences. The questionnaire that was both applied qualitative and quantitative, since it contained an open-ended question as well as closed items; and
- (iv) Case studies – to conduct qualitative in-depth studies of two early adolescents in order to compare their life-worlds: one, who presents with truant behaviour and the other, a so-called non-truant.

4.3 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

For the purpose of the quantitative component of the research, a questionnaire was designed and administered.

4.3.1 Questionnaire

According to the New Dictionary of Social Work (1995:51), a questionnaire can be defined as “a set of questions on a form which is completed by the respondent in respect of a research project”. The questions can be open (e.g. “Do you have any comments on this matter?”) or closed with an option to respond either “yes” or “no” (e.g. Have you ever missed classes in the past month?). Alternatively, the questionnaire may contain statements to which respondents are requested to react.

The basic objective of such a questionnaire is to obtain facts and opinions about a phenomenon from people who are informed on the particular matter. Gillham (2000:66) cites that there can be no precise formula for identifying questionnaire features that reduce error. Some key principles should guide the design of any questionnaire and some systematic procedures should be considered for refining it. Simply asking what appear to be clear questions does not ensure that respondents have a consistent understanding of what is being asked. The more external feedback is obtained, for example, from some type of pre-test, the better. Pre-testing of some sort is an essential step in preparing any survey.

One important form of feedback results from simply discussing the questionnaire content with others. Persons who may be consulted in this regard include expert researchers, key figures in the locale or organisations to be surveyed and individuals from the population to be sampled. Forming a panel of experts to review the questions can also help. Presser and Blair (in Schutt, 2004:241) recommend a panel of a psychologist, a questionnaire design expert and a general methodologist.

Another increasingly popular form of feedback comes from guided discussions among potential respondents, called focus groups, to check for consistent understanding of terms and to identify the range of events or experiences about which people will be asked to report. By listening to, and observing the focus group discussions, researchers can validate their assumptions about what level of vocabulary is appropriate, identify key concepts which can be further investigated in questionnaires and case studies, and what respondents are going to be reporting on (Fowler, 1995:167). Questionnaires are probably the most generally used quantitative measuring instruments of all. Different types of questionnaires can be identified of which an overview is presented below.

4.3.2 Mailed questionnaire

A mailed questionnaire is, according to Grinnell and Williams (1990:216-217), a questionnaire which is sent off by mail in the hope that the respondent will complete and return it. The researcher compiles the questionnaire and it is accompanied by clear, carefully worded prescriptions at the level of understanding of the target population to be reached. The respondent enjoys a high degree of freedom and in completing the questionnaire and information can be obtained from a large number of respondents within a brief period of time.

4.3.3 Telephonic questionnaires

As in the case of the mailed questionnaire, the researcher and respondents are physically removed from each other, but are able to communicate with each other about the contents of the questionnaire. However, the communication is handicapped in that no non-verbal communication is possible.

4.3.4 Personal questionnaires

In this case the questionnaire is handed to the respondent who completes it on his or her own, but the researcher is available in the event of any problems. The researcher limits his or her own contribution to the completion of the questionnaire to the absolute minimum. The researcher thus largely remains in the background and can, at most, encourage the respondent with a few words to continue with his or her contribution or lead him or her back to the topic.

4.3.5 Questionnaires delivered by hand

These questionnaires are delivered by hand, so that respondents can complete them in their own time, and are collected later. It is important that an appointment be made for collecting the questionnaires and this should preferably not be more than forty-eight hours after delivery. By handling questionnaires in this way, much time is normally saved. Response rates are raised because of the personal contact and the fact that the fieldworkers merely distribute the questionnaire and do not bother the respondents at an inconvenient time. Respondents who are seldom at home and thus difficult to reach, may also be involved in this way.

4.3.6 Group-administered questionnaires

In this case respondents who are present in a group complete a questionnaire on their own. Preferably each respondent should receive the same stimulus and complete his or her own questionnaire without discussion with other members of the group. The great advantage of this method is that much time and costs are saved because a group of respondents is handled simultaneously and consequently also exposed simultaneously to the same stimulus.

In view of the fact that the respondents in the proposed investigation comprise large groups of learners who attend various secondary schools in the area of study, it was decided to apply a group-administered questionnaire.

4.3.6.1 Motivation for the design of the questionnaire

As indicated in 1.5, the main aim of this study was to ascertain how educators, *in loco parentis*, specifically in the eastern EMDC of the Western Cape, can be equipped to deal with the problem of truant behaviour among early adolescents. The questionnaire was designed and applied to learn more about the life-world of truants and non-truants in the afore-mentioned age group.

The previous literature overview has indicated how the influence of the domestic situation, experiences in their learning environment, peer interaction, and the functioning of the 'self', of early adolescents in general and / or specifically children in the area of investigation, may all have a bearing on truant behaviour. In the light of this literature overview, the relevant empirical evidence was sought through the application of a questionnaire.

4.3.6.2 The design of the questionnaire

With reference to the above-mentioned discussion and in view of the fact that a sample of three hundred early adolescent learners was assessed, it was decided to make use of a group-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised different sections which each measured a particular aspect of truant behaviour, presented by early adolescents. A coding system was used not only to ensure frank and honest responses, but also to enhance the validity and reliability of the questionnaire.

Section A focussed on the biographical data of the respondents. Responses to the questions in this section supplied a brief overview of each respondent's personal and family background. In the following section, Section B, respondents' perceptions pertaining to the influences of peer interaction were explored and how these might serve as an impetus for truancy. The focus of Section C was on respondents' perceptions regarding the nature of their parents' involvement and responsibilities in their scholastic education. Statements and questions were formulated in such a way as to elicit responses that would inform whether the respondents' parents thought that regular school attendance was important or not. Section D aimed to establish respondents'

attitudes and feelings about the role educators might play toward learners' tendencies to engage in truant behaviour and whether they felt valued and respected at school, as human beings. Section E explored the learners' experience themselves in their learning environment. Aspects focussed on in this particular section, included the learners' future perspective, self-confidence, self-value, motivational level and self-reliance.

The sections in the questionnaire as discussed in the fore-going paragraph emerged from the focus group interview, literature study and my experience as an educator and Educational Psychologist. The rationale for the inclusion of all these sections is that peers, parents, school and several other environmental factors, have a marked influence on the self of learners. A copy of the questionnaire is attached as annexure A.

4.3.6.3 Item analysis

To determine whether the items in the questionnaire are homogeneous, their properties were electronically assessed. This is a necessary step, since the items were selected on the basis of face validity and some items may therefore be invalid.

According to Owen and Taljaard (1995:32), item analysis has several purposes. It permits us to identify and exclude items which may be too simple or too difficult to respond to. The final form of the test or questionnaire can be improved through the selection, replacement, or revision of items. This form of analysis also makes allowance to shorten an assessment instrument, while at the same time increasing its validity and reliability. Finally, it yields the internal consistency of the instrument.

4.3.6.4 Selection of subjects

The eastern EMDC of the Western Cape, where I render psycho-educational services, comprises of eighteen secondary schools. These schools are located across areas of both higher and lower socio-economic status with vast cultural diversity. Through my involvement with these schools, it has become evident that truant behaviour is particularly prevalent in the lower socio-economic areas, predominantly occupied by the same cultural groups.

Therefore, the aim of the intended study was to determine the causes and circumstances underlying truant behaviour at schools that fall in the lower socio-economic areas which I serve. For this purpose, it was decided to apply the questionnaire at six of the eighteen secondary schools in the specified area. The main aim of the questionnaire was to ascertain who the truants and the so-called non truants are, so as to non randomly select two suitable candidates for the in-depth case studies as motivated in 4.4.3.4. It clearly emerged from the literature study that early adolescents, in other words learners from the age of fourteen to sixteen years old, are more likely to engage in truant behaviour. Hence, it was decided to apply the questionnaire to three hundred grade eight learners at the six secondary schools. Both genders were included in the application of the questionnaire. All respondents remained anonymous.

4.3.6.5 Application of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was applied at all six schools on the same day, during the morning session. All the participating learners were grouped in the halls at the respective schools. I was responsible for the invigilation at one of the six schools, while five of my colleagues took charge of this task on my behalf at the remaining five schools. To secure honest responses, respondents' anonymity was maintained by making use of a numbering system, whereby each learner's questionnaire was allocated a number which was recorded next to his or her name on a class list.

Prior to the commencement of the application of the questionnaire, the following comments and instructions were read to the respondents:

- Kindly note, since your anonymity will be secured, you are requested to answer the questionnaire as honestly as possible.
- There are no correct or incorrect answers – all questions should be answered as honestly as possible.
- The majority of the questions may be answered by simply drawing a circle around the relevant code.
- In some cases you are required to write a few words or enter a number in the relevant block.

- Do not encircle more than one code per question.
- After completing the questionnaire, kindly return it to the person who issued it to you.

4.3.6.6 Data analysis

(i) Reliability of the questionnaire

In order to determine the reliability of the four above-mentioned sections (aspects) which were included in the questionnaire, an item analysis was conducted.

(ii) Interpretation of the questionnaire

The scoring of the questionnaire was done quantitatively and executed electronically. Inaccurately completed questionnaires were discarded.

The questionnaire consisted of five sections ranging from A to E. Section A covered the biographical detail of the respondents. Section B consisted of thirteen statements, while section C to E were each represented by ten statements pertaining to the respondents' perceptions of various influences in their life-worlds which might or might not have encouraged them to display truant behaviour. Each statement in sections B to E was responded to by the participants according to a five-point scale. The numbering used in the five point scale was 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. A low score would be indicative of an unfavourable social environment, while a high score would indicate a favourable social environment. The interpretation of the different sections is presented below.

In order to create a more reader friendly questionnaire it was decided to replace the numbering on the questionnaire with facial expressions. The numbering of the five-point scale was replaced by the following facial expressions:



Should a respondent strongly agree with a statement, he or she would choose the most friendly, approving expression represented by number 5. In the event of strong disagreement, the most unfriendly, disapproving expression would be chosen, represented by number 1. A facial expression of moderate agreement represented number 4, while an expression of moderate disagreement represented number 2. A neutral facial expression represented number 3.

Statements 1 to 7 and 14 to 43 were formulated in a favourable manner, while statements 8 to 13 were formulated unfavourably. This factor was taken into account in the interpretation of the results.

(iii) Research problems emerging from the questionnaire

Research problem 1:

How do secondary school learners feel about various truancy aspects?

Research problem 2:

Is there a significant difference between different groups regarding the truancy aspects (friends; parents/care givers; educators; self-esteem)?

Research problem 3:

How many learners have already tranted?

Research problem 4:

Is there a significant difference between different groups regarding whether they have truanted or not?

For research problem one and three, frequencies and percentages were used to analyse the results. For research problem two and its related hypotheses, Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted followed by Bonferroni t-tests if significant differences were found, to determine *which* groups differed significantly. Chi-square tests were used for research problem four.

To facilitate the analysis, some variables were grouped together because only a few respondents fell into some of the groups listed in the questionnaire. For example, the “whom the learner lives with” variable, had only three respondents living with either a sister or aunt, and none living with an uncle or a brother. Hence, grandparents, sister and aunt were grouped together. The same was done for the number of people living in a household - four categories were formed from the original eight.

(iv) Description and purpose of the statistical techniques used in the analysis of the aforementioned research problems.

□ Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

According to Pretorius (1995:125), this technique entails a statistical strategy in which the total variance in a set of scores is analysed into various sources. Each of the factors in a factorial design is a source of variance, as are each of the possible interactions.

The same author cites that the purpose of the ANOVA is to compare the means of two or more groups in order to decide whether the observed difference between them represents a chance occurrence or a systematic effect.

□ Bonferroni t-tests

This kind of test refers to a multiple comparison procedure in which the family wise error rate is divided by the number of comparisons.

The traditional Bonferroni is probably the most commonly used of all tests of this nature, because it is highly flexible, very simple to compute and can be used with any kind of statistical test. Several alternatives to the traditional Bonferroni have been developed, including those developed by Holm, Holland and Copenhagen, Hommel, Rom and others. These tests have greater power than the Bonferroni while retaining its flexibility approach that allows for use with any set of statistical tests such as t-tests, correlations and chi-squares (Howell, 2006).

□ Chi-square tests

The logic of Chi-square is based on the difference between the observed and expected frequencies. The observed frequencies refer to the actual frequencies, where as the expected frequencies on the other hand refer to the observations that we would have expected, all things being equal.

Chi-square tests are frequently used because behavioural researchers often are interested in counting the number of subjects falling into particular categories. For example, a researcher developing a measure of self-concept might want to know whether or not subjects' scores are normally distributed. In order to do this, the researcher would divide the theoretical, normal distribution into categories. He would then build a frequency polygon of the observed responses and divide it into the same categories. The observed number of responses falling in each area of the frequency distribution could be compared with the expected frequency based on the normal distribution to see if the responses were normally distributed (Pretorius, 1995:127).

(v) □ Open-ended qualitative question

Please answer the following open-ended question in the space provided:

Have you ever truanted ("bunked" classes)?
Please mark your answer with an X.

YES

NO

Briefly explain your reason(s) for truanting or not truanting.

If your answer is NO, why do you think other learners truant?

The rationale for the inclusion of this question was offering respondents the opportunity to express their opinions freely regarding their engagement with this type of behaviour.

This item was interpreted by checking for recurring themes in the learners' responses which were then classified according to certain distinctive aspects and interpreted qualitatively.

4.4 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The qualitative research comprised the following – focus group interview, semi-structured interviews and two case studies. Each of these are now discussed in more detail.

4.4.1 Focus group interview

According to Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson (2001:1), focus group interviews as a research method originated in the work of the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University in the 1940's. Under the leadership of Paul Lazarsfeld, the Columbia Bureau conducted commercial market research on audience responses to radio soap operas and the like.

A focus group interview could be described as purposive discussion of a specific topic or related topics taking place between six to ten individuals with a similar background and common interest. In this open conversation each participant may make comments, ask questions of other participants or respond to comments by other, including the researcher. Usually this kind of group interaction mainly consists of verbal and non-verbal communication and an interplay of

perceptions and opinions that will stimulate discussion without necessarily modifying or changing the ideas and opinions of participating individuals (Flick, 2002:114).

4.4.1.1 Motivation for the use of a focus group interview

Focus group interviews are designed to do exactly what the name implies – focus. Although participants in focus group interviews need not reach consensus, they have focuses and clear agendas. In fact, the topics of discussion in a focus group interview are carefully predetermined and sequenced in an understandable and logical way. As such they facilitate the natural, spontaneous discussion of phenomena of experiences by the participants.

In the present study, emphasis was placed on finding out as much as possible about the participants' experiences and feelings about the problem of truancy. In addition, key concepts relating to truant behaviour among early adolescent learners were identified which were further investigated in the questionnaire and the case studies.

4.4.1.2 The process of focus group interviewing

As with unstructured interviews with individuals, the focus group interview can be divided into specific phases. Although many decisions are taken in the course of focus group interviews, certain activities occur at particular stages. According to De Vos (1998:316), the following form part of the planning for focus group interviewing.

Since many factors related to location may influence the dynamics of focus group interaction and discussion, it is important to consider location when planning this type of interview. The location should be free from outside distractions, background music or the hum of ventilation systems, which may make the tape recording of discussions nearly impossible. It is necessary to have a room with chairs that can be arranged so those participants face each other.

Ideally, the researcher should encourage all participants to express themselves more while he or she says less and should take care not to fall into the trap of conducting individual interviews with each member of the group. The following steps are typical of conducting a focus group interview.

The participants are normally seated around a table to ensure maximum opportunity for eye contact with the researcher as well as other participants. To enhance rapport among all the participants, name tags are on the table in front of them.

Focus group interviews are normally tape-recorded and notes are taken by an assistant researcher. Special care should be taken that note-taking does not interfere with the spontaneous nature of the group discussion. Participants should be informed at the outset that the discussion is to be recorded in order to capture everyone's comments. Excessive attention to the tape recorder should be avoided as far as possible.

The focus group interview for this study was held at one of the six schools included in the empirical investigation. Six learners, one from each school, participated in the interview. These learners were identified as truants by their schools on the following grounds:

- They have been missing most their classes regularly without permission from their educators.
- Their ages ranged from fourteen to fifteen years old, which is the age when truancy is most common.

The learners were all seated in the library room of the above-mentioned school, while I sat at the head of the table. As explained to all the learners present, the main aim of the focus group interview was to conduct an open conversation, to gain insight into the life-worlds of learners who present with typical truant behaviour. They were invited to reflect openly on their perceptions and experiences as truanting learners. Therefore, the central request presented in the interview was:

As you might have learnt recently, there are many people who are very concerned about learners who do not complete their school careers, who deliberately miss out on their classes or simply just stay away from school without permission from their parents and the school. Please share your opinion with me regarding this serious problem and should you have any personal experience of engaging in this type of behaviour, I would be very interested to hear about it.

4.4.1.3 Data analysis

The focus group interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim to analyse the content and the expression of vocalisations and link these with non-verbal behaviours presented during the group session. The data analysis was conducted in an unstructured fashion to identify specific recurring themes pertaining to truant behaviour demonstrated by early adolescent learners.

To further facilitate the search for such themes, a log was kept of the major events that were captured on the tape recording, including other important aspects related to truancy, whereby the present study would benefit. The frequent recurring themes that have emerged from the focus group interview included:

- ❑ Educator unpleasantness and antipathy toward certain learners;
- ❑ Anxiousness, embarrassment and low scholastic attainment;
- ❑ Lack of social bonding with the school; and
- ❑ Family stress and disharmony.

The above-mentioned recurring themes were used to design the questionnaire and to structure the interviews in the case studies.

4.4.2 Interviews with principals of schools included in the empirical investigation

Interviews were conducted with principals and respondents in the case studies respectively.

The literature on the techniques of interviewing treats the interview as a pipeline for extracting and transmitting information from interviewee to the interviewer. It is an especially effective method of collecting information for certain types of research questions and for addressing certain types of assumptions. Particularly when investigators are interested in understanding the perceptions of participants or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events, interviewing provides a useful means of access (Berg, 2004:83).

In this way, the interview helps us to understand the closed worlds of individuals, families, organisations, institutions and communities. Learning about these 'closed worlds' depends on the ability of the interviewer to maximise the flow of valid, reliable information, while minimising distortions in the interviewee's recollection of events (Gillham, 2000:21).

A more detailed discussion of the interview as a research instrument will be presented in 4.4.3.5.

4.4.2.1 Interviews for the purpose of obtaining the views of the principals

In order to draw specific information from the principals of the secondary schools included in the empirical study regarding their perceptions of and attitudes towards truant behaviour, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all six principals. These interviews were conducted at the school in the principal's office.

4.4.2.2 Data analysis

The information obtained in these interviews was recorded by making brief notes while listening to what the principal had to say. The responses were checked for recurring themes as well as other important aspects concerning truant behaviour that may support the present study. This information will be presented in chapter five.

4.4.3 Case studies

Berg (2004:251) cites that case studies involve systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, or phenomenon to permit the researcher to better understand how the subject operates or functions. The case study is not actually a data-gathering technique, but is often referred to as a methodological approach that incorporates a number of data-gathering measures such as surveys, interviews, observations and document analysis (O'Leary, 2004:115). Case studies therefore have much in common with methodologies generally used to delve deeper, that is, they allow for in-depth exploration; are an examination of subtleties and intricacies; attempt to be holistic; explore processes as well as outcomes and investigate the context and setting of a situation.

4.4.3.1 The process of conducting case studies

O'Leary (2004:117) suggests that of the most crucial determinations in conducting any case study is selecting the right case. Whether a case is of intrinsic value, or is seen to be representative of a larger population, it must provide the researcher with sufficient data to make relevant arguments. In order to select an appropriate case, you need to:

- *Define a case* – this involves defining boundaries that separate some aspects of the case that makes it distinct. This might involve defining individuals on the basis of their job, educational level, experiences or cultural grouping. There are endless possibilities, but the key is to articulate your boundaries clearly and be able to argue the importance of an in-depth study of a case within those boundaries.
- *Determine how many cases you will explore* – a researcher may want to delve into only one case, or compare and contrast cases from two or more settings. The appropriate number of cases is highly dependent on the research goals of any given study and what it aims to uncover.
- *Select a case for study* – the selection of cases is generally random or non-random. Random selection involves the process by which each element in a population has an equal chance of selection, as opposed to non-random sampling, where the researcher handpicks cases on a pragmatic or theoretical basis (David & Sutton, 2004:80).

4.4.3.2 Case study design types

According to Yin (1994:41), there are several appropriate designs for case studies. These include exploratory, explanatory and descriptive case studies. Each approach is discussed in the ensuing paragraphs.

a. Exploratory case studies

This type of study may be seen as a prelude to a large social scientific study and must have some type of organisational framework that has been designed prior to beginning the research.

This sort of explanatory study may be useful as a pilot study, for example, when planning a large, more comprehensive investigation.

b. Explanatory case studies

Explanatory case studies are useful when conducting causal studies. Particularly in complex studies of organisations or communities, a researcher might desire to employ multivariate cases to examine a plurality of influences. This might be accomplished by using a pattern-matching technique in which several pieces of information from the same case may be related to some theoretical proposition.

c. Descriptive case studies

These types of case studies require the investigator to present a descriptive theory, which establishes the overall framework to follow throughout the study. What is implied by this approach is the formation and identification of a viable theoretical orientation before enunciating research questions. The investigator must also determine before beginning the research exactly what the unit of analysis in the study will be.

4.4.3.3 Choice of a case study design for the present study

For the purpose of the present study it was decided to embark on the explanatory as well as the descriptive approach. Since the aim of the present study was to gain an ideographic understanding of the underlying causality of truant behaviour presented by early adolescent learners, it was decided to employ the explanatory method. This particular approach, which normally yields valuable explanatory insights into cases under examination, formed the basis for the development of more general, nomothetic theories with regard to the problem of truancy.

In view of the fact that the empirical investigation was based on Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory, which offered a contextual framework for the approach to the case studies, the approach may also be viewed as descriptive. According to this approach, the environment may be regarded as a series of systems which includes the home, school and various broader community settings in which a person spends his or her life (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000:115-125).

The exploration and description of the two case studies took place through detailed, in-depth data collection methods involving multiple sources of information that are rich in context. These included interviews, personality tests, self-esteem tests, as well as projection media – namely incomplete sentences tests.

4.4.3.4 Selection of respondents for the two case studies

Two learners from the population group to whom the questionnaire was administered, were selected on a pragmatic basis. One of them may be considered to be a typical truant and the other, a non-truant. For the selection of the learner who presents with typical truant conduct, the following criteria were taken into consideration:

- ❑ Being absent from school without reasonable grounds seventeen times or more during the school year;
- ❑ Being absent from particular classes regularly without leave from the educator concerned;
- ❑ Leaving the school premises at any time of the day, after having been recorded as present in the attendance register; and
- ❑ Asking permission regularly to leave the classroom, never to return for the rest of the lesson or school day.

Based on these selection criteria, one learner who presents as a typical truant was randomly selected from the truant group who completed the questionnaire for the nomothetic research. Moreover, this learner's inclusion was furthermore subjected to parental permission and his own willingness to participate in the in-depth case study.

The random selection of the non-truant was done by gauging the responses in the questionnaire, which respondent presents as a typical non-truanting learner. Parental permission and a commitment from the learner were also obtained in this instance.

4.4.3.5 Selection of the assessment media for the two case studies

The assessment media were selected in such a way that it would help to gain a deeper understanding of the respondents, their functioning, personality and life-worlds in general. Through this and also by means of direct questioning, information about the truant and non-truant's attitudes with regard to truant behaviour could be inferred. Each of the assessment media that were used in the case studies will be discussed as follows.

a. Interviews

A brief general discussion of interviews has been done in 4.4.2. However, according to O'Leary (2004:164), the following types of interviews may be considered:

□ Structured interviews

At one end of the spectrum is the fully structured interview that uses pre-established questions, asked in a predetermined order, using a standard mode of delivery. Means for prompting and probing the interviewee are predetermined and used in defined circumstances. Researchers attempt to be objective, neutral and removed, and try to minimise personal interaction.

□ Semi-structured interviews

As the name suggests, these interviews are neither fully fixed nor fully free, and are perhaps best seen as flexible. Interviewers generally start with some defined questioning plan to draw out specific information, attitudes, opinions and beliefs around particular issues. A more conversational style of interview is pursued that may see questions answered in an order more natural to the flow of a conversation. They may also start with a few defined questions, but the interviewer should be ready to pursue any interesting tangents that may develop.

□ Unstructured interviews

At the other end of the spectrum is the unstructured interview that attempts to obtain certain information without the aid of predetermined questions. To do this, interviewers use a more conversational style and attempt to prompt, probe and develop questions on the spot as is

appropriate to the ongoing conversation. According to Leedy and Ormond (2005:146), unstructured interviews are flexible and more likely to yield information that the researcher had not planned to ask for; their primary disadvantage is that the researcher gets information from different people and may not be able to make comparisons among the interviews.

For the purpose of the present empirical study, it was decided to make use of semi-structured interviews in the case studies.

(i) Motivation for the use of semi-structured interviews

The general purpose of these interviews was to gather information about and gain insight into the experiential worlds of the interviewees concerning their perceptions and attitudes with regard to truant behaviour among early adolescent learners.

(ii) Data collection

The case studies were conducted at the particular school attended by the selected learners. Special permission was obtained for these learners to be exempted from their classes when necessary, for the administering of psychological assessment media on them.

Prior permission was sought from both participants in the case study to tape record the interview and transcribe it, and they were assured of confidentiality in the research report for ethical reasons. The tape recorder was small, aimed at being as unobtrusive as possible and note-taking was kept to a minimum, so as not to inhibit or distract the interviewee. This facilitated the smooth flow and unfolding of information about both participants' involvement in and attitudes and perceptions regarding truancy. A similar introduction was used consistently for all interviews, which included a brief explanation of the purpose of the study.

Before the commencement of each interview, issues that it was hoped that the respondent would focus on during the interview, were recorded on a grid. These issues that were derived from the literature, the focus group interview, and my personal observations as well as from other interviews with principals and educators were marked as they were addressed. Other issues recorded during the interview that required further clarification were marked as well as new trends and dynamics that emerged that required elaboration. Such clarification and

elaboration were obtained when appropriate, which could have been at that stage, later during the interview or on completion thereof.

(iii) Data analysis

The data analysis was done by listening for recurring themes such as domestic problems, difficulties coping with scholastic activities, peer pressure and so forth.

The following structure was used to interpret the information that emerged from the interviews:

- Additional biographical information;
- Family and environmental background;
- Intellectual image;
- Emotional image;
- Physical image;
- Conative image;
- Moral image; and
- Summary of the interview

b. High School Personality Questionnaire (HSPQ)

The High School Personality Questionnaire was developed in the USA, by Raymond B. Cattell and Mary D.L. Cattell. The main aim of this questionnaire was to develop an instrument which could offer a valid and reliable personality image of a person between the age of twelve and eighteen years old.

Personality may be defined in different ways. According to Visser, Garbers-Strauss and Prinsloo (1992:1), personality may be defined as a term that refers to the integrated and dynamic organisation of an individual's psychic, social, moral and physical characteristics, as it finds expression in his or her interaction with the environment and particularly with other people. Cattell views personality as that which tells us what any human being may do when placed in a given situation (Visser et al. 1992:1).

The HSPQ measures fourteen relatively independent personality dimensions or primary and various secondary factors. Each primary factor is represented as a bipolar continuum of which the two extreme poles are described, viz the left-hand pole (which represents a sten score of one to three) and the right-hand pole (which represent a sten score of eight to ten). Scores which fall in the two extreme poles on each of the continuums may be regarded as significant.

Reliability coefficients of the various groups for whom the HSPQ is standardised are presented in the different test manuals. These coefficients were calculated by means of the test-retest method. Compared to Afrikaans and English speaking learners whose reliability coefficients range between 0,43 and 0,96, Black and Indian learners' coefficients are lower, ranging from 0,21 to 0,79. Despite this, the HSPQ may be administered on learners from different backgrounds.

Although the HSPQ was standardised for learners from different backgrounds, only construct validity is reported in the manuals. Based on the low inter-correlation between the different factors and the relatively high equivalent coefficients calculated for the different factors (ranging between 0,50 and 0,84), it may be concluded that the questionnaire does have a relatively high level of construct validity (Taljaard & Prinsloo, 1995:406).

The fourteen primary HSPQ factors are briefly described in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 The fourteen primary HSPQ factors:

FACTOR	Low score description	Standard sten score (STEN)										High score description
		Average										
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
A	Critical, reserved, cool											Warm, soft-hearted, participating
B	Dull, less intelligent											More intelligent, bright
C	Emotionally immature and unstable											Emotionally mature, stable, realistic
D	Deliberate, stodgy, placid											Unrestrained, nervous
E	Obedient, mild, dependent											Assertive aggressive, rebellious
F	Sober, silent, serious											Happy-go-lucky, enthusiastic
G	Casual, quitting, undependable											Conscientious, persevering
H	Timid, threat-sensitive, shy											Venturesome, thick-skinned
I	Practical, tough-minded											Tender-minded, sensitive, protected
J	Vigorous, goes readily with group											Individualistic, obstructive, reflective
O	Secure, resilient, confident											Discouraged, self-reproaching
Q ₂	Group follower, values social approval											Makes own decisions, resourceful
Q ₃	Careless, ignores standards											Self-controlled, self-respecting
Q ₄	Relaxed, composed											Tense, driven, irritable

The following secondary order factors were calculated:

- Anxiety
- Extraversion

Each secondary order factor will be calculated according to a formula comprising a combination of various primary order factors as reflected in 5.3.3.

(i) Motivation for the inclusion of the HSPQ

The inclusion of this instrument was based on the fact that one's personality plays a major role in virtually every aspect of life. Therefore, the application of this questionnaire was instrumental in coming to a reasonable understanding of the personality characteristics and functioning of the early adolescent learner who engages in truant behaviour.

(ii) Data collection

The HSPQ is a pencil and paper questionnaire, comprising 142 items per form and may be applied individually or in group format. Of the four forms, only two are standardised for South African groups. Although no time limits apply, it takes approximately forty to fifty minutes to complete one form of the questionnaire.

During the application of the questionnaire, each respondent should preferably sit at a table that is spacious enough to hold all the test material. The tables have to be spaced in such a manner that rules out the possibility for respondents to copy each other's responses and makes it easy for invigilation purposes. Ideally, a writing board and chalk should also be available for illustrating purposes.

Since the two learners included in the case studies attend different schools, the questionnaire was applied on separate occasions. Permission was obtained from the learners' parents and the principals to administer the questionnaire in a suitable venue on the school premises. In order to respond to the questions, each learner was provided with a questionnaire, an answer sheet, an HB pencil and an eraser.

(iii) Data analysis

According to Cattell (in Visser et al. 1992:13) the answer sheet for hand scoring (456 PP) should be used if manual scoring is preferred. This was the case in the present study where the scoring

was done with the aid of two scoring stencils (679 and 680). Before the scoring commenced, the answer sheets were checked to make sure that only one answer was marked for each question.

The raw scores which were tabulated on the right-hand side of the answer sheet were converted into norm scores before the respondents' scores were interpreted. The norm scores that were used for the purpose of interpretation enable one to relate a learner to other learners of a group to which he or she belongs, as regards his or her various personality characteristics.

c. Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes (SSHA)

This questionnaire which was developed in the USA by Dr. W.F. Brown and Dr. W.H. Holtzman has been adapted and standardised in South Africa by the Institute for Psychometric Research of the Human Sciences Research Council. Two forms of the questionnaire are available, viz Form H for secondary school learners and Form C for tertiary students. It is mainly used for the evaluation of respondents' study methods, their motivation for studying as well as certain attitudes with regard to academic activities in their learning environment. Diagnostically, this questionnaire may also give an indication of learners' habits and attitudes relating to scholastic activities and academic problems.

The SSHA may be administered individually or in a group. No time limit applies however, respondents require sufficient time in which to complete the questionnaire (Louw, 1995:108).

The SSHA have the following scales:

- Delay avoidance (DA) indicates to what extent the learner promptly completes his or her assignment, avoids delay and is not inclined to unnecessary waste of time.
- Work method (WM) gives an indication of the learner's use of effective study methods, efficiency in doing assignments and the extent to which he or she sets about his or her school work in the most effective way.
- Study habits (SH) combine the scores on the DA and WM scales to provide a measure for academic behaviour.

- Teacher approval (TA) provides a measure of the learner's attitude towards the educator's classroom behaviour and methods.
- Education acceptance (EA) determines the extent of the learner's acceptance of educational ideals, objectives, practices and requirements.
- Study attitudes (SA) combine the scores of TA and EA to provide a measure of the learner's confidence in scholastic aims.
- Study orientations (SO) are a combination of all the above-mentioned aspects and provide an overall measure of the learner's study habits and attitudes.

In view of the fact that reliability coefficients for the four primary scales of the SSHA (for learners and students) calculated according to different methods, tend to fall between 0,7 and 0,8 and even higher, it seem highly fair to deduce that this is a very reliable instrument.

Validity coefficients for the different scales were obtained by comparing learners and first year students' scale scores with examination results. The reasonably positive correlation between SSHA scores and examination results may be regarded as a significant indication of the validity of scales of this instrument (Taljaard & Prinsloo, 1995:420).

(i) Motivation for the use of the SSHA

The rationale for the inclusion of the SSHA in the case studies was to ascertain the general attitudes of the respondents towards their scholastic activities. In view of the findings obtained through the intensive literature study as well as from other sources, one could make the inference that early adolescents' poor attitude towards their scholastic activities, may lead to truant behaviour.

(ii) Data collection

Since the two respondents attend different schools, the SSHA was applied separately and on different occasions. In order to answer the questionnaire, each learner was provided with a questionnaire booklet, an answer sheet; an HB pencil and an eraser.

(iii) Data analysis

The scoring of the raw data was done manually with a scoring key, 779PP. In scoring the answer sheets the following procedure was followed:

- The answer sheets were checked to ascertain that only one answer had been marked for each question. At the same time the answer sheets were scanned for gross oddities of responses that might have rendered the responses useless.
- The scoring key was placed on the answer sheet as indicated on the key. Scores for the four primary scales (DA, WM, TA and EA) were entered in the appropriate spaces at the bottom of the answer sheets. As indicated on the answer sheet, the score for SH was obtained by adding the scores for DA and WM and the score for SA is the sum of the scores for TA and EA. The total score SO, is the sum of the scores for SH and SA.

The interpretation of the SSHA scores is simplified by the use of the diagnostic profile at the back of the answer sheet by means of which the results of the test may be graphically presented so that the respondent's scores can be viewed at a glance. High scores on the SSHA scales are characteristic of learners who earn high marks at school in accordance with their ability, while low scores not only indicate that learners do not achieve according to their ability, but also reveal learners' attitudes towards their home and school in general.

d. Projection media

The concept projection will now be explained. Sigmund Freud as far back as 1894 described projection as a defence mechanism whereby a person unconsciously ascribes his or her own unacceptable wishes, characteristics, attitudes and subjective feelings to others (Abt & Bellak, 1959:13). In terms of this view, the individual has the inclination to blame his or her environment for whatever originates within the self. Thus, the person who labels others as inhuman or cruel, in all probability denies his or her own aggressive qualities.

As indicated by the above description of the term, projection is currently used in a much broader sense in the field of psychology, particularly in assessment media where semi-structured and unstructured stimuli (like the TAT and the Rorschach) are included.

In the use of self-report inventories, such as sentence completion, figure drawing and storytelling, the assumption is that an individual's responses to an unstructured stimulus are influenced by underlying needs, motives, and concerns. Thus, the individual can be assumed to project something of him- or herself into the response to these tasks. The interpretation of the responses should therefore yield important information about a person's basic personality structure and motivations (Benner, 1993:916).

e. Sacks Sentence Completion Test (SSCT)

According to Smith (1990:111), sentence completion tests have been in use since 1920. The Sacks sentence completion test is not a standardised test and is not used quantitatively. This test developed by Dr. Joseph M. Sacks and other psychologists from the New York Veterans Administration Mental Hygiene Services, is used to explore significant areas of an individual's adjustment and attitudes. It also enables the researcher to gain information concerning specific areas of functioning in the individual's life world.

Reliability and validity testing of this instrument yielded contingency coefficients of .48 to .57, with standard score errors of .02 and .03. These results of the SSCT compare favourably with those in validation studies of other methods of personality study such as the Rorschach and Thematic Apperception Tests (Abt & Bellak, 1945:372).

(i) Motivation for the use of the test

As the inherent projective qualities in this test are considerable, it was decided to explore and gather information concerning relationships and attitudes of the two early adolescent learners included in the case study, by applying this test. This test is not only found to be highly effective in determining the content of subjects' attitudes in the various areas, but is also fairly simple to administer (Smith, 1990:112).

Usually sentences are selected which explore significant areas of an individual's adjustment, or in certain situations these tests may be used for the purpose of investigating specific clusters of attitudes, needs and feelings. The underlying hypothesis is that the completed sentences epitomise the child's reality as he or she experiences it and attaches meaning to it. The items included in the sentence completion test present the subject with sufficient opportunities to

express his or her attitudes. Such information may be useful in screening learners for future intervention and offer the therapist significant clues to the content and dynamics of the learner's experiential world.

(ii) Data collection

The two learners who participated in the in-depth study attend different schools, therefore the SSCI was administered separately. In order to complete the sentences, each learner was supplied with a copy of the list with the partly completed sentences, an HB pencil and an eraser.

The following instructions were given to each of the learners at the commencement of the test:

"Below are sixty partly completed sentences. Read each one and finish it by writing the first thing that comes to your mind. Work as quickly as you can. If you cannot complete an item, circle the number and return to it later".

(iii) Data analysis

On completion of the tests by the respondents, it was read through in order to obtain a global impression regarding each one's situation. Each test was studied again while notes were made of sentences that might have a bearing on each other and to identify eminent problems. The researcher's insight as a psychologist was applied in this regard. The scoring and interpretation of the SSCT was conducted according the guidelines of Abt and Bellak (1959:13).

The SSCT comprises sixty items that are designed in such a way that it sheds light on fifteen categories listed below, according to the following scale: 2, 1, 0 and X:

2 - Seriously disturbed. Appears to require therapeutic aid in handling emotional conflicts in this area;

1 - Mildly disturbed. Has emotional conflicts in this area, but appears able to handle them without therapeutic aid;

0 - No significant disturbance noted in this area; and

X - Unknown. Insufficient information.

The four responses for each of the fifteen categories listed below were analysed jointly, after which a global assessment mark was allocated to each of them according to the above scale.

The items and different categories of the SSCT include the following:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Category</u>
14, 29, 44, 59	i. Attitudes towards mother: My mother..... My mother and I..... I think that most mothers..... I like my mother but.....
1, 16, 31, 46	ii. Attitude towards father: I feel that my father seldom..... If my father would only..... I wish my father..... I feel that my father is.....
12, 27, 42, 57	iii. Attitudes towards family unit: Compared with most families, mine..... My family treats me like..... Most families I know..... When I was a child, my family.....
10, 25, 40, 55	iv. Attitudes towards females: My idea of a perfect woman..... I think most girls..... I believe most women..... What I like least about women.....
11, 26, 41, 56	v. Attitude toward heterosexual relationships:

- When I see a boy and a girl together.....
 My feelings about steady relationships are...
 If I had sexual relations.....
 My sex life.....
- 8, 23, 38, 53 vi. Attitude toward friends and acquaintances:
 I feel that a real friend.....
 I don't like people who.....
 The people I like best.....
 When I'm not around my friends.....
- 6, 21, 36, 51 vii. Attitude toward seniors at school or at work:
 The senior learners at school.....
 The educators at school.....
 When I see the principal coming.....
 Educators whom I consider my superiors.....
- 4, 19, 34, 48 viii. Attitude towards to subordinates:
 If I were in charge.....
 If I had to be an educator.....
 The learners in my class.....
 In giving orders to others, I.....
- 13, 28, 43, 58 ix. Attitude toward friends at school or at home:
 At school I get along best with.....
 The learners in my class are.....
 I like to be with friends at school who.....
 Friends who attend school with me usually...
- 7, 22, 37, 52 x. Fears
 I know it is silly, but I am afraid of.....
 My friends don't know that I'm afraid of.....
 I wish I could lose the fear of.....
 My fears sometimes force me to.....

- 15, 30, 45, 60
- xi. Guilt feelings
- I would do anything to forget the time I.....
 - My greatest mistake was.....
 - When I was younger, I felt guilty about.....
 - The worst thing I ever did.....
- 2, 17, 32, 47
- xii. Attitude towards own abilities:
- When the odds are against me.....
 - I believe I have the ability to.....
 - My greatest weakness is.....
 - When I can not cope with my schoolwork.....
- 9, 24, 39, 54
- xiii. Attitude towards the past:
- When I was very young.....
 - Before I came to high school.....
 - If I can start high school over again.....
 - My most vivid childhood memory.....
- 5, 20, 35, 50
- xiv. Attitude towards the future:
- To me the future looks.....
 - I look forward to.....
 - Some day I.....
 - When I am older.....
- 3, 18, 13, 49
- xv. Goals:
- I always wanted to.....
 - I could be perfectly happy if.....
 - My secret ambition in life.....
 - What I want most out of life.....

f. Self-Esteem Index (SEI)

Mental health professionals have a great deal of interest in the self-esteem of children and adolescents, both in and out of the school setting. Self-esteem is often cited as a correlate of the emotional, behavioural, and academic problems experienced by school-aged individuals.

According to Brown (1987:49), self-esteem may be defined as the way that individuals perceive and value themselves. It is a learned characteristic that is acquired inferentially. It grows out of our life experiences and is based in large measures on the comments, perceptions, and actions of people around us. Of particular consequence are the things that we experience with or that we are told by the significant others in our lives – family members, friends, educators, co-workers, classmates and the like.

The SEI is an 80-item, norm referenced self-report instrument designed to elicit children's perceptions of their personal traits and characteristics. It is appropriate for individuals aged eight to eighteen years of age. This test may be administered individually or in a group. Group administration is particularly appropriate for screening and research efforts when the goal is to gather large amounts of data in relatively short periods of time (Brown & Alexander, 1991:3). However, for the purpose of the present study the SEI was administered individually and separately at the schools attended by the two learners who were involved in the case studies.

The coefficient Alpha formula was applied in studying the internal consistency reliability of the total SEI and its four scales. Three of the five (including the total SEI and the four sub scales) mean coefficients are in the 0.80's and the remaining two are in the 0.90's. Based on this, it may be concluded that the reliability of the SEI and its scales is sufficient to warrant the use of the instrument. In terms of its validity, Brown and Alexander (1991:31) have provided sufficient evidence to support the usefulness of the Index for its stated purpose.

From an educational perspective, it is clear that school experiences may play a major role in developing learners' feelings about themselves, their skills and their place in the scheme of life. Should a learner consider him- or herself agile, attractive, or smart, he or she may engage in behaviours designed to protect and maintain those self-conceptions. Similarly, if he or she feels clumsy, ugly or unsuccessful, behaviours may be evidenced that perpetuate those negative conceptions. The effort to maintain consistency is evidenced in behaviours that are designed to

counter any threat to one's self-concept, even though such behaviours may seem to be counterproductive (Rich, 1982:244).

Knoff (1986:59) points out that there are several reasons that one might initiate self-esteem evaluations for children and adolescents. One major reason is to identify learners who qualify for, or who may benefit from, special education, remedial programmes, counselling, or therapy at school or in other community settings. This evaluation may be a component of a broad-based screening effort or it may be part of a more intensive appraisal regimen designed to diagnose children who actually have self-esteem problems or serious emotional difficulties.

(i) Motivation for use

Self-esteem assessment may be used in research as in the case of the present study. The chief aim is to identify particular self-esteem problems, behaviours, feelings, or attitudes presumed to underlie, to cause or to be associated with truant behaviour among early adolescent learners in particular. A further aim was to determine whether truant behaviour is pervasive in nature if it is limited to specific situations, such as low academic self-esteem or poor perceptions of popularity among peers.

(ii) Data collection

This is not a timed test. For most respondents however, a thirty minute testing session normally is sufficient to complete all of the test items. Respondents may be allowed to set their own pace for responding, but should be encouraged by the examiner not to dawdle or procrastinate. To ensure that the SEI was administered in a standard manner, the following procedures were followed:

- Rapport was established with each respondent. The purpose for administering the Self-esteem Index was explained and the way in which the results would or would not be used, was described;
- Each respondent was supplied with a copy of the Self-esteem Index, learner response booklet and a pencil; and

- The directions printed on the front of the student response booklet were read to each respondent, after which they started answering the questions.

(iii) Data analysis

To analyse the raw data the following procedures were followed: The scores were transferred from the answer sheet to Section VII on the reverse side of the Profile and Record form. The numerical value for each response was written in both blanks following the item number. The first blank is under the "Total" column and the second blank is under one of the columns labelled **FA** (Family Acceptance), **AC** (Academic Competence), **PP** (Peer Popularity), and **PS** (Personal Security), which correspond to the four sub-scales of the SEI.

In order to obtain the raw scores for each of the sub-scales, the numbers recorded in the FA column were recorded and the sum thereof was entered in the appropriate blank in Section VII and then transferred to Section II on the Profile and Record Form. The same was for the other sub-scales.

The total raw score for each sub-scale was converted into a percentile rank or a self-esteem quotient. These were recorded in the appropriate blanks in Section II on the Profile and Record Form and plotted on the profile in Section IV. Following this step, the joint raw scores for the four sub-scales were also converted to a percentile rank or a standard score, which were recorded in the proper blanks in Section II and plotted on the profile in Section IV.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The main aim of this chapter was to provide a detailed description of the entire empirical investigation including the research design and research method. It began with a statement of the main research problem followed by the sub-problems that were explored. Then it outlined the types and the value of the different research approaches that were embarked upon in conducting the investigation and how these are linked directly to the research problem and the specific aims of this study. Each assessment medium that was used in the study was fully explored in terms of its theoretical background, motivation for being included in the present study, administration, and data analysis.

The data analysis as well as the discussion and interpretation of the empirical research results are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter the research design and methodology were presented. This chapter contains the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the results of the empirical research. The section on the discussion of the results is reserved for the next chapter.

5.2 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

A group administered questionnaire was completed by a sample of three hundred fourteen to sixteen year old learners who attend six different secondary schools in the eastern EMDC of the Western Cape. The procedures for the administration as well as the scoring and interpretation thereof, were discussed in 4.3.6.

The administering of the questionnaire took place under similar conditions on the same day and at concurrent times at the schools concerned. The invigilation was conducted by me and five of my colleagues.

The aim of the quantitative research was to investigate four factors that are related to truancy namely – friends, caregivers, educators and the self. A number of research problems and hypotheses were stated. A survey design was used to investigate these.

Data collection was done by means of a questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire with regard to above-mentioned four factors was between 0.93 and 0.97, which may be considered as very good.

Data were analysed by means of appropriate statistical techniques such as frequencies, percentages, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and chi-square analysis. This chapter reports on the results.

5.2.1 RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

Research problem 1:

How do secondary school learners feel about various truancy aspects?

The truancy aspects are:

- Interaction with friends;
- Parents/ caregivers' involvement in learners' school activities;
- The educators' influence on learners' school work;
- Learners' self-esteem regarding schooling.

Research problem 2:

Is there a significant difference between different groups regarding the truancy aspects (friends, parents/ caregivers, educators and self-esteem)?

The groups are different regarding:

- Gender;
- Age;
- Home language;
- Person/s with whom the learner is living; and
- Number of people sharing the house.

Null-hypotheses for research problem 2 were stated as follows:

There is no statistically significant difference between different groups regarding the truancy aspects (friends, parents/ caregivers, educators and self-esteem).

The groups are different regarding:

- Gender;
- Age;
- Home language;
- Person/s with whom the learner is living; and
- Number of people sharing the house.

Research problem 3:

How many learners have already truanted?

Research problem 4:

Is there a significant difference between different groups regarding whether they have truanted or not?

The related null-hypotheses are:

There is no statistically significant difference between different groups regarding whether they have truanted or not.

The groups are different regarding:

- Gender;

- Age;
- Home language;
- Person/s with whom the learner is living; and
- Number of people sharing the house.

For research problem one and three, frequencies and percentages were used to analyse the results. For research problem two and its related hypotheses, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted followed by Bonferroni t-tests if significant differences were found to determine *which* groups differed significantly. Chi-square tests were used for research problem four.

To facilitate the analysis, some variables were grouped together because only a few respondents fell into some of the groups listed in the questionnaire. For example, the “whom the learner lives with” variable, produced only three respondents living with either a sister or aunt, and none living with an uncle or a brother. Hence, grandparents, sister and aunt were grouped together. The same was done for the number of people living in a household - four categories were formed from the original eight.

The results are presented in the next section.

5.2.2 RESULTS

5.2.2.1 Biographical data

Section A: The biographical data of the sample were as follows:
(Please note, some missing values occur.)

(i) Gender

Male: 216

Female: 83

(ii) Age

14 years old: 167

15 years old: 131

(iii) Home language

English: 145

Afrikaans: 154

(iv) Person/ s that the learner primarily lives with:

Both parents: 94

One parent: 175

Grandparents, sister, aunt: 20

(v) Number of people sharing the house:

1-2: 45

3-4: 134

5-6: 95

7-8: 24

5.2.2.2 Research problem one

How do secondary school learners feel about various elements related to truant behaviour?

The percentages of the whole group of respondents for the four factors (friends, parents/ care-givers, educators and self-esteem) are indicated in Tables 5.1 to 5.4. For the sake of greater clarity, positives and negatives were grouped together.

Section B Percentages for the items that focus on interaction with friends

Table 5.1 Interaction with friends/ peers

Item	Strongly agree/agree	Uncertain	Strongly disagree/disagree
1. Being present at school every day is very important for me and my friends.	33.3	2	61.3
2. We encourage each other to attend school.	32.3	5	62.7
3. We think that school is important.	34.3	2.3	62.7
4. We like our teachers very much.	33.7	4.0	62.0
5. It is important for all of us to participate in sport activities at school.	33.3	21.0	45.3
6. We like all our learning areas.	35.3	2.3	61.3
7. We attend all our classes.	32.3	3.0	64.7
8. My friends and I smoke.	55.0	0.7	44.3
9. My friends and I take alcohol.	29.7	13.3	56.7
10. Some of my friends occasionally take drugs.	6.0	42.0	52.0
11. In my circle of friends stealing and disobeying of rules occur occasionally.	17.0	20.0	63.0
12. In my circle of friends, theft occurs occasionally.	9.0	24.3	66.7
13. I hang around and mix with friends who work very hard in school.	29.3	0	70.7

The results in Table 5.1 clearly reveal that the respondents' level of interest in and their commitment to involvement in scholastic activities, both inter and extra mural seem to be relatively low. On the one hand, a reasonably low percentage of the respondents (29,3%) have indicated that they mix with friends who work diligently in school. On the other hand, the 70,7 % of respondents who disagreed to this, may be associating with undesirable elements in their friendships that they form, which may often manifest in a tendency to display irresponsibility, rebelliousness and negativity regarding their school and educators. This understandably causes

learners to neglect their schoolwork – a behavioural pattern which is characteristic of the learner who demonstrates truancy.

According to Kapp (in Smith, 1996:57), the learner with dysfunctional behaviour (which often includes truancy), is in danger of becoming trapped in a spiral of negative interactions with both educators and peers alike.

As cited in 2.2.3, a significant difference seems to be apparent between these results and research previously conducted in terms of which evidence emerged that truants may engage in activities such as drug taking, violence and organised crime. However, the present investigation revealed that learners, who were identified as truants, might place greater importance on being acknowledged by their male or female peers to a certain extent.

Besides smoking, which seems to be practised by the majority of the respondents, activities such as drug taking, stealing, disobeying of rules and theft do not occur readily among the participants in this study. This differs remarkably from findings yielded from preceding research. The latter showed that some truants may spend their time engaging in fringe activities such as drug taking, prostitution, joyriding, violent behaviour, watching video nasties and doing organised crime as reflected in 2.2.3.

Section C Percentages for the items that focus on involvement with parents/ caregivers

Table 5.2 Parents/ caregivers' involvement in scholastic activities

Item	Strongly agree/agree	Uncertain	Strongly disagree/disagree
14. My scholastic performance is important to my parents.	33.0	16.3	50.7
15. My parents always attend parent meetings at my school.	33.7	10.0	56.3
16. The way my parents and I get on at home, motivates me to work very hard at school.	30.7	9.0	60.3
17. My parents have a positive attitude towards my teachers.	27.0	28.3	44.3
18. My parents and I often discuss my schoolwork at home.	31.0	3.7	65.0
19. My parents expect me to obey the rules that apply at home.	42.3	15.3	41.7
20. My parents allow me enough time to do my homework.	33.3	5.7	60.7
21. My participation in cultural activities at school is important to my parents.	26.7	27.3	45.7
22. My parents expect me to succeed in my school work and to pass grade 12.	57.3	12.0	30.7
23. Should my parents discover that I am not attending all my classes at school, they will be very upset about it.	57.0	13.3	29.7

In terms of parents/ caregivers' involvement in their scholastic lives, it appears that the respondents agree rather strongly that they do not particularly enjoy much interest and support

at home. Generally speaking, parents/ caregivers seem to display an unfavourable attitude towards their children's scholastic progress.

Although their parents/ caregivers apparently do not make allowance for sufficient time to complete scholastic activities at home or show real interest in their schoolwork, it seems that respondents are expected to obey house rules, attend school regularly, and eventually pass grade 12 successfully. It also emerged that a reasonably high percentage of respondents (57 %) believe that their parents/ caregivers would not entertain the idea of them being absent from their classes.

To a large degree, these results correspond with what has been reported in relatively recent media reports, as proposed in 2.3.3, whereby truancy was predominantly blamed on the lack of responsible parenting, love and continued involvement that children desperately require from their parents in order to sustain successful progress at school. Furthermore, truants were more likely to emerge from homes where excessive disciplinary control, for example, through the application of strict house rules as well as the administering of corporal punishment, is adhered to.

Section D Percentages for the items that focus on educators' influence

Table 5.3 Educators' influence

Item	Strongly agree/ agree	Uncertain	Strongly disagree/ disagree
24. My teachers always give me attention at school.	33.7	2.0	64.3
25. My teachers treat me with respect.	32.0	9.3	58.7
26. The contributions I make in class are always valued and respected by my teachers.	27.0	24.7	47.7
27. My teachers encourage me to attend school regularly.	33.7	5.7	60.7
28. My teachers always try to make lessons interesting and meaningful.	33.3	5.3	62.3
29. I know most of my teachers have my interests at heart.	31.0	14.3	54.3
30. I feel very comfortable to discuss anything with my teachers.	32.7	6.0	61.3
31. My teachers do not say any negative or bad things about my work in front of other learners.	27.0	32.7	50.3
32. My teachers do not really make unreasonable demands on me.	33.7	3.0	63.3
33. I will take any of my teachers as my role model.	33.3	8.7	58.0

These results are characterised by a non-supportive school environment in which the educator's influence may play a pivotal role in causing and sustaining truant behaviour among learners. Not only do these findings demonstrate the respondents' extremely unfavourable and uninteresting school experiences, but they also reflect on the learners' perceptions of educators' uncaring and

authoritarian attitudes as well as their non-exemplary conduct towards learners in certain instances.

As stated in 2.4.3, previous research in this regard largely confirms truants' unfavourable school encounters with particular reference to feelings of rejection, experiences of discrimination and subjection to undue and humiliating punitive measures. Truants were extremely bored and disliked school more than non-truants. In many instances, truants present with an inability to relate to the culture of their particular school and generally perceive their experiences in their learning environment, particularly engagements with certain educators, more negatively than non-truants.

Further research evidence in 2.4.3 revealed that 27 % of the learners identified as demonstrating truancy, cited unpleasantness and antipathy displayed by educators towards learners as playing a significant role in their truant behaviour. It was also found that fear of an educator may be a contributory factor in a learner's deliberate absence from school.

Furthermore, the present empirical investigation furthermore suggests that negative encounters with educators are highly likely to cause serious disruption of the relationship between learners and their educators. However, this may not cause learners to demonstrate inappropriate behaviour such as blatant disrespect or defiance of educators, but is more likely to result in deliberate learner absence from classes.

Section E Percentages for the items that focus on own thoughts and feelings

Table 5.4 Own thoughts and feelings regarding school attendance

Item	Strongly agree/ agree	Uncertain	Strongly disagree/ disagree
34. I consider all my classes important to attend.	34.3	3.3	61.3
35. Generally, I find schoolwork very interesting.	31.7	4.0	63.3
36. All classroom activities are relevant to my everyday life.	30.7	17.3	51.0
37. All the things that I learn in school will help me to find work one day.	29.3	21.0	48.7
38. Through education obtained at school, I will be able to live a comfortable life one day.	29.7	23.3	46.3
39. I always feel happy with my test and examination results.	34.0	5.0	60.3
40. Generally, I feel that I'm coping very well with my schoolwork.	33.7	5.3	60.3
41. I'm sure one day when I have finished with school, I'll certainly miss it.	31.3	16.3	51.7
42. Regular school attendance will help me to achieve my goals and dreams in life.	32.7	16.3	50.0
43. Even if I had a choice, I would choose to go to school.	35.3	5.3	58.7

Based on the foregoing results, in terms of their own thoughts and feelings, the respondents consider themselves as largely incompetent to make adequate and satisfactory progress in

school and to eventually achieve their goals and dreams. Generally there also appears to be a significantly high level of doubt among respondents as to whether they would achieve success in life, secure a sustainable income and be able to live comfortably through the type of education obtained at school.

Previous research evidence in this regard in 2.5 reported that ongoing truanting seems to be closely related not only to lower levels of self-esteem, but also to a poor academic self-concept and a feeling of being less able among certain learners. Research indicated that persistent absentees are more likely to be anxious and, comparatively speaking, have lower career aspirations than the normal school population.

As noted in 2.4.4, truants nearly always experience feelings of alienation, of being footloose, hopelessness and estrangement from their school, home, neighbourhood and society at large. The fact that truant learners often experience alienation from their school may hold far-reaching implications for their attitude toward as well as their thoughts and feelings about school attendance.

Moreover, the present empirical investigation has clearly revealed that some of the learners who emerged as demonstrating truancy, presented with a tendency to withdraw emotionally from those persons and situations that they did not feel comfortable with. This may possibly explain why the self-esteem of certain learners is often undermined even before tackling challenging tasks and they prefer rather to skip school. These learners may eventually exhibit an almost paranoiac feeling of insecurity resulting in dropping out which usually emanates directly from chronic truancy.

5.2.2.3 Research problem two

For research problem 2, the following null-hypotheses were tested:

There is no statistically significant difference between different groups regarding the truancy aspects (friends, parents/ caregivers, educators and self-esteem).

The groups differed in terms of gender, ages, home languages, people with whom the learner is living and the number of people sharing the house.

To test the above mentioned hypotheses, ANOVA was conducted. The results are indicated in Table 5.5.

Table 5 .5 Summary of ANOVA results to identify indicators that have a significant effect on each of the four truancy construct scores, individually

Summary of ANOVA results of the four truancy construct scores						
Construct	F-value	Biographical variable				
		gender	live with	language	age	number of people
Friends	<0.0001***	<0.0001***	0.0001***	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Caregivers	<0.0001***	<0.0001***	0.0064**	n.s	n.s	n.s
Educators	<0.0001***	<0.0001***	0.0033**	n.s	n.s	n.s
Self	<0.0001***	<0.0001***	0.0004***	n.s	n.s	n.s

*** : F-prob < 0.001; 0.1%-level of significance;

** : F-prob < 0.05; 5%-level of significance;

* : F-prob < 0.10; 10%-level of significance;

ns : no significance

Table 5.5 indicates significant differences for groups of different *genders* and *people with whom the learner is living* on the 5%-level or on the 0.1%-level. For these groups the null-hypothesis may therefore be rejected. The null-hypotheses may not be rejected for language, age and number of people the learner lives with.

To investigate *between which groups* the differences lie, Bonferroni t-tests were conducted for gender and for whom the child is living with. The results appear in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 Means and significance of difference for gender and for person whom the child is living with regarding the four truancy constructs

Construct	Means for gender	Means for whom the child is living with
Interaction with friends	Male: 3.36 ^a Female: 2.22 ^b	Single parent: 3.28 ^a Parent: 2.70 ^b Grand parent et al: 2.66 ^b
Involvement of parents/caregivers	Male: 3.44 ^a Female: 2.32 ^b	Single parent: 3.60 ^a Parent: 2.81 ^b Grand parent et al: 2.86 ^b
Educators' influence	Male: 3.74 ^a Female: 2.37 ^b	Single parent: 3.60 ^a Parent: 3.00 ^b Grand parent et al: 2.96 ^b
Influence of self-esteem	Male: 3.65 ^a Female: 2.33 ^b	Single parent: 3.55 ^a Parent: 2.90 ^b Grand parent et al: 2.79 ^b

Note: Different small letters (a or b) indicate significant differences.

Table 5.6 illustrates that male learners are significantly more negative in their perceptions regarding the influence of friends (3.36 > 2.22); involvement of parents/ caregivers (3.44 > 2.32); educators' influence (3.74 > 2.37) and the influence of self-esteem (3.65 > 2.33).

Based on the results cited above, it is obvious that compared to their female counterparts, male respondents who participated in the present empirical investigation presented with a significantly greater probability of engaging in truant behaviour. Based on previous research conducted in this respect, there appears to be a significant difference with regard to school adjustment between the sexes.

As noted in 2.2.3, boys seem to experience far greater problems compared to girls. The early adolescent boys in the junior secondary school may be expressing their striving for independence and autonomy more openly in conflicts with educators and school rules and

regulations. Therefore, it may be fair to consider truancy as merely one of their behaviour problems.

With regard to whom the child is living, Table 5.6 shows that learners who live with a single parent are significantly more negative in their perceptions on all truancy issues (mentioned above) than those who live with both parents or with other caregivers, such as grandparents or aunts (3.28 is significantly greater than 2.70/2.66; 3.33 is significantly greater than 2.81/2.86; 3.60 is significantly greater than 3/2.96 and 3.55 is significantly greater than 2.9/2.79).

These results clearly show that respondents who live with a single parent exhibit higher probabilities of truant behaviour. Consistent with findings in 2.4.2, family structure is shown to be important, in terms of which it is suggested that individuals with more siblings and only one parent present, are more likely to demonstrate truant behaviour.

5.2.2.4 Research problem three

How many learners have already truanted?

The question was asked if learners have ever truanted. The results appear in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7 Frequency and percentage of learners who had/ had not truanted

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Learners who have truanted ("bunked" classes)	199	66.33
Learners who have never truanted	101	33.67

Table 5.7 indicates that of all the respondents that participated in the investigation, 66.33% of the learners have "bunked" classes previously. Only 33.67% have never truanted.

This means that from the entire sample population who completed the truancy questionnaire, approximately two-thirds have displayed truant behaviour in the past. This result may be safely generalised to all secondary schools in the area in which the empirical investigation was conducted. One can thus assume that truant behaviour may be prevalent in most schools of the

eastern EMDC of the Western Cape with the same socio-economic status, as the schools that participated in the empirical investigation.

The results of this research may in all probability indicate the upper limits of truancy in the secondary schools which I serve, because it can be expected that the extent of truancy in the balance of schools in the same area is smaller than in the six schools that participated in the present study.

5.2.2.5 Research problem four

Is there a significant difference between different groups regarding whether they have truanted or not?

The data was analysed to determine if different groups differed significantly regarding whether they have truanted or not. The groups differed regarding gender, age, whom the learners lived with, number of people in the household and language group. Significant dependencies between truancy and two moderator variables were found, namely *gender* and with *whom the child lives*. The null-hypotheses for these two moderator variables may therefore be rejected (but not for the others).

The results of the chi-square analysis for the two variables mentioned are indicated in Tables 5.8 and 5.9.

Table 5.8 Chi-square and significance of difference between genders for having truanted or not

Gender	Response	df	Chi-square	Significance
Male	Yes=173	1	64.0630	P < .0001
	No=43			
Female	Yes=26			
	No=57			

Missing frequency = 1

Table 5.8 indicates a significant dependency between gender and truancy: significantly more males than females have truanted (173 in comparison to 26). When the responses for each gender are studied, it seems that for every four males that responded with a “yes”, only one responded with a “no” ($173/43 = 4.02$). In contrast, for females, for every one “yes”, two females said “no” ($26/57 = 0.46$). This implies that significantly more boys than girls have truanted.

Consistent with previous research, discussed in 2.4.5, there is some evidence to suggest that boys have greater absentee rates than girls, while girls were absent twice as often with parental consent. However, contrary to this, it was also found that girls have a higher truancy rate than boys during the first three years of secondary schools than boys. Spooner (in Collins, 1998:26) the head educator of Leeds comprehensive school, reviewed truancy figures in a large city, and found:

The absence rate was greater in ‘down-town’ localities, it increased as learners grew older, it was greater among girls, it increased dramatically on Fridays, it grew as the term went on and it was markedly greater among below average learners. On Fridays, towards the end of term, in down-town girls’ schools, it was likely, therefore, to be dramatic and demoralising.

Spoooner’s suggestion that truancy may be greater among girls is supported in a review of literature by Carlen (in Collins, 1998:26) who postulated:

In terms of gender, at both lower and secondary levels, girls are more frequently truanting than boys although ‘illegitimate’ truancy rates are virtually the same for both. These higher legitimate truancy for girls (if accurate) may be explained in terms of different gender roles, especially the expectation that young women will fulfil domestic commitments, along with the lower social value placed on education of females.

Another gender difference that emerged from prior studies as reflected in 2.4.5, is that female truants demonstrated less antisocial behaviour than male truants and that females had more variable attitudes and behaviours. Parallel with the present study, it was learnt that truant boys perceived their school experience more negatively than truant girls.

Table 5.9 Chi-square and significance of difference between learners that live with different caregivers for having truant or not

Live with	Response	df	Chi-square	Significance
Parents	Yes = 46	2	26.862	P < .0001
	No = 48			
Single parent	Yes = 136			
	No = 39			
Grandparents sister, aunt	Yes = 9			
	No = 11			

Frequencies missing: 11

An examination of Table 5.9 reveals that for learners who live with their parents, more or less the same number have truant or have not truant (46 and 48). The same goes for those who live with their grandparents, sisters or aunts (9 and 11). However, when learners live with a single parent only, significantly more have truant than not (136 versus 39). This means that for approximately every four learners staying with a single parent who responded with a “yes”, only one responded with a “no” ($136/39 = 3.5$).

Previous research findings as cited in 2.4.2 largely support the results of the present investigation. Research has showed that early adolescents living with both mother and father were less likely to present with truant behaviour. In addition, certain factors and principles, related to the number of parents in the family unit, which may appear to influence truant behaviour particularly among early adolescent learners have been identified. It was found that the order from least to most likely to play truant among early adolescents is as follows – live with both parents; live with mother; live with father; live away from parents. It has furthermore emerged that in households handled by a single parent too much pressure is brought to bear on the individual, to the extent that he or she may not be able to bring up the children to the best of his or her ability and society’s expectations.

5.2.2.6 Interpretation of the qualitative open-ended question

For the purpose of evaluating respondents' reactions as to whether they ever truanted or not, the questionnaire was concluded with the following open-ended question:

"Have you ever truanted (bunked) classes?

YES

NO

Please mark your answer with an X

A brief qualifying explanation for their answers was also requested:

Briefly explain your reason(s) for truanting or not truanting."

It clearly emerged that the majority (66,33 %) of the respondents who participated in the investigation have demonstrated truant behaviour, while approximately 33,67 % indicated that they have not. One questionnaire was spoilt and was therefore not taken into account.

From the responses received from the participants (truants) who answered affirmatively to the above-mentioned question, certain recurring themes emerged, which included the following:

- ❑ Educator mistreatment of learners including unfairness, undue punitive treatment, marginalisation of certain learners by their educators, an uncaring and unsympathetic attitude displayed towards learners, and perceived discriminatory behaviour demonstrated by some educators against learners;
- ❑ Learners felt they were being insulted and 'picked upon' by certain educators which left them extremely discouraged and de-motivated. Therefore, they often sought revenge by skipping some of their classes;
- ❑ Truants tended to view themselves as outcasts who were rejected at school by certain educators and fellow learners, causing them to feel unhappy and unwelcome;

- ❑ Suspicion that they were the topic of discussion in staff rooms where so-called untruths and embarrassing 'stories' about learners were shared by educators;
- ❑ Learners indicated that most times they felt confused and out of their depth and were not certain who to approach for assistance at school when difficulty with extremely complicated academic tasks was experienced;
- ❑ Dysfunctional family lives, lack of parental interest in their scholastic activities and no moral support received at home for schooling;
- ❑ Embarrassment about physical appearance particularly among girls who felt that they did not always look presentable enough to go to school;
- ❑ Older children were instructed by their parents to remain at home to care for younger siblings or bedridden family members suffering from terminal illnesses such as cancer, tuberculosis and HIV-AIDS. In other instances, they were requested to stay out of school to work in order to supplement family income;
- ❑ High levels of violence among rival local gangs and an intense fear of falling victim to violent gang related incidents which could spill over to schools;
- ❑ Peer influence. Some truants had older working friends who sometimes entertained them during school hours;
- ❑ A fearless attitude. Some truants considered that the worst thing that could happen is to be placed in detention as a penalty for truant behaviour;
- ❑ Early adolescent learners were bullied and blackmailed by older learners;
- ❑ The experience of school as unfulfilling and extremely boring;
- ❑ Moodiness and irritation demonstrated towards learners by educators;

- ❑ High rate of absenteeism among educators that creates conditions of chaos and lawlessness in schools;
- ❑ Lengthy educator meetings during intervals, which create opportunities for truancy to take place;
- ❑ Loopholes in the attendance policy or the total absence of any truancy prevention structure at schools; and
- ❑ Poor infrastructure, such as over-crowded classes, holes in fences and lack of supervision while learners change classes between lessons, which makes it extremely easy to disappear from school without being missed;

Based on the responses of the participants (33.67%) who indicated that they have not yet engaged in truant behaviour, the following recurring themes emerged:

- ❑ A grave concern about ending up in trouble with authorities at schools and their parents for poor attendance;
- ❑ A relatively strong inclination to focus on academic activities and the realisation that their future to a large extent depends on diligent work and regular school attendance;
- ❑ Experiencing school as an exciting, fulfilling and fun place to be at;
- ❑ Determination to follow the example set by family members who are well educated and successful in life.
- ❑ Associating with peers who are regular attendees and have a zest for learning;
- ❑ Educators are regarded as a great source of inspiration to attend school regularly;
- ❑ Fear of not passing tests and examinations and;

- ❑ Encouragement by parents and caregivers to work hard at school and their continued support and interest.

As far as responses pertaining to possible reasons why certain learners engage in truant behaviour, the following common themes, as perceived by non-truants, surfaced:

- ❑ Peer influence. Learners who play truant cannot decide for themselves and just follow their friends' example, knowing that nothing serious will happen to them;
- ❑ Total lack of or extremely poor interest in academic activities, together with a care-free attitude towards school work;
- ❑ Finding school life uninteresting and boring;
- ❑ Serious domestic problems;
- ❑ A disregard for school attendance which is not seen as compulsory or important;
- ❑ Great difficulty coping with academic challenges; and
- ❑ Dislike of certain educators.

5.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The types of data gathering methods that were used to conduct the qualitative research included a focus group interview, interviews with principals as well as two in-depth case studies with two learners who had previously completed the questionnaire. The one learner presents as a typical truant, while the other one may be considered a typical non-truant.

5.3.1 Focus group interview

A focus group interview was conducted at Kleinvlei High School on 28 February 2006. Six identified truant-learners, one from each of the schools that participated in the empirical investigation, participated in the interview. The main objective of this interview was to ascertain

the participants' personal experiences and general feelings regarding the phenomenon of truancy. A full transcription of the interview is attached as annexure B. The most frequent recurring outcomes that emerged from the interview included the following:

- ❑ Discriminatory behaviour, unfairness and a lack of interest demonstrated by certain educators towards learners mainly from low socio-economic backgrounds;
- ❑ Learner anxiousness, embarrassment and fear of exposure as a result of scholastic under-achievement;
- ❑ Bullying of the younger boys by older boys in the senior grades;
- ❑ Gangsterism and the fear of being victimised by gang members, who control certain areas adjacent to schools;
- ❑ Administering of corporal punishment by certain educators;
- ❑ Boredom, particularly after examinations while educators are marking scripts and learners are not instructed or given any work to do in class;
- ❑ Lack of social bonding with the schools by learners, due to negative experiences in and out of the classroom; and
- ❑ Feelings of hopelessness about the future that seems very bleak to many early adolescent-learners.

5.3.2 Interviews with principals

From the unstructured interviews that were conducted with the principals of the high schools involved in the empirical research, it emerged that truancy is a common phenomenon particularly among early adolescent learners. The following common themes emerged from the interviews with the respective principals:

- ❑ Unfavourable adjustment by grade eight learners to the academic challenges and social demands that their new, secondary school learning environment offers;
- ❑ A serious lack of support and parent involvement regarding their children's education and their future in general;
- ❑ The domestic backgrounds of truant learners, namely poverty, unemployment, overcrowded living conditions, single parenting, substance abuse, broken homes and anti-education values demonstrated by some parents and caregivers;
- ❑ The lack of infrastructure at high schools, especially the absence of formal learning support for learners with special educational needs. This service exists only in primary schools and is already over-utilised;
- ❑ Budgetary constraints experienced by most schools, particularly in the area where the empirical investigation was conducted, to create learner friendly extracurricular activities and programmes. This prohibits schools from developing a pleasant and fulfilling learning environment for all learners;
- ❑ Low morale and lack of motivation among educators, due to demoralising working conditions and poor support from the Department of Education;
- ❑ Absenteeism among educators, coupled with large educator-learner ratios which make it difficult to control learners at many secondary schools in the eastern EMDC of the Western Cape;
- ❑ Peer pressure and adolescent delinquency in general; and
- ❑ Negative attitudes towards the educational process in the concerned school community.

5.3.3 Case studies

5.3.3.2 Case study 1: Gary (truant-learner)

(a) Biographical information

Name	:	Gary (pseudonym)
Gender	:	Male
Chronological age	:	14 years, 2 months
Home language	:	English
Grade	:	8

(b) Interpretation of assessment media

(i) Interview

The interview with Gary was conducted by myself on 22 March 2006 and took place at his school in Blackheath. A full transcription of the interview is attached as annexure C.

Although Gary initially presented as withdrawn and unsure of himself, he eventually appeared more relaxed and gradually made better contact as the interview progressed. He was not dressed in full school uniform, and also wore a small ring in his left ear. Generally speaking, he comes across as someone who is not very concerned about the school's dress code and his general appearance.

It clearly emerged from the interview that Gary feels rather alienated at school and experiences it as an exclusive environment. Apparently his educators only communicate with him to reprimand him in the event of him 'bunking' their classes or about his work that is incomplete. Otherwise, he perceives them as being unconcerned and uncaring about him. His response with regard to this type of treatment was as follows:

"It makes me feel as if I don't belong in class. Even the children who are favoured by the teachers, they don't take much notice of a person. That's why I always feel lonely and very one-

sided at school ... and there are more children who feel like me, because we always talk about the way certain teachers treat us and how full of nonsense they are.”

In view of the disruption caused by occasional gang fights in the area near the school, Gary views his school environment as unsafe and life threatening. His response to the question regarding chaotic incidents such as gang wars which occasionally spill into the school ground and how it affects him was as follows:

“...I’m very, very scared ... and I feel nervous. This never happened at primary school. It used to happen in our area, but never at school.”

Furthermore, there appears to be delays as far as his vocabulary, receptive and expressive abilities and his general language comprehension are concerned. No articulation or speech difficulties were observed.

□ Additional biographical information

Gary is the only child of his parents. He lives in a residential area adjacent to Blackheath in Metropole East. He was enrolled at the secondary school in 2005 for grade eight, but is currently (2006) repeating the grade, since he did not write the final examination at the end of the previous year.

□ Family and environmental background

His parents were separated approximately six and a half years ago after which Gary and his mother moved in with his grandmother and two cousins. Since his parents are not on good terms with each other, Gary has extremely limited contact with his father, who is currently unemployed. According to Gary, he does not enjoy living with his grandmother, because he suspects that she is favouring his two younger cousins who also live in the same house. Apparently she secretly gives them pocket money and buys them most things they desire. He related an incident in which a school friend secured a weekend job for Gary at a local shopping centre, which unfortunately, he had to decline, as his mother and grandmother did not approve of it. His mother spends most of her time with her friends during weekends, while Gary seldom gets pocket money, has to sit at home, watch television and keep his two cousins company.

Furthermore, it appears that his grandmother is very strict and has a very poor understanding of Gary's emotional and social developmental needs. She allows her daughter (Gary's mother) to enjoy her free time leisurely, evidently because she is a source of income for the household. However, Gary is in the care and under the control of his grandmother, is confined to the house and clearly does not have any outlet for his emotional and social needs at home.

On more than one occasion in the past, Gary contemplated running away from home to fend for himself, but is aware of the dangers that may put him at risk. His immediate and surrounding neighbourhoods are plagued by high levels of social evils of which serious crime and, particularly, gangsterism, are extremely rife. Although Gary is familiar with some of the local gang members in the area, he does not engage in criminal activities such as fights, drugs sale to learners at neighbouring schools, theft and burglary. However, since he is obliged to pass through the areas in which they operate, the gang members whom he remembers from primary school regularly attempt to draw his attention or try to make conversation with him. This 'soft' approach may possibly be a smoke screen in order to lure Gary into their destructive operations.

Gang related fights taking place in Gary's neighbourhood, are likely to spill over to the surrounding schools, since rival gang members or their acquaintances in numerous instances attend the same schools. In view of the possibility of such incidents at school or after school, many learners, including Gary, either avoid school or slip away through holes in the school's fence to secure their personal safety.

□ Intellectual image

According to reliable information obtained from the school, it appears that Gary might present with mild mental disabilities. Although no formal intellectual evaluation was conducted, a survey of his learner portfolio revealed that he experiences immense difficulty in most learning areas. It is also clear that he presents with perceptible delays coping with the demands and expectations set by a mainstream learning environment.

Gary personally acknowledges that he sometimes fails to understand his schoolwork and generally experiences it as complicated and extremely uninteresting. Furthermore, he admits that he finds it too embarrassing to ask his teachers for assistance and more clarity, as he experiences most of them as unhelpful and uncaring, when approached for guidance.

- Emotional image

In general, Gary presents as an extremely lonely, withdrawn and insecure type of person. He experiences feelings of alienation, rejection and being treated unfairly in virtually his whole social context.

In his home environment Gary feels unhappy about the undesirable treatment of his mother and grandmother. The opportunity to enjoy a social life independent from his mother and grandmother is completely out of the question, as Gary is expected to remain in the house, including weekends. He enjoys no opportunity to compare opinions, abilities and physical changes with his peers. His situation at school is almost similar, as he feels largely marginalised and overlooked by his teachers and many learners who, in Gary's opinion, consider themselves of higher social standard than him. It appears that he only feels comfortable, secure and accepted among peers who experience similar feelings of social and emotional marginalisation.

- Physical image

The marked change in the velocity or rate of growth that early adolescents experience is termed a 'growth spurt'. A fourteen year old boy, for example, may find himself growing as quickly as a two-year old. The physical self (body image) seems to be more important during adolescence than at any other stage of a person's life, except possibly old age.

Basic physical changes focus attention on the body, which becomes a symbol of experience. Depending on its condition and quality, the body may give rise to subjective experiences such as:

- Being good at gymnastics;
- Self-esteem based on athletic achievements;
- Security based on physical strength; and
- Social acceptance based on an attractive face and body.

Although Gary seems to have reached all his physical and motor developmental milestones, he does not appear happy with his physical appearance. He perceives himself not only as physically unattractive, but also totally inept at communication. Furthermore, as a result of financial constraints, his mother cannot afford to buy him new school clothes, which is why he wears second-hand clothes. These clothes are either passed down by his extended family members, or bought at second-hand stores. This makes Gary feel inferior to his classmates, whom he perceives to be well-dressed, have lots of pocket money which they spend lavishly and own bicycles on which they ride to school.

□ Conative image

Gary appears to be de-motivated and pessimistic about life and particularly his future. Since his current life-world is filled with numerous impediments and high levels of negativism, he seems very discouraged about his life. He openly admits that he feels like someone who is completely without any direction.

Due to all the obstacles in his present experiential world, Gary does not demonstrate any interest in the future, as it is his perception that he has absolutely nothing to look forward to. He finds his schoolwork extremely uninteresting and he generally does not feel like attending school. It is understandable that uninteresting learning material unimaginatively presented, may bore learners. Those learners, who in addition, present with learning difficulties, cannot be expected to respond positively to the school situation.

Furthermore, Gary feels that nobody seems interested in him and his scholastic performance. He does not receive any praise or encouragement from anyone to apply himself optimally to his academic work. Therefore, Gary is discouraged, de-motivated and disillusioned about attending school, and is seriously contemplating quitting and securing him a job of any kind. Quite disturbingly, it seems that it is irrelevant to him whether he finds a job at the entry level of the labour market or in the ranks of the local gangs and drug lords.

□ Moral image

Psychologists, together with philosophers and theologians, have long been fascinated by the question of how children develop morality. How do they come to know right from wrong? In other words, how does a child develop a conscience?

According to Sigmund Freud, as the child identifies with significant others, including parents and educators, and eventually adopts his or her own standards, the conscience develops. Other psychologists have emphasised the manner in which parents enforce discipline and how this affects the child's moral development. It was found that children were more likely to tell their mothers voluntarily when they did something wrong if the mothers had previously used withdrawal of love, rather than physical punishment, as the usual method of discipline. Furthermore, any given person is likely to show one predominant type of moral reasoning, but at times a person's moral judgements will fit a lower level and at times a higher level (Louw, 1998:409).

In spite of the numerous barriers that he has to deal with in his entire social context, Gary's nonchalant attitude regarding school attendance, reflects that his behaviour does not conform with the majority of early adolescent learners generally believed to be correct. His disposition to associate and involve himself with local gangs and to engage in their criminal activities like for example, selling drugs in the community, particularly to school going children, further supports this argument.

Gary's urge to become independent in terms of securing a sustainable income or even just to earn his own pocket money, is understandable. However, morally speaking, the end does not justify the means, since there are numerous other ways of earning an income which Gary may embark upon.

□ Brief summary of the interview

Although Gary initially presented as a rather quiet and withdrawn type of person, he seemed more at ease as the interview progressed. His co-operation throughout the entire session was fairly satisfactory.

The interview strikingly revealed that Gary's ecological part systems including his unfavourable domestic circumstances, negative and unpleasant encounters with teachers and fellow learners, as well as peer pressure, may influence his truant behaviour. A range of comments to this effect were made. Some comments were significant and disturbing. They revealed both the apparent inferior level of his actualisation and some genuine problems regarding his scholastic progress and personal circumstances.

On the other hand, his intrapsychic part-systems, particularly his feelings of being rejected and labelled in school and at home, his apparent limited cognitive abilities, lack of motivation and poor moral image may also be significantly related to Gary's inclination to absent him occasionally from certain classes and school.

(ii) High School Personality Questionnaire

The High School Personality Questionnaire (HSPQ) was conducted on Gary and took place on 20 March 2006 at his school. I was personally responsible for the administering thereof.

Table 5.10 presents the scores that were obtained in the HSPQ:

Table 5.10 Profile of Gary's High School Personality Questionnaire

FACTOR	Low score description	Standard sten score (STEN)										High score description	
		Average											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
A	Critical, reserved, cool				•								Warm, soft-hearted, participating
B	Dull, less intelligent		•										More intelligent, bright
C	Emotionally immature and unstable		•										Emotionally mature, stable, realistic
D	Deliberate, stodgy, placid										•		Unrestrained, nervous
E	Obedient, mild, dependent		•										Assertive aggressive, rebellious
F	Sober, silent, serious					•							Happy-go-lucky, enthusiastic
G	Casual, quitting, undependable		•										Conscientious, persevering
H	Timid, threat-sensitive, shy					•							Venturesome, thick-skinned
I	Practical, tough-minded						•						Tender-minded, sensitive, protected
J	Vigorous, goes readily with group					•							Individualistic, obstructive, reflective
O	Secure, resilient, confident											•	Discouraged, self-reproaching
Q ₂	Group follower, values social approval				•								Makes own decisions, resourceful
Q ₃	Careless, ignores standards		•										Self-controlled, self-respecting
Q ₄	Relaxed, composed							•					Tense, driven, irritable

Each of the above-mentioned factors is represented by a bipolar continuum of which the two extreme poles are described on the left-hand pole (which represents a standard score of 1 to 4) and the right-hand pole (which represents a standard score of 7 to 10). However, one should guard against the assumption that the right-hand 'high' pole is 'good' in some psychological sense or other and that the left-hand 'low' pole is 'bad'.

According to which performances and purposes are considered, sometimes the left and sometimes the right-hand pole may be advantages. For the sake of convenience, each factor is briefly indicated by an alphabetical letter.

A brief discussion of the significantly high and low primary factors follows:

Significant high scores (standard sten scores 8, 9, and 10):

- D (9) This high score indicates that Gary may be extremely unrestrained, impatient, impulsive, distractible, egotistical and present with nervous symptoms.
- O (10) This high score indicates that Gary may be extremely anxious, self-reproaching, depressed, lonely, inadequate and easily touched. He may also be over-sensitive to people's approval or disapproval.

Significant low scores (standard sten scores 1, 2, and 3):

- B (2) This low score may reflect a low mental capacity, coupled with an inability to deduce relations and correlates.
- C (2) This low score may be indicative of being emotionally less stable, changeable in attitudes and interests, evasive of responsibilities and giving up easily.
- E (2) This extremely low score may be related to obedience, mildness, dependency, being easily led and submissiveness.
- G (2) This low score may indicate low superego strength, a lack of moral standards, a tendency to disregard rules and to quit easily.
- Q₃ (2) A low score on this factor may be indicative of laxity, poor self-sentimental integration, following his own urges and a general carelessness as far as social rules are concerned.

The following second-order factors were calculated:

- Anxiety
- Extraversion

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Anxiety} &= \frac{(11-C) + D + (11-G) + (11-H) + 0 + (11-Q_3) + Q_4}{7} \\
 &= \frac{9 + 9 + 6 + 9 + 10 + 9 + 7}{7} \\
 &= \frac{59}{7} \\
 &= 8.4
 \end{aligned}$$

The second order factor score of 8.4 for anxiety that was obtained in the HSPQ is considered to be significantly high. It may indicate that Gary experiences high levels of anxiety, even though it is mainly on a sub-conscious level.

According to Visser et al. (1995:41), Factor C needs to be considered in the interpretation of the anxiety second order factor score. The significantly low C score (2) that was obtained may indicate that Gary presents with personality disintegration, which in return may retard his chances of successful future adaptation.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Extraversion} &= \frac{A + F + H + (11-J) + (11-Q2)}{5} \\
 &= \frac{4 + 5 + 5 + 6 + 7}{5} \\
 &= \frac{27}{5} \\
 &= 5.2
 \end{aligned}$$

Gauging from the second order factor score of 5.2 (average) for Extraversion, it is obvious that Gary may be considered to be neither an extrovert, nor an introvert type of person.

Unlike the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF) which can be used to determine the second order factor, Independence, the HSPQ does not allow for it, due to the different structure of its formula. However, it does appear to be highly likely that Gary's scores on a number of primary factors may be indicative of a strong dependency of approval. These factors include the following:

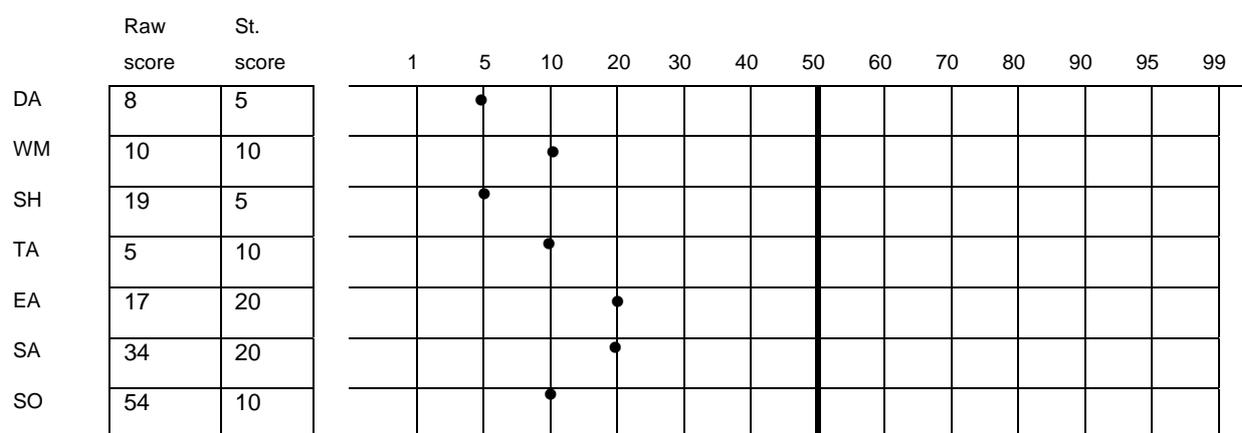
- C Low (2) Ego weakness; emotionally less stable;
- E Low (2) Submissiveness; easily led;
- G Low (2) Low superego-strength; disregards rules;
- I High (9) Tender-minded; dependent;
- O High (10) Apprehensive; self-reproaching; and
- Q₂ Low Average (4) Group dependent; "a joiner" and sound follower.

Considering his global personality profile as revealed by the HSPQ, it may be concluded that Gary in all probability presents with ego weakness as well as relatively high levels of anxiety, sensitivity, tender mindedness, submissiveness, discouragement and a strong dependency of approval. From this, it may be inferred that given his unfavourable social context, he potentially may fall prey to undesirable influences in his environment by possibly being lured into the realm of gangsterism in future, even though he is presently evading such activities. This conclusion is further based on the fact that he may not be equipped with the intellectual skills to distinguish what is good or bad for him, given his significantly low score (2) on Factor B, which reveals poor mental capacity.

(iii) Survey for Study Habits and Attitudes

The Survey for Study Habits and Attitudes (SSHA) was administered on 22 March 2006. It took place at Gary's school and I administered the test. Table 5.11 presents the data that were obtained.

Table 5.11 Profile of Gary's survey for Study Habits and Attitudes



The data presented in the preceding graph, shows that Gary obtained significantly low scores on all seven scales of the survey. In view of the fact that a relatively high, statistically significant relationship exists between study habits and attitudes and school achievement, the following deductions may be made regarding Gary's habits and attitudes as far as his academic work is concerned:

- Gary rarely completes assignments promptly, delays the start of an assignment and is inclined to waste time unnecessarily;
- Generally speaking, he does not employ effective study methods and his efficiency in doing assignments is low. Also, the extent to which he sets about his school work appears to be relatively poor;
- His attitude towards his teachers' classroom behaviour and methods seems to be negative;

- Gary does not demonstrate acceptance of any educational ideals, objectives, practices and requirements, as well as any confidence in his scholastic aims; and
- Overall, his study habits and attitudes appear to be characteristic of a learner who is performing poorly and/ or not according to his ability.

(iv) The Sacks Sentence Completion Test (SSCT)

The administering of this test took place on 11 April 2006 at Gary's school. Gary was presented sixty incomplete sentences, which he was instructed to complete by filling in the initial idea which came to mind. The first part of all the sentences appeared in normal letters, while Gary's responses were written in italics. On completion of the test, the responses were placed in fifteen categories each comprising four sentences. As discussed in 4.4.3.5, an assessment rating score (2, 1, 0 or X) was assigned to each category after a global qualitative evaluation was made thereof. An interpretative summary of each category is also supplied:

Items	Categories	
14, 29, 44, 59	i. Attitudes towards mother:	<i>Rating: 2</i>
	<i>My mother is always cross and upset.</i>	
	<i>My mother and I don't talk a lot to each other.</i>	
	<i>I think that most mothers like to scold their children.</i>	
	<i>I like my mother but she just does her own things.</i>	
	<i>Interpretative summary:</i> Gary's relationship with his mother seems to be extremely poor, if not, non-existent.	
1, 16, 31, 46	ii. Attitude towards father:	<i>Rating: 2</i>
	<i>I feel that my father seldom make an effort to visit me.</i>	
	<i>If my father would only know that I want to see him more.</i>	
	<i>I wish my father can come fetch me weekends.</i>	
	<i>I feel that my father is not like a real father to me.</i>	
	<i>Interpretative summary:</i> He feels that his father has abandoned him	

and expresses a strong desire to be with him more often.

- 12, 27, 42, 57 iii. Attitudes towards family unit: *Rating: 2*
- Compared with most families, mine *are boring*.
 My family treats me like *a small boy*.
 Most families I know *always argue with each other*.
 When I was a child, my family *life was messed up*.
- Interpretative summary: His family functioning appears to be dysfunctional and his family life perceived by him as extremely dull.
- 10, 25, 40, 55 iv. Attitudes towards females: *Rating: 2*
- My idea of a perfect woman *is one that is unlike my mother and grandmother*.
 I think most girls *are loud*.
 I believe most women *are unfriendly*.
 What I like least about women is *their bad attitude*.
- Interpretative summary:* Gary seems to have unfavourable perceptions about females.
- 11, 26, 41, 56 v. Attitude toward heterosexual relationships: *Rating: 1*
- When I see a boy and a girl together *I wonder where they are going*.
 My feeling about steady relationships is that *it's for confused people*.
 If I had a love affair *I'm not certain how I will react*.
 My love life *there is nothing happening*.
- Interpretative summary:* He appears to have extremely little hope of achieving good adjustment in intimate relationships.
- 8, 23, 38, 53 vi. Attitude toward friends and acquaintances: *Rating: 1*

I feel that a real friend *will stay on my side*.
 I don't like people who think *they are smarter than others*.
 The people I like best are the one's *who like me*.
 When I'm not around my friends *I wonder [sic] they say about me*.

Interpretative summary: He seems suspicious and waits for approval of others before committing himself emotionally. (This is a confirmation of dependency as found in HSPQ).

6, 21, 36, 51 vii. Attitude toward seniors at school or at work: *Rating: 1*
 The senior learners at school *think they are very wonderful*.
 The educators at school *only like the clever children*.
 When I see the principal coming *I walk another way*.
 Educators whom I consider my superiors *must be fair to all learners*.

Interpretative summary: Gary seems to resent and fear authority.

4, 19, 34, 48 viii. Attitude towards to subordinates: *Rating: 2*
 If I were in charge, *I will listen to every one under me*.
 If I had to be an educator, *I won't give everybody their way*.
 The learners in my class, *some of them don't really like me*.
 In giving orders to others, *I feel they might not like it*.

Interpretative summary: He feels he will not be capable of doing a good supervisory job and to handle hostility.

13, 28, 43, 58 ix. Attitude toward friends at school or at home: *Rating: 2*
 At school I get along best with *only a few boys whom I know*.
 The learners in my class *look down on me and think I'm stupid*.
 I like to be with friends at school who *understand my situation*.
 Friends who attend school with me *usually "bunk" classes*.

Interpretative summary: Gary feels rejected by most children in his class and only feel comfortable among those who have empathy with him.

7, 22, 37, 52

x. Fears

Rating: 2

I know it is silly, but I am afraid *of the dark*.

My friends don't know that I'm afraid of *being embarrassed*.

I wish I could lose the fear of *being embarrassed by teachers*.

My fears sometimes force me to *run away from school*.

Interpretative summary: Gary's fear of embarrassment and rejection causes him to withdraw.

15, 30, 45, 60

xi. Guilt feelings

Rating: 1

I would do anything to forget the time *I saw my parents fighting*.

My greatest mistake was *running away from troubles*.

When I was younger, I felt guilty *about stealing my cousin's money*.

The worst thing I ever did *was to smoke dagga with my friends*.

Interpretative summary: He has regrets about the past and seems mildly disturbed about his failure to deal with trouble.

2, 17, 32, 47

xii. Attitude towards own abilities:

Rating: 2

When the odds are against me, *I get away from it*

I believe I have the ability *to learn to do something with my hands*.

My greatest weakness is *reading and maths, I can't actually do it*.

When I can not cope with my schoolwork, *I just want to leave everything*.

Interpretative summary: He feels extremely incompetent as far as his own abilities are concerned.

9, 24, 39, 54

xiii. Attitude towards the past:

Rating: 1

When I was a young child, *I was unhappy about the way my parents*

used to argue and fight in our house.

Before I came to high school *I was worried about the teachers.*

If I were young again *I want to live with my parents in our old house.*

My most vivid childhood memory is *a beating from my grandmother.*

Interpretative summary: He has some unpleasant memories about the past, but seemingly he has not experienced any serious trauma.

5, 20, 35, 50

xiv. Attitude towards the future:

Rating: 1

To me the future looks *a little bit dark, but I'm hoping for the best.*

I look forward to *find help from someone to get out of my situation.*

Some day I *will have to work but I'm not sure who will give me work.*

When I am older *I'll be a better person.*

Interpretative summary: He feels unsure of himself, but to a certain degree he appears to be optimistic.

3, 18, 13, 49

xv. Goals:

Rating: 1

I always wanted *to be rich.*

I could be perfectly happy if *I could leave school right now and go work.*

My secret ambition in life *is to improve my life.*

What I want most out of life is *to be happy like other people.*

Interpretative summary: Gary seems to identify happiness with material success.

On the basis of the responses obtained from the Sacks Sentence Completion Test, the following concluding deductions can be made:

In eight of the fifteen categories, Gary obtained a rating of 2, which may be indicative of severe disturbance and appears to require therapeutic aid in handling emotional conflicts in these categories. His rating of 1 in the balance of the categories may reveal mild disturbance. He may present with emotional conflicts in these categories, but appears able to handle them without

therapeutic aid. In none of the categories Gary obtained a 0 rating, which implies no significant disturbance.

An examination of his global Sacks Sentence Completion Test profile reveals that Gary appears to be trapped in a dysfunctional family system. There is significant evidence to suggest that his relationships with his separated parents differ largely. He does not seem to get along well with his mother and grandmother, whom he lives with, while he expresses a burning desire to be with his father, with whom he is not in regular contact. Generally speaking, Gary's family life is perceived as being unattractively dull.

With regard to the rest of his interpersonal relationships, it is obvious that he views females in an unfavourable light and that a poor possibility for the achievement of well adjusted intimate relationships exists. A certain degree of suspicion and dependency appear to be present, since Gary waits for approval of others, before committing himself emotionally. He apparently also resents and fears authority and regards himself as incapable of performing efficiently in a supervisory capacity.

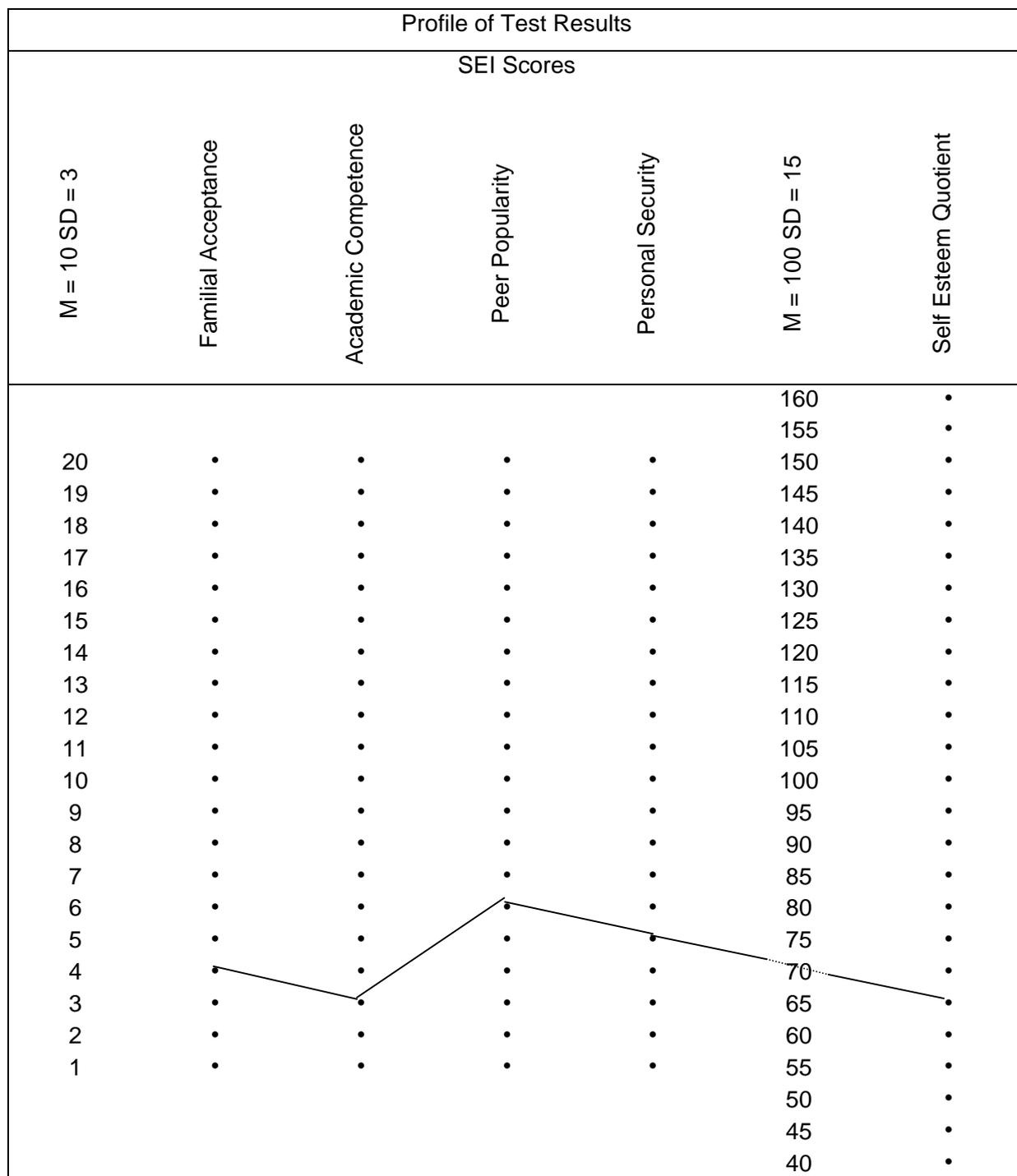
(v) Self-Esteem Index

The Self-Esteem Index (SEI) was administered at Blackheath High School on 18 April 2006 by me. Table 5.12 lists Gary's test results obtained in the SEI, while Table 5.13 reflects his Self-Esteem Index profile.

Table 5.12 Gary's Self-Esteem Index scores

	Raw score	Percentile rank	Standard score		Self esteem quotient	
			Gary's total	Range of standard score	Total	Range
Total Test	176	0.9			65	40 -160
Perception of Familial Acceptance Scale (FA)	36	2	4	1 - 20		
Perception of Academic Competence Scale (AC)	42	1	3	1 - 20		
Perception of Peer Popularity Scale (PP)	44	9	6	1 - 20		
Perception of Personal Security Scale (PS)	45	5	5	1 - 20		

Table 5.13 Profile of Gary's Self-Esteem Index:



A brief discussion of Gary's results on the different sub-scales and of his total score obtained in the SEI follows:

The *Perception of Familial Acceptance Scale* measures the way individuals perceive and value themselves as members of their families and in their homes. Gary's significantly low score of 4 which may fall between 1 and 20 possibly reflects extremely negative perceptions of his home and family life. This implies that he may perceive himself as not being valued, included and accepted by his family.

As far as the *Perception of Academic Competence Scale* which measures the individual's interest in and desire to excel at academic activities, Gary's significantly low score of 3 which may lie between 1 and 20, reflects that he may be experiencing difficulty coping with his school work. This may be coupled with a feeling that he is unable to meet the expectations and requirements offered to him in his learning environment.

The score of 6 which may fall between 1 and 20, which was obtained on the *Perception of Peer Popularity Scale* and measures the individual's perceptions of his or her acceptance and popularity with people of his or her own age, may be considered as significantly low. Low scores on this particular scale are common among children with low overall self-esteem, poor social skills, or who are socially inexperienced.

In terms of the *Perception of Personal Security Scale*, which gives an indication of children's perceptions of their psychological well-being, Gary's significantly low score of 5 which could fall between 1 and 20, may indicate that he is a withdrawn type of person and/ or that he is experiencing anxiety.

On the basis of the results obtained in terms of his total self-esteem quotient of 65, which may fall between < 40 and 160, Gary's score may be considered to be significantly low. Therefore, it may be concluded that he, in all likelihood, presents with overall low self-esteem.

Considering his overall results obtained in the *Self-Esteem Index*, it appears that Gary's perception of his functioning in his entire context may be described as highly inept and lacking the required cognitive as well as social skills to meet the demands of his present circumstances.

(c) Synthesis and conclusion of the case study: Gary

Gary's high school career commenced in 2005 as a grade eight learner. He is currently (2006) repeating the same grade. Based on the criteria set out in chapter four, he was randomly selected from the typical truant group which completed the questionnaire. In this regard, kindly refer to 4.4.3.4.

For the purpose of the case study, Gary was interviewed on 22 March 2006. See annexure C for a review of a transcribed copy of the complete interview.

The data obtained from the interview has been organised into different categories and grouped into the ecological systems within which they function, as discussed in 5.3.3.2. Direct quotations were presented verbatim, without any corrections, so as to obtain a clear reflection of the true essence of Gary's experiential world and his different levels of functioning.

Emerging from the interview, it appears that Gary's truant behaviour is likely to stem from maladjustment in his entire social world. He seems to experience unfavourable domestic circumstances, and also as being marginalised, humiliated and rejected at school by peers and teachers. Besides encountering immense difficulty coping efficiently with his learning matter, he seems to lack motivation to apply himself diligently to his scholastic as well as other tasks and challenges in his everyday life. His apparent lack of interpersonal skills, mild mental disabilities and negative self-image seem to discourage Gary from engaging meaningfully in classroom and extra-curricular activities at school. Furthermore, his immediate physical surrounding is characterised by high levels of gangster activities and numerous forms of criminal behaviour conducted by opposing gangs operating in the broader area around his school. Consequently, these activities occasionally spill over into school grounds.

Based on the significant high and low scores obtained in the HSPQ, Gary's personality seems to be characterised by low ego strength, a tendency to disregard rules, quitting easily, laxity and poor self-sentimental integration. Moreover, he appears to be unrestrained, impatient, impulsive, distractible, insecure, dependent, anxious, self-reproaching, lonely and over-sensitive to people's approval or disapproval. Therefore, it is understandable that he chooses to avoid responsibilities by opting to escape through truanting.

In so far as his study habits and attitudes towards scholastic activities are concerned, Gary rarely completes assignments and may be inclined to delay the start thereof. He does not use effective study methods. His attitude towards his teachers' classroom behaviour and methods appears to be negative. Furthermore, acceptance and the pursuit of any educational ideals, objectives, practices and requirements seem to be lacking. Generally speaking, Gary's study habits and attitudes towards his academic activities appear to be typical of a learner who is not performing according to expectations of learners of his chronological age.

Considering the data obtained from the Sacks Sentence Completion Test, Gary experiences his family life as extremely unpleasant. His parents are separated and Gary strongly yearns for a father figure.

As far as his interpersonal relations are concerned, it emerged that he is particularly unfavourably disposed toward females and that his chances of attaining positive adjustment in an intimate relationship appear to be relatively slim. He not only portrays suspicion and alienation, but also seems to be dependent on the approval of others, prior to engaging with them. Furthermore, Gary appears to have a strong anti-authority attitude and considers himself completely lacking the qualities of someone who has to cope with the demands and challenges faced by an efficient leader or supervisor.

Manifestation of a poor self-esteem is particularly evident, given the outcomes of the SEI that was administered to Gary. On all four sub-scales of this instrument, significantly low scores of 6 and below out of 20 and a global self-esteem quotient of 65 out of a minimum of 40 and a maximum of 160 were obtained. In terms of the Perception of Familial Acceptance Scale, Gary's low score of 4 may be indicative of undesirable perceptions of his home and family milieu. His score of 3 on Academic Competence Scale shows that he may be battling to cope scholastically. According to his score of 6 on the Peer Popularity Scale, he seems to be a person with low self-esteem, poor interpersonal skills and generally socially maladjusted. The low score of 5 on the Personal Security Scale may reflect a tendency to withdraw easily, and demonstrate uncertainty and anxiety.

5.3.3.2 Case study 2: Stephan (non-truant learner)

(a) Biographical information

Name	:	Stephan (pseudonym)
Gender	:	Male
Chronological age	:	15 years, 2 months
Home language	:	English
Grade	:	9

(b) Interpretation of assessment media

(i) Interview

Stephan was interviewed on 11 April 2006 at his school. A full transcription of the interview is attached as annexure D.

From the start of the interview, Stephan presented as a friendly, outspoken, and well-nurtured child. He settled into the interview situation very easily, appeared relaxed and co-operated extremely well during the entire interview.

□ Additional biographical information

Stephan lives with his parents and two siblings. He is the youngest of the family's three children. His secondary school career commenced in 2005 as a grade 8 learner at a school in Kleinvele. He represents his school in various sport codes, including soccer and hockey in winter and athletics in summer.

□ Family and environmental background

Based on information obtained in the interview, Stephan's family unit seems to be reasonably intact. The family often go out together and are extremely fond of enjoying all kinds of entertainment, such as dining, watching a movie in the cinema or going on holiday. What fascinates Stephan the most about their holidaying in far places is that he always gets to meet

new friends and they always find exciting stuff to do. The family occupies a house of their own in Kuils River, a relatively upmarket suburb, which is situated approximately 15 kilometres away from the school. The majority of his friends from Kuils River also attend the same secondary school.

Both Stephan's parents are employed: his father as a clerk at Somerset West municipality and his mother as a teacher in Kraaifontein. His older brother is a third-year law student and his sister, a grade 11 learner. She also attends the same school. He and his sister are transported to school every morning by their father on his way to work. After school, they travel back to Kuils River by taxi, together with many of their friends from the same neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood, in which Stephan lives, is upmarket and relatively quiet and not affected as negatively by criminal activities and numerous other kinds of social ills as the area in which the school is situated. There are two well-maintained parks, an easy accessible library, a few small shops and a huge sport complex within walking distance from his house.

□ Intellectual image

According to Stephan, he is coping reasonably well with his academic challenges and generally feels extremely positive about his experiences at school. Due to his educators' unfailing interest in him, he holds them in high esteem and considers them to be concerned and reasonably helpful towards him and other learners who work diligently at their scholastic activities. His family, in particular his mother, seems to play a very supportive role in his scholastic progress.

Stephan's ideal in life is to become a computer programmer and he seems dedicated to make a success of his school career and future tertiary training to realise his dream. Overall, he obtains excellent results, particularly in mathematics, and mentioned that he does not hesitate to approach his peers and his teachers for assistance in the event of experiencing difficulty in grasping or executing academic tasks.

Based on the foregoing, it appears reasonably fair to deduce that Stephan functions on the level of formal operations, the stage of cognitive development in Piagetian theory that follows concrete operations. According to Berk (2003:246), formal operations are characterised among others by the following aspects of thought:

- A clear distinction between the actual and the possible;
- The ability to use symbols to represent other symbols; and
- The ability to co-ordinate variables – that is to take several factors into account at the same time.

Formal operations enable adolescents to study successfully in such learning areas as algebra, chemistry, philosophy and literature. In view of the fact that Stephan is coping relatively well in mathematics, one can assume that he is able to use the hypothetical-deductive method of thought, in which one inspects the data and then hypothesises that a particular theory may explain those data. According to Piaget, the ability of hypothetical-deductive thought is the basis of experimentation and scientific thinking (Berk 2003:247).

- Emotional image

Upon reaching adolescence, the child is confronted with contradictory emotions. On the one hand he or she must remain in the role of a child, while at the same time gradually moving away from the position of a younger child.

Stephan presents as a reasonably confident and emotionally well-adjusted person. Although he admits that he is slightly shorter than most boys of his chronological age, he seems extremely pleased about his achievements. He also appears to be largely contented and accepts how he feels about himself and the manner in which his life is unfolding.

As far as interpersonal relations are concerned, Stephan interacts well with his family members, peers and teachers with whom he is in daily contact. Since he maintains fairly healthy relationships with everyone in his social world, particularly his peers, it seems likely that Stephan enjoys ample opportunity to evaluate his opinions, abilities and even physical changes – a process referred as *social comparison* in 3.3.4. This occurrence is highly typical, mainly due to numerous cognitive and physical changes that take place during the initial stages of puberty, which normally result in adolescents reaching out to their peers, with whom they usually exchange their personal experiences.

□ Physical image

In view of the immense change in the velocity of growth adolescents undergo particularly during early adolescence, they find themselves growing as rapidly as they grew when they were two or three years old. They experience tremendous growth and transformation in physical appearance from children to young adults. Although adolescence happens to everyone, it does not happen to everyone at the same time. There is a good deal of competition among adolescents because of this variation in development. Boys and girls compare themselves with one another to see how they rate. Nevertheless, the rapid growth that characterises adolescence affects almost every part of the body (Crain, 2000:167).

Although Stephan acknowledges that he is physically slightly shorter than the average boy of his age, he expresses his satisfaction with his physical image and does not mind being shorter than most of his peers. On the contrary, he seems very happy with the way in which he presents and admits confidently that he accepts and appreciates the way he was created. In order to gain exposure in physical interaction, Stephan represents his school in various forms of contact sport such as soccer and hockey and also holds provincial colours as an avid athlete.

□ Cognitive image

Gauging from the information obtained during the interview, Stephan presents as a highly motivated and determined type of learner, who realises that in order to attain his goals, he has to apply himself unreservedly to academic and other challenges in life. At this early stage and relatively young age, he has already set his career goal, namely to become an information technology analyst when he is older. He reported that he is eager to do his utmost best at school and to give whatever it requires, in order to achieve his career goal.

In addition to the fact that he is an extremely dedicated and motivated learner, Stephan enjoys unconditional support from his family as well as continued interest and encouragement from his teachers to pursue his dreams and aspirations in life. He considers his mother as his main source of inspiration, while his sister kindly renders him support and guidance regarding his scholastic work.

Therefore, his positive family and educational dynamics coupled with his own potent internal willpower and urge to succeed may be considered to be highly favourable factors which will inevitably stand him in good stead to achieve his ultimate goals in future.

□ Moral image

As mentioned earlier, moral development refers to the process by which children learn the principles that enable them to judge particular behaviour patterns as “good” or “bad”, “approved” or “disapproved” and to direct their own behaviour accordingly. The ability to differentiate between right and wrong is largely considered to be one of the adolescent’s most important developmental tasks.

Based upon Stephan’s formal-operational thought level and his sheer dedication to render his level best in realising his goals in life, it is likely that he engages in sound moral reasoning. He expresses a strong desire to fulfil his career goal. Achieving this may, to a large degree, not only satisfy one of his personal needs, namely to achieve, but may also enjoy the approval and pleasure of the significant others in his life.

□ Brief summary of the interview

Stephan presented as a well-cared for, optimistic and friendly boy who settled into the interview situation with ease. From the onset, he impressed as an enthusiastic type of person, who approaches life with tremendous zest.

His family dynamics and environmental background seems to be reasonably intact, except for the area in which his current school is situated. The immediate surrounding of the school is largely plagued by high levels of social dysfunctionality and disorder. Generally speaking, his domestic situation appears to be reasonably stable as well as nurturing in terms of his emotional and social developmental needs. Drawing heavily on their socio-economic status and level of education, his family seemingly plays a significant role in his life. In this particular regard, his mother and sister are striking sources of inspiration in virtually all spheres of Stephan’s life and play an exemplary role in his overall functioning.

As far as his different levels of personal functioning are concerned, Stephan presents as a well-adjusted early adolescent and conscientious learner. His unrestricted zest for life and sheer determination to reach his ultimate goals, appear to be two of the most potent driving forces in Stephan's pursuit to attain success in life. A copy of the interview is attached annexure D.

(ii) High School Personality Questionnaire

The HSPQ was conducted on Stephan on 10 April 2006 at his school. I was personally responsible for the administering thereof. Table 5.14 presents the scores that were obtained in the HSPQ.

Table: 5.14 Profile of Stephan's High School Personality Questionnaire

FACTOR	Low score description	Standard sten score (STEN)										High score description
		Average										
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
A	Critical, reserved, cool								•			Warm, soft-hearted, participating
B	Dull, less intelligent								•			More intelligent, bright
C	Emotionally immature and unstable									•		Emotionally mature, stable, realistic
D	Deliberate, stodgy, placid			•								Unrestrained, nervous
E	Obedient, mild, dependent						•					Assertive aggressive, rebellious
F	Sober, silent, serious					•						Happy-go-lucky, enthusiastic
G	Casual, quitting, undependable									•		Conscientious, persevering
H	Timid, sensitive, shy									•		Venturesome, thick-skinned
I	Practical, tough-minded					•						Tender-minded, sensitive, protected
J	Vigorous, goes readily with group		•									Individualistic, obstructive, reflective
O	Secure, resilient, confident			•								Discouraged, self-reproaching
Q ₂	Group follower, values social								•			Makes own decisions, resourceful
Q ₃	Careless, ignores standards									•		Self-controlled, self-respecting
Q ₄	Relaxed, composed			•								Tense, driven, irritable

Each of the above-mentioned factors is represented by a bipolar continuum of which the two extreme poles are described on the left-hand pole (which represents a standard score of 1 to 4) and the right-hand pole (which represents a standard score of 7 to 10). However, one should guard against the assumption that the right-hand 'high' pole is 'good' in some psychological sense or other and that the left-hand 'low' pole is 'bad'.

Depending on which performances and purposes are considered, sometimes the left and sometimes the right-hand pole may be advantages. For the sake of convenience, each factor is briefly indicated by an alphabetical letter.

A brief discussion of the significantly low and high primary factors follow:

Significantly low scores (standard sten scores 1, 2 and 3):

- D (3) This significantly low score indicates that Stephan may be undemonstrative, complacent, constant, self-effacing and not restless.
- J (2) This significantly low score may indicate that Stephan is filled with zest for life, enjoys group action and accepts common standards. It may also be easy for him to sink his personality into group enterprise.
- O (3) A low score obtained for this factor implies that Stephan may be a self-assured, untroubled, self-confident, cheerful and resilient type of person.
- Q4 (3) A low score obtained for this factor may indicate that Stephan may present as a relaxed, tranquil, unfrustrated and composed type of person.

Significantly high scores (standard sten scores 8, 9 and 10):

- A (8) A high score for this factor may indicate that Stephan, in all probability, may be regarded as someone who is warm-hearted, good-natured, ready to co-operate, attentive to people, trustful, easy going and likes to participate.
- B (9) This high score may imply that Stephan has high mental capacity, may be regarded as insightful and intellectually adaptable.
- C (8) A significantly high score for this factor may indicate that Stephan may be regarded as someone who is emotionally stable, mature, calm, responsible, constant in interests and avoids difficulties.

G (9) This significantly high score may be an indication that Stephan may be regarded as conscientious, determined, persevering, emotionally disciplined and concerned about moral standards and rules.

H (9) A high score for this factor may indicate that Stephan is adventurous, friendly, socially bold and enjoys meeting people.

Q2 (8) Stephan's high score on this factor may indicate that he is a self-sufficient and resourceful type of person who prefers his own decisions.

Q3 (9) This significantly high score may indicate self-sufficiency, social preciseness and someone who follows his or her self-image.

The following second order factors were calculated:

□ Anxiety

□ Extraversion

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Anxiety} &= \frac{(11-C) + D + (11-G) + (11-H) + 0 + (11-Q_3) + Q_4}{7} \\
 &= \frac{2 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 3}{7} \\
 &= \frac{17}{7} \\
 &= 2.4
 \end{aligned}$$

The Second Order Factor score of 2.4 for anxiety that was obtained in the HSPQ is considered to be significantly low. This may indicate that Stephan experiences reasonably low levels of anxiety.

According to Visser, et al. (1995:41), Factor C needs to be considered in the interpretation of the anxiety Second Order Factor score. The significantly high C score (9) that was obtained may

indicate that Stephan presents as emotionally stable, mature for his age, calm, responsible and has the ability to adjust to facts and to face reality.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Extraversion} &= \frac{A + F + H + (11-J) + (11-Q2)}{5} \\
 &= \frac{8 + 6 + 9 + 9 + 3}{5} \\
 &= \frac{35}{5} \\
 &= 7
 \end{aligned}$$

The Second Order Factor score of 7 for Extraversion that was obtained in the HSPQ is considered a high average score, which may indicate that Stephan tends to be more of an extrovert, than an introvert type of person.

Unlike the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF) which can be used to determine the second order factor Independence, the HSPQ does not allow for it, in view of the different structure of the latter instrument's formula. However, by analysing certain of the significant primary factors based on the scores obtained by Stephan, the conclusion can be made in terms of which he may be regarded as a largely independent type of person. These factors include the following:

- C High (9) Ego strength, emotionally stable;
- O Low (3) Self-assured, complacent, self-confident;
- Q2 High (8) Self-sufficient, prefers own decisions; and
- Q3 High (9) Controlled, socially precise.

Considering Stephan's overall scores obtained in the HSPQ, it may be deduced that he is an emotionally mature, conscientious, resilient, venturesome, self-controlled and resourceful type of person for someone of his particular developmental level – namely early adolescence. It would also appear that he presents as intelligent, independent, vigorous, highly relaxed, cheerful,

warm hearted, trustful, easy going and someone who finds great fulfilment in participating in constructive group activities.

(iii) Survey for Study Habits and Attitudes

The SSHA was administered on 12 April 2006. It took place at Stephan's school and the administering thereof was conducted by me. Table 5.15 below, presents the data obtained.

Table 5.15 Profile of Stephan's Survey for Study Habits and Attitudes

	Raw score	St. score	1	5	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	95	99
DA	35	90											•		
WM	37	97													•
SH	72	97													•
TA	34	85										•			
EA	32	80										•			
SA	66	85										•			
SO	138	95												•	

The data presented in the preceding graph shows that Stephan generally obtained significantly high scores on all seven scales of the survey. In view of the fact that a relatively high, statistically significant relationship exists between study habits and attitudes and school achievement, the following deductions may be made regarding Stephan's habits and attitudes as far as his academic work and scholastic progress are concerned:

- It appears that Stephan regularly and timeously executes his scholastic activities and generally does not delay the commencement thereof;
- He uses highly effective study methods and generally handles assignments in a very efficient and successful manner;
- His attitude towards his teachers' classroom behaviour and methods appears to be highly positive;

- Stephan clearly demonstrates acceptance of his educational ideals, objectives, practices and requirements, as well as a high level of confidence in his scholastic aims;
- Overall, his study habits and attitudes appear to be characteristic of a learner who is achieving efficiently and/ or according to his true ability.

(iv) The Sacks Sentence Completion Test (SSCT)

The administering of this test took place on 24 April 2006 at his school. Stephan was presented sixty incomplete sentences, which he was instructed to complete by filling in the initial idea which came to mind. The first part of all the sentences appeared in normal letters, while Stephan's responses were written in italics. On completion of the test, the responses were placed in fifteen categories each comprising four sentences. As discussed in chapter 4, an assessment rating score (2, 1, 0 or X) was assigned to each category after a global qualitative evaluation was made thereof. An interpretative summary of each category is also supplied:

<u>Items</u>	Categories	
14, 29, 44, 59	i. Attitudes towards mother: My mother <i>is a teacher and she works a lot at home.</i> My mother and I <i>do the shopping.</i> I think that most mothers <i>are concerned about their children.</i> I like my mother but <i>she always wakes me up very early.</i>	<i>Rating: 0</i>
	<i>Interpretative summary:</i> Stephan expresses highly positive feelings toward his mother.	
1, 16, 31, 46	ii. Attitude towards father: I feel that my father seldom <i>does exercise.</i> If my father would only <i>stop watching animated TV programmes.</i> I wish my father <i>will take us to Sun City again.</i> I feel that my father is <i>the best daddy in the world.</i>	<i>Rating: 0</i>

Interpretative summary: He admires his father, but wishes he was more active and outgoing.

12, 27, 42, 57 iii. Attitudes towards family unit: *Rating: 0*
 Compared with most families, mine *are very happy*
 My family treats me like *the youngest child in the house, because I do most of the work alone.*
 Most families I know *love to be together and celebrate special days.*
 When I was a child, my family *spoilt me a lot.*

Interpretative summary: He expresses a favourable feeling toward his family which also appears to be highly intact.

10, 25, 40, 55 iv. Attitudes towards females: *Rating: 0*
 My idea of a perfect woman *is that she has to be very good looking.*
 I think most girls *are inquisitive.*
 I believe most women *are very nice and kind.*
 What I like least about women *is they always take long in shops.*

Interpretative summary: Stephan seems to have only minor and superficial criticism about women.

11, 26, 41, 56 v. Attitude toward heterosexual relationships: *Rating: 0*
 When I see a boy and a girl together *I try to listen what they are talking about.*
 My feeling about steady relationships is that *it is good.*
 If I had a love affair *I won't tell my parents about it.*
 My love life *is very quiet.*

Interpretative summary: He appears to be reasonably uncertain about forming relationships with females.

8, 23, 38, 53 vi. Attitude toward friends and acquaintances: *Rating: 0*
 I feel that a real friend *must always be there when you need him.*

I don't like people who *think they are smarter than other people*.
 The people I like best are the one's *who are kind to everyone*.
 When I'm not around, my friends *phone me on my cell phone*.

Interpretative summary: He seems to fit in very well with his friends and expresses mutual good feelings between friends and self.

6, 21, 36, 51

vii. Attitude toward seniors at school or at work:

Rating: 0

The senior learners at school *are nice*.
 The educators at school *are always busy*.
 When I see the principal coming *I already take out my books*.
 Educators whom I consider my superiors *are older than me*.

Interpretative summary: Stephan expresses no conflict with authority-figures. He feels accepted by them.

4, 19, 34, 48

viii. Attitude towards subordinates:

Rating: 0

If I were in charge, *I will check that everyone does his or her work*.
 If I had to be an educator, *I will be fair to everyone in my class*.
 The learners in my class *are all my friends*.
 In giving orders to others, *I will make sure they know what to do*.

Interpretative summary: He feels comfortable and well accepted by subordinates.

13, 28, 43, 58

ix. Attitude toward friends at school or at home:

Rating: 0

At school I get along best with *the boys in my class*.
 The learners in my class *work hard most times*.
 I like to be with friends at school who *are motivated to work hard*.
 Friends who attend school with me *stay in the same area where I live and we sometimes go out together weekends*.

Interpretative summary: Stephan expresses mutually good relationships with his friends, and seems to

get along best with the boys in his class.

7, 22, 37, 52

x. Fears

Rating: 1

I know it is silly, but I am afraid of *some people*.

My friends don't know that I'm afraid of *some people and big dogs*.

I wish I could lose the fear of *being late for school*.

My fears sometimes force me to *speak to somebody older about it*.

Interpretative summary: He has a fear of self-assertion, which is fairly common and not pervasive.

15, 30, 45, 60

xi. Guilt feelings

Rating: 0

I would do anything to forget the time *I was punished for being late*.

My greatest mistake was *to leave my bicycle outside the shop*.

When I was younger, I felt guilty about *nothing*.

The worst thing I ever did was *to miss Sunday school sometimes*.

Interpretative summary: Stephan seems to have minor regrets about certain things in his life, but does not seem to be aware of any guilt feelings.

2, 17, 32, 47

xii. Attitude towards own abilities:

Rating: 0

When the odds are against me, *I do my best*.

I believe I have the ability *to score high marks*.

My greatest weakness is *chocolates*.

When I can not cope with my schoolwork, *I still try my best*.

Interpretative summary: Stephan seems confident about his ability to overcome obstacles, and feels inspired by them to greater efforts.

9, 24, 39, 54

xiii. Attitude towards the past:

Rating: 0

When I was a young child, *my father told me stories at night*.

Before I came to high school *I worked just as hard at primary school*.

If I were young again *I would play my computer games.*

My most vivid childhood memory is *the day when we moved to our new house.*

Interpretative summary: Stephan feels he was well adjusted in the past and seems to have a memory of accomplishment.

5, 20, 35, 50

xiv. Attitude towards the future:

Rating: 0

To me the future looks *very good.*

I look forward to *next week, because then we do oral.*

Some day I *will know everything about computers.*

When I am older *I want to go overseas.*

Interpretative summary: He feels optimistic and seems confident of achieving his goals.

3, 18, 13, 49

xv. Goals:

Rating: 0

I always wanted *to be the best in my school work.*

I could be perfectly happy if *my father allows me to use his laptop.*

My secret ambition in life *is to be successful in my career.*

What I want most out of life *is to live long and healthy and to be very successful in the things I do.*

Interpretative summary: Stephan has a burning desire for success in his life and also sees the importance of good health for happiness.

On the basis of the responses obtained from the Sacks Sentence Completion Test, the following concluding deductions can be made:

It emerged from the above mentioned test that in twelve of the fifteen categories, Stephan was allocated a rating of 0. From this, it may be inferred that he appears not to present with any disturbance in these categories. In the remaining three categories his rating was 1, which is

indicative that he apparently does experience mild disturbance and emotional conflicts, but appears able to handle them without therapeutic aid.

Since Stephan's relationships with all his family members appear to be tremendously positive, his family unit may be described as reasonably intact. Although he expresses highly positive feelings toward all his family members, he in particular singles his mother out as his inspiration and the one he strongly identifies with.

On an interpersonal level, it appears that Stephan on the one hand presents with mixed perceptions about females and seems unsure about forming heterosexual relationships. On the other hand, as far as his attitudes toward his male friends and acquaintances are concerned, he seems reasonably well adjusted and projects a sense of favourable, mutual understanding with them. Furthermore, not only does he express reasonably positive feelings toward authority figures, but he also projects ease and acceptance should he be placed in a position of management or control over others.

Stephan has a few minor regrets about certain things in his past, but does not seem to be aware of any serious guilt feelings. He comes across as a highly motivated, optimistic and confident learner who is determined to make a great success of his scholastic and future vocational aspirations.

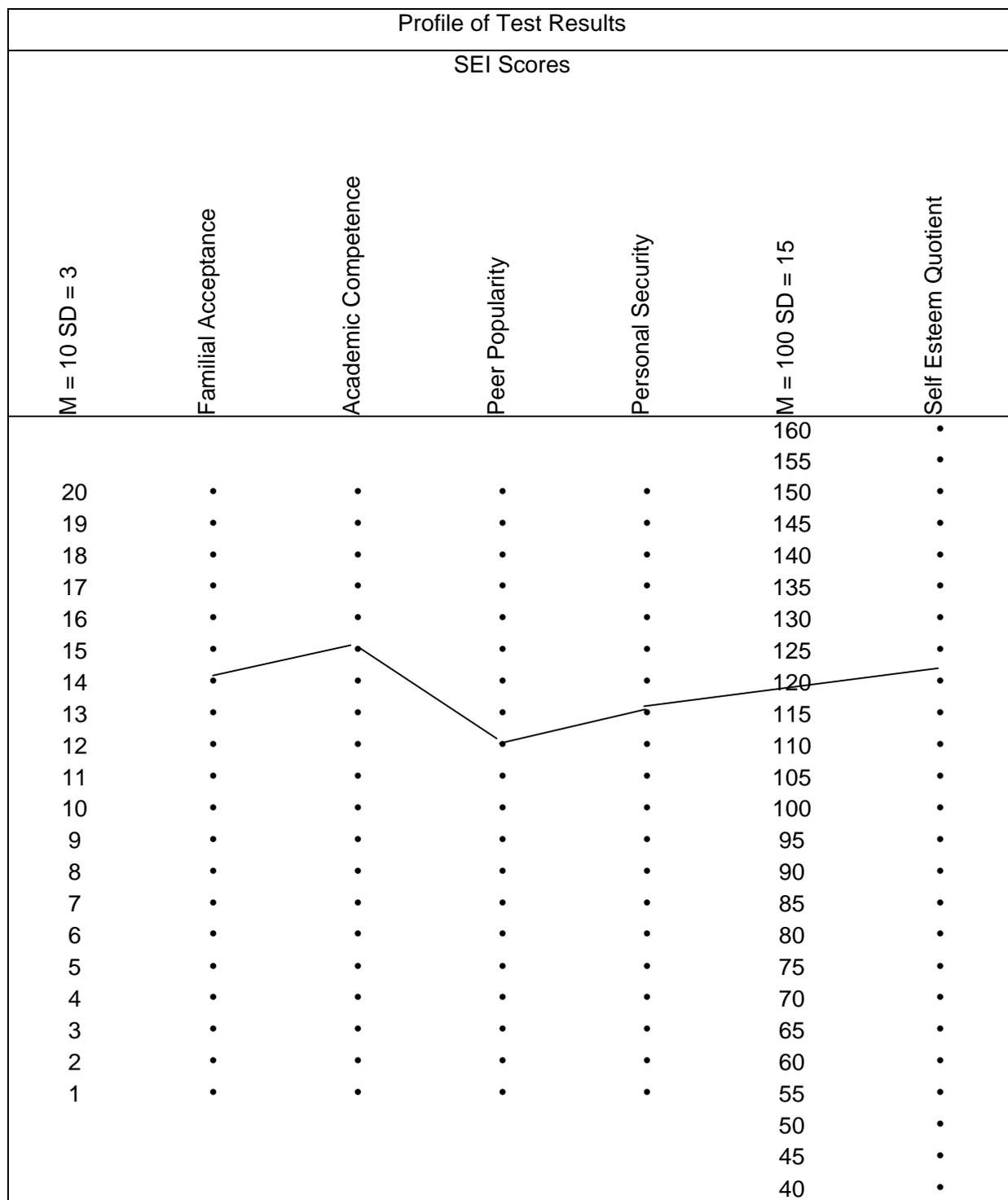
(v) Self-Esteem Index (SEI)

The Self-Esteem Index was administered at his school on 18 April 2006. Table 5.16 lists Stephan's test results obtained in the SEI, while Table 5.17 reflects his Self-Esteem Index Profile.

Table 5.16 Stephan's Self-Esteem Index scores

	Raw score	Percentile rank	Standard score		Self-esteem quotient	
			Stephan's total	Range of standard score	Total	Range
Total Test	275	92			121	40 -160
Perception of Familial Acceptance Scale (FA)	73	91	14	1 - 20		
Perception of Academic Competence Scale (AC)	70	95	15	1 - 20		
Perception of Peer Popularity Scale (PP)	63	75	12	1 - 20		
Perception of Personal Security Scale (PS)	68	84	13	1 - 20		

Table 5.17 Profile of Stephan's Self-Esteem Index



Based on the results obtained by Stephan in the Self-Esteem Index, the following can be deduced given his performance on the various scales of this instrument:

In terms of the *Perception of Familial Acceptance Scale* which measures the way that individuals perceive and value themselves as members of their families and in their homes, Stephan's relatively high score of 14 out of 20 may reflect positive perceptions of his home and family life. This implies that he may perceive himself as being valued, respected and included by his family.

As far as the *Perception of Academic Competence Scale*, which measures the individual's interest in and desire to excel at academic activities, Stephan's reasonably high score of 15 out of 20 may reflect that he attains reasonable success with his school work. This may be coupled with a feeling that he is able to handle the challenges and requirements made by his current learning environment.

The score of 12 out of 20 that was obtained on the *Perception of Peer Popularity Scale*, which measures the individual's perceptions of his acceptance and popularity with people of their own age, may indicate that Stephan presents with overall high self-esteem, effective social skills and that he may be regarded as socially well adjusted and experienced.

In terms of the *Perception of Personal Security Scale* is concerned, which gives an indication of children's perceptions of their psychological well-being, Stephan's reasonably high score of 13 out of 20 may be indicative thereof that he is a confident and assertive type of person.

His self-esteem quotient of 121, which could fall between 40 and 160, may be considered a relatively high score that indicates that Stephan may generally present with high self-esteem overall.

The emerging picture from Stephan's results in the SEI illustrates that he appears to be significantly well-adjusted in his entire social life world, and views himself as sufficiently capable of dealing with challenges with which he may be confronted. Given his relatively high score of 121, the conclusion may be drawn that Stephan undoubtedly presents with a reasonably positive self-esteem.

(c) Synthesis and conclusion of the case study: Stephan

Stephan is currently a grade 9 learner. He was enrolled at his school as a grade 8 learner in 2005 and passed to grade 9 at the end of the same year. Prior to obtaining his and his parents permission, he was randomly selected from the non-truant group learners who completed the questionnaire and consequently included in the empirical investigation.

As in the case with Gary, (truant learner) an interview was also conducted with Stephan (non-truant learner).

The data that emerged from the interview has been organised into different categories and grouped according to the ecological systems within which they function, as discussed in 5.3.4.2.

Gauging from the interview, he presented as an overall soundly adjusted type of child. His home and family environment seem to be reasonably stable and conducive for his sound psychosocial development. His mother and sister apparently play an exemplary and inspirational role in his development and global functioning.

Based on the significant high and low scores that were obtained in the HSPQ, Stephan's personality seems to be characterised by emotional stability, friendliness, self-assurance, cheerfulness, trustfulness, a co-operative spirit, a sense of responsibility, determination, perseverance, independence and social preciseness.

In terms of his study habits and attitudes, Stephan seems likely to execute his scholastic activities regularly and completes them on time. Assignments appear to be managed in an extremely efficient manner and completed with great success. It emerged that he generally uses highly effective study methods. His attitude towards his educators' classroom behaviour appears to be extremely positive and he furthermore demonstrates acceptance of his educational ideals, objectives, practices as well as a high level of confidence in his scholastic aims.

On the grounds of the responses obtained from the Sack's Sentence Completion Test, it emerged that Stephan's relationship with his family members is reasonably cordial and positive. It appears that his family unit is highly stable and that they are tremendously supportive of each other.

As far as his interpersonal relationships are concerned, he seems to get on a lot better with male acquaintances and friends than with females. Furthermore, he expressed favourable attitudes and positive feelings towards authority figures and also projects ease and acceptance should he be promoted to a position of management or control over others.

It has also been observed that Stephan presented as an extremely motivated and enthusiastic learner, who is determined to attain great success with regard to his current scholastic and future vocational aspirations. As far as his past is concerned, he feels that he was well adjusted and he seems to have a memory of excellent accomplishment. He furthermore seems confident about his ability to overcome any possible obstacles or burdens that may hinder him in future.

The Self-Esteem Quotient of 121 which was obtained by Stephan may be considered a reasonably high score, which may indicate that he probably presents with overall positive self-esteem.

5.3.4 Concluding summary of both respondents

In view of the qualitative nature of the research, the objective was not to compare the two respondents who were involved in the case studies. However, it was decided to include both learners in the investigation, precisely on the grounds of their divergent behaviour and attitude with regard to truancy. Hence, I deem it functional to present some of the most striking differences which surfaced between the two respondents in relatively broad outline. Although a scientific comparison between the two respondents can not be made, an attempt was made to compare the data on a qualitative level. Furthermore, the data is not to be generalised to other learners.

Comparatively speaking, marked contrasts seem to exist in the social contexts and experiential worlds of both respondents. For example, in terms of their family and environmental dynamics, the truant respondent's (Gary) home situation may be regarded as extremely unfavourable. After his parent's separation six years ago, he and his mother are living with his maternal grandmother. In this new family system, it appears that Gary's social and emotional needs are totally disregarded, which seemingly causes him to experience feelings of abandonment and extreme unhappiness. On the other hand, the non-truant learner's (Stephan) family and environmental situation appear to be reasonably stable, supportive and highly functional.

Similarly, Gary also experiences feelings of social and emotional rejection in his scholastic environment. He feels extremely marginalised by the majority of his educators and certain peers, particularly those who consider themselves to be of higher socio-economic standard. Stephan on the other hand, maintains fulfilling interpersonal relationships with virtually all his educators and peers at school alike.

There is evidence to suggest that in terms of their motivational levels, the two respondents presented with notable discrepancies. Gary appears to be pessimistic about his life, but particularly about his own future. Furthermore, he comes across as extremely de-motivated as far as his scholastic challenges are concerned. In contrast, Stephan presents as a tremendously motivated and determined type of person, who applies himself vigorously to his scholastic tasks as well as to other challenges that he may be faced with.

Marked differences were observed in their personalities. Among other, Gary's personality test scores revealed that he presents with low super-ego strength, feelings of insecurity, loneliness, a tendency to disregard rules and that he may be easily influenced. On the other hand, Stephan's personality scores portray him as being someone who is self-secured, insightful, self-confident, responsible, emotionally disciplined, self-confident, adventurous and enjoys meeting people.

The outcome of an evaluation regarding the respondents' study habits and attitudes clearly reveals a significant distinction between them in so far as Gary seemingly rarely completes assignments, embarks on poor study methods and does not particularly demonstrate acceptance of any educational ideals, objectives, practices and any confidence in his scholastic aims. However, exactly the opposite holds true for Stephan who regularly and timeously executes his scholastic assignments, uses highly effective study methods and generally handles assignments in a highly efficient and successful manner. He furthermore clearly portrays unconditional acceptance of his educational ideals, practices, requirements as well as a significantly high level of confidence in his scholastic aims.

Finally, striking differences also seem to prevail in terms of the two respondents' self-esteem. Comparatively speaking, Gary's relatively low self-esteem quotient of 65 may point to negative self-esteem, while Stephan's quotient of 121 may be indicative of reasonably positive self-esteem.

5.4 CONCLUSION

Chapter five was concerned with the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the results of the empirical research. A discussion of the quantitative research data formed the major point of departure of the chapter, followed by a rather lengthy analysis of the data that emerged from various qualitative research methods that were used in the empirical investigation.

Chapter six discusses the results of these analyses. It will also focus on the design and implementation of strategies or guidelines which secondary school educators, *in loco parentis*, may use in dealing with truant behaviour among early adolescents.

CHAPTER 6

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the results of the empirical research were discussed at length. This chapter aims to supply a broad overview of the entire study. It is on the basis of this discussion that recommendations are made to secondary school educators *in loco parentis*, in addressing truant behaviour particularly prevalent among early adolescent learners.

This study was intended to find answers to the following problem:

How can educators, *in loco parentis*, be equipped with the skills and resources necessary to address the problem of truancy?

The inclusion of the term, *in loco parentis*, in the research problem and in the title of the thesis, refers to the capacity of educators as the parents of learners while in their care at school.

6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION

In an attempt to address the above-mentioned research problem, an extensive literature study was conducted to investigate various aspects regarding truant behaviour, including:

- Historical perspectives of truant behaviour;
- Different types of truancy;
- Causes of truant behaviour;
- Recognising potential truants;

- ❑ Consequences of truancy;
- ❑ Truants' feelings while away from school; and
- ❑ Parental attitudes towards truancy.

The preceding literature discussion was followed by an examination of different theories of child development, culminating with an embracing analysis of Urie Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory. In view of its highly differential and encompassing account of contextual influences on children's development, I have opted to base the empirical investigation on the principles of this particular theoretical approach.

The empirical investigation that was carried out included qualitative as well as quantitative research methodology. The following methods were applied:

- ❑ Focus group interview;
- ❑ Interviews;
- ❑ Questionnaire; and
- ❑ Case studies.

6.3 SYNTHESIS OF SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

6.3.1 Main findings and concluding summary of the literature study

6.3.1.1 Truancy as a multi-faceted problem

(i) Historical perspectives

In spite of the renewed attention devoted to this type of behaviour displayed by learners, truancy is not in the least a modern phenomenon. As discussed in 2.2.1, truancy may be described as neurotic behaviour, manifesting in learners' exaggerated concern about their mothers' safety at

home, fear of educators, nervousness for school and so forth. Subsequently, it was noted that there may be a presence of emotional disturbance in children, associated with great anxiety, which results in periodic absence from school. This phenomenon was referred to as *school refusal*.

However, *truancy* has become the preferred term used by many researchers, since it is more comprehensive than the term *school refusal*. It was further postulated that *school refusal* differs from truancy in quite a few ways. For example, the truant's non-attendance is usually intermittent, in comparison to the school refuser who may be away from school for weeks at a time. On the other hand, a school refuser is generally a good learner with vocational goals, compared to a truant, who may be a poor learner who dislikes school.

In the South African context, the occurrence of truant behaviour indeed has an extended history. By consulting class registers in the former racially biased schooling system of the House of Assembly, incidents of truancy could be readily determined. However, this was not always the case in the schooling systems of the other two Houses (Representatives and Delegates), possibly as a result of classes largely being over-crowded in most instances and attendance registers that were not efficiently controlled. Even though attendance records had been efficiently controlled in some cases, the question arose whether possible reasons for non-attendance prior to 1994, such as political violence and intimidation, met the criteria for classifying these incidents of absenteeism, as truancy.

In 2000 a Truancy Reduction Project was launched in Manenberg, a residential area on the Cape Flats. As explained in 2.2.1, this initiative was spearheaded by the Departments of Education and Community Safety in order to address the prevalence of truant behaviour among learners at primary and secondary schools. 'High risk schools' in the area enjoy the services of learning support officers, who visit homes of learners who are not attending schools for more than three days per week irrespective of the grounds for their non-attendance. Currently, this project is taken care of by the Urban Renewal Programme, while negotiations between the above-mentioned departments are taking place regarding sole responsibility of the future implementation thereof in the other parts of the Western Cape Province.

(ii) Definitions of truancy

Emerging from the literature study, it seems easier to describe the term truancy than to define it, as it may be a multi-causal and multidimensional phenomenon in terms of which numerous social, emotional and institutional dynamics may play a contributory role. From this, it would be fair to conclude that occurrences of truant behaviour cannot be investigated in isolation, given the multitude of factors associated with it. The term truancy is often used as an umbrella term for absenteeism, school refusal or school phobia. For the purpose of the present study, I prefer to use the definition offered by Le Rich (1995:1) in 2.2.2, which describes truant behaviour as follows:

A truant is a girl or boy who might be absent from school altogether or from a particular lesson or lessons, with or without parental knowledge...Truancy can be broadly defined in terms of 'blanket' truancy and 'post-registration' truancy. 'Blanket' truancy is...the absence of a child from school per se. This might be with or without the knowledge and/or consent of the parent or guardian...the 'post-registration' truant does register at school. He or she may then fail to turn up at a particular lesson or lessons during the school day.

(iii) Types of truancy

(a) Specific lesson absence

This type of truancy which refers to the absence from certain lessons or learning areas like for example mathematics, science and modern languages, is reported as the fastest growing. As suggested in section 2.3.1, this may be related to difficulty that learners experience with specific learning areas or as a result of certain educator characteristics such as inconsistency, inhumaneness, unfairness, bias or unreasonable demands made on learners.

(b) Post-registration truancy

In this case learners register as being present at school, but eventually disappear during the course of the day. Compared to specific lesson truants who 'bunk' particular lessons, these

learners skip clusters of lessons, on different days, for different reasons, sometimes on the spur of the moment.

(c) Parental-condoned truancy

Essentially, parental-condoned truancy occurs in the event of the parent being aware of the child's absence from school, however, not being willing or in certain instances, unable to address it.

Occasionally, parents may ask their children to remain at home for a manifold of different reasons. These reasons may include – keeping parents company at home or protection of parents mainly in cases where violence or abuse is common. Another reason is the performance of household chores which is particularly common among girls.

A common practice in these cases is to send a note to school suggesting illness of the learner or some or other reason as the explanation for his or her absence, regardless of the actual reason.

(d) Negativistic truancy

This type of truancy involves the learner being subjected to severe pressure predominantly from parents and educators, to achieve beyond his or her limits and scholastic capabilities. In reaction to these demands and expectations, the learner does the complete opposite and starts rejecting the desired behaviour or performance, by absenting himself or herself from school.

(e) Opportunistic truancy

Based on evidence to be found in 2.3.5, this form of truancy refers to the occasional skipping of classes whenever it suits the learner. The conclusion may be drawn that learners will miss school in order to attend certain social events which they may perceive as being more exciting and fun-filled than attending school.

(f) Psychological truancy

In these cases, learners physically attend school, but do not in any significant manner engage in any purposeful scholastic activities. These learners, who normally 'switch off' during lessons, may be focussed on activities or situations totally irrelevant to the subject matter discussed in their learning setting at any given time.

In 2.3.6 there is evidence to suggest that commonalities exist between physical and psychological truancy, citing that this link includes a low academic self-concept, a general lack of self-confidence and higher than average levels of anxiety about scholastic work. It may be concluded that a reasonably high proportion of psychological absence possibly involves learners who are lacking personal 'inner strength'.

(iv) Causes of truancy

As revealed in 2.4, it emerged from the literature study that there is no single cause of truant behaviour among learners. While some research attributes the problem to macro-societal factors such as the class system, environmental factors and inadequacies in judicial penalties, other research locates it in micro-societal factors, including individual family structures, family attitudes and standards of behaviour. However, the following causes were identified:

(a) Societal factors

Powerful cultural, political and economic forces operate in any society which may directly influence the education system. In this regard, it was found in 2.4.1 that after interviews were conducted with truants, they are likely to live in multiple disadvantaged circumstances, compared to regular attendees.

Thus, in the same section (2.4.1), it is argued that the prevalence of truancy increases when unemployment and poverty rises. If learners emerge from poor backgrounds, they are likely not eager to appear disadvantaged among their peers and may start truanting.

(b) Chaotic or dysfunctional family life

Based on evidence in 2.4.2, the home life of truants is often characterised by overcrowded living conditions, frequent relocations as well as poor parent-child relationships. Comparatively speaking, truancy is more likely to occur among children of working class parents than their middle-class counterparts.

In terms of parental control and discipline, inconsistent handling and defective parenting have been reported in families of learners who often present with truant behaviour. It was also found that truants were less likely to live with both parents. In the majority of all cases of truancy, these children lived in a home disrupted either by separation, divorce, desertion or death. This particular finding corresponds directly with what has emerged from the empirical investigation, which will be referred to later in 6.3.2.

(c) An unsupportive school environment

Family circumstances are not the only factors contributing to truancy. As indicated in section 2.4.3, the school system may be regarded as one of the primary causes. In the same section it was cited that several contributing factors of truant behaviour are within the school's control, referring specifically to areas such as policies, school rules, curriculum matters and certain educator characteristics and attitudes.

On the other hand, violent behaviour such as gang related incidents and other criminal behaviour such as theft and robbery often occur in the immediate areas of schools. Intense fear of these activities, which occasionally spill over to secondary schools in particular, increasingly disrupts the normal functioning of these learning sites. As revealed by the findings of the empirical study in 6.3.2, this is likely to result in poor school attendance. It may also expose or lure early adolescent learners to a delinquent subculture, characterised by the avoidance of responsibility and disdain for legitimate achievement.

Furthermore, educators of truants score higher on ratings of rejection and overprotection than educators of non-truants. Truants consider their educators to be authoritarian, unfair and excessively concerned with minor rules. In addition to this, they perceive principals as extremely punitive and incompetent in handling disciplinary matters, including truant behaviour.

Furthermore, truancy has also been linked to differences in teaching and learning styles, educator absenteeism, poor learner-educator relations, low educator expectations and inconsistency in the application of discipline at school.

(d) Personal deficits

Based on evidence revealed in 2.4.4, personal learner characteristics that may contribute to truant behaviour may include school phobia, poor social and emotional functioning, ethnic or racial dissonance, failure to learn, a learning style not in pace with the classroom, learning disabilities, language deficits and health problems. These difficulties may in all likelihood be symptomatic of underlying social or emotional problems. In addition, differences in academic achievement have been found between truants and non-truants. Truants are described as having poor skills in reading, vocabulary, arithmetic, and verbal reasoning.

It has also been reported that truants nearly consistently experience alienation, footlessness, hopelessness and estrangement from their school, home, neighbourhood and society at large. In terms of further research on truants' personal 'defects', found in 2.4.4, these learners may be labelled as mentally retarded, learning disabled, school phobic and lacking in self-esteem.

(e) Attitudes

It is reported in 2.4.5 that many truants were more bored at school than non-truants and also experience an inability to feel a part of their school culture. Some of these learners feel frustrated with their school work, since they perceive the expectations of the school system as too high. Aspects disliked, particularly by junior high school truants, include their educators' attitudes and the authority schools exercise over them in general.

(v) Recognising potential truants

In 2.5.1, it was found that persistent truants are more likely to be delinquent, less able to comply with demands of the curriculum, generally have lower levels of self-esteem and poor academic self-concepts, are more anxious and have lower career aspirations than the normal school population.

In the same section a checklist was presented, comprising possible warning signs which educators and significant others should look out for. Some of the signs are mentioned in the ensuing list.

The learner may experience or demonstrate at least four or more of the following:

- ❑ Being bullied;
- ❑ A dip in his or her scholastic attainment;
- ❑ A proneness to periods of absence from school due to ill health;
- ❑ Withdrawal from scholastic events;
- ❑ Finding school life less interesting;
- ❑ Overreaction to teasing or to other classroom situations;
- ❑ Higher levels of anxiety when in school and about school work in general;
- ❑ Lower long-term career aspirations;
- ❑ Higher levels of anti-social behaviour; or
- ❑ Greater patterns of alienation from school.

(vi) Delinquency and truancy

The link between delinquency and truancy has a relatively long history. Since 1915, a number of researchers have reported that similar to truants, delinquents often emanate from unfavourable and deprived domestic backgrounds, characterised by multiple adversities.

Therefore, the possibility of a direct link between truant and delinquent behaviour may not be ruled out.

(vii) Consequences of truancy

The implication of non school attendance unquestionably creates concern that instances of truancy are likely to result in delinquent behaviour, social disorder and certainly, educational failure. As indicated in 2.7, misdemeanours such as theft, running away from home, the usage and distribution of drugs, burglary, vandalism, assault and robbery all stem from truant behaviour, to the degree that truancy in a sense, may be described as the 'kindergarten of criminal behaviour'.

Other complications in adult life such as the inability to settle into routine work and/ or marriage, frequent job changes, poverty, high separation and divorce rates, illiteracy, depression, temper tantrums and involvement with social workers, are linked to truant behaviour. Furthermore, truancy is also found to be associated with a significant higher likelihood of becoming a teenage parent and of being unemployed.

As further stated in 2.7, the most serious implication of truancy is its correlation with dropout. To a large extent, dropouts are characterised by a number of similar traits that truants present and both are associated closely with low academic achievement.

(viii) Truants' feelings while away from school

With regard to truants' feelings while away from school, it appears that missing school may be a profoundly unsatisfactory experience for some of them. In one study, a small proportion of truants indicated that they wished they could restart their school careers on a clean sheet. However, this is not the case in all incidents of truant behaviour, as reflected in 2.8.

However, the general image that emerged shows that missing school may be an unsatisfactory experience for many truants and that most of them are actually bored while skipping school.

(ix) Parental attitudes towards truancy

(a) Parental rejection

There is evidence which suggests that parents of truant learners may have rejected them when they were younger. Section 2.9.1 disclosed a pattern of maternal rejection prior to age five and paternal rejection after age five in a group of truants.

(b) Parental overprotection / overindulgence

Research findings of a comparative study, as outlined in 2.8.2, revealed that truant learners are more often overprotected and overindulged than non-truant learners. It has further been suggested that overprotection may actually stem from underlying feelings of rejection of children.

(c) Parental control and discipline

It was found in section 2.8.3 that truants were more likely to emerge from homes where discipline was defective, evidenced by the frequent use of corporal punishment in homes of truant learners.

6.3.1.2 A discussion of various developmental theories and an exploration of possible environmental elements affecting truant behaviour from an eco-systemic perspective, according to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological perspective

(i) Psychoanalytic theory

According to this perspective, human behaviour is merely a surface characteristic. In order to understand development, the symbolic meaning of behaviour and the deeper inner working of the mind require analysis.

Sigmund Freud, one of the prominent exponents of this theory, emphasised the formative nature of early experiences and of biologically based drives. He furthermore postulated that children move through a series of developmental stages during which they confront conflicts between biological drives and social expectations. The manner in which these conflicts are resolved, determines the individual's ability to learn, to get along with others and to cope with anxiety.

(ii) Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory

Central to Piaget's theory is the belief that children actively construct their own cognitive world and that information is poured into their minds from their environment. Through the process of adaptation, the structures of the body are adapted to fit with the environment, and similarly, the structures of the mind develop to better fit with, or represent the external world.

(iii) Behaviourism and social learning theory

In terms of behavioural theories, the assumption is made that human beings are affected by environmental stimuli to which they are exposed. Developmental patterns are considered to be personal and reflective of a particular set of environmental stimuli.

Therefore, this perspective suggests that human behaviour may be regarded as the result of continuing exposure to specific environmental factors and also stresses the notion that learning of appropriate or inappropriate responses (behaviours) takes place within a specific human environmental context.

(iv) The ethological and evolutionary perspectives

As explained in 3.2.4, ethology stresses that behaviour is associated with evolution, or the survival value of behaviour and is characterised by critical and sensitive periods. Through the application of the ethology theory to the understanding of the human-caregiver relationship, it is cited that attachment behaviour of babies such as smiling, babbling, grasping and crying are inherent signals whereby the caregiver is encouraged to approach, care for, and interact with the baby. Based on this conceptualising of human behaviour, it may be concluded that the tendency among early adolescents to engage in certain attention seeking behaviours, may possibly be viewed as an expression of their need to survive in their social life worlds.

In order to generate an increased understanding of child development, a new arena of theory and research has been forged, called evolutionary developmental psychology, which refers to the genetic and ecological mechanisms that govern the development of social, emotional and cognitive competencies common to all human beings. In accordance with this perspective, it

thus appears that both internal and external factors may play a role in shaping children's behaviour.

(v) Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development

In view of the fact that this perspective is referred to as the sociocultural theory, it focuses on how culture, in other words, values, beliefs, customs and skills of a social group, is transmitted to future generations. Social interaction is regarded as an essential transaction, particularly in the form of co-operative dialogue between children and more knowledgeable members of society such as parents, educators and significant others.

On the basis of the above description, it emerges that children's development appears to be a socially mediated process, for which they are largely dependent on the support and guidance that adults and more mature peers could provide in their acquisition of new social skills and culturally adaptive competencies.

(vi) Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory

In terms of this approach to human development, the environment is viewed as a series of five structures or systems that not only include, but extend beyond home, school and neighbourhood settings in which children function daily. Each of these structures or layers is considered to exert a powerful impact on children's development. These structures are enumerated in the ensuing paragraphs.

(a) The microsystem

This layer or system comprises the immediate setting in which the child lives and refers specifically to the influence exerted by family members, peers, the school as well as relationships in their immediate surroundings. According to Bronfenbrenner, the child is not a passive recipient of the influence of others, but must be considered as an active force in his or her relations with elements in his or her immediate environment.

(b) The mesosystem

The mesosystem serves as the connection or network between the different microsystems such as home, school, and neighbourhood and brings together the various contexts in which the child lives and develops.

(c) The exosystem

This system refers to social settings that have a powerful influence on the development of children. These settings may include community health service, parks, recreation centres and informal groups such as one's extended family, social support networks, and the workplace.

(d) The macrosystem

The macrosystem which represents the outermost level of Bronfenbrenner's model comprises the ideology, values, laws, customs and resources of a given culture.

(e) The chronosystem

The environment in which we live is not static, since important changes do occur which essentially produce new conditions, whereby our development may be affected. In addition, the timing of the environmental change may affect its impact. For example, parental separation or divorce may have more diverse repercussions for a one-year-old toddler than for an adolescent involved in numerous relationships and engagements beyond the family.

However, changes may also arise from within the child. Depending on their physical, cognitive and personality characteristics, children may occasionally select, modify and create many of their own settings and experiences.

From the above summary of the bio-ecological systems theory, it seems apparent that children to a large degree not only appear to be products, but also producers of their personal environments or life worlds.

6.3.1.3 A brief overview of the developmental level of the early adolescent learner in the junior secondary school phase

(i) Physical development

The early adolescent developmental phase is characterised by rapid overall growth, nearly as quickly as during infancy. Within the space of a few months, early adolescents grow several inches and may continually require new clothes. This period of rapid physical growth is referred to as the adolescent growth spurt and commences at different times for boys and girls. On average, girls start their spurt at age twelve, which is two years in advance to boys.

It appears that early adolescents are rather conscious of what is happening to their bodies. These pubertal changes may in a sense impact on the developing adolescents' emotional state and social behaviour, which is commonly believed to be related to their moodiness and desire for greater physical and psychological distance from parents.

(ii) Social and personality development

Early adolescents gradually become aware of their personal and others' intra-physic processes and as a consequence, become more introspective and self-conscious. Increasingly questions such as: "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" may remain uppermost in their minds.

As reflected in 3.3.2, early adolescents' search for identity is aimed at discovering their specific strengths and weaknesses as well as the role they can best play in their future lives. In other words, they seek to come to terms with their identity. Should they, however, experience difficulty in their effort to find a suitable identity, early adolescents may follow several dysfunctional courses.

Therefore, on the one hand, it may be assumed that successful identity formation may result in the adoption of socially acceptable roles by early adolescents and the ability to form and maintain long-lasting personal relationships later in life. On the other hand, the reversal of this may emanate, should appropriate identity formation fail dismally.

(iii) Cognitive development

As discussed in 3.3.3, the onset of adolescence marks the commencement of abstract thinking, as the young child reaches the formal operational stage of development.

Characteristic of this stage of development is the capability of hypothetical-deductive reasoning according to which not only all possible factors that might affect the outcome of a problem are considered, but specific hypotheses regarding what might happen may also be deduced from it. Eventually, these hypotheses are tested in order to ascertain which ones work in the real world.

Another significant feature of the formal operational developmental stage is propositional thought, in terms of which early adolescents are expected to be able to evaluate the logic of propositions, without referring to real life circumstances.

However, it seems apparent that the early adolescent occasionally does take irrational decisions, such as embarking on truant behaviour, while failing to consider the consequences of his or her behaviour. Therefore, actions of this nature may be considered as a contradiction of adolescents' ability to engage in predicting possible consequences of their engagements and to perceive the logical contradictions of certain behaviours, such as truancy.

(iv) Socio-emotional development

On becoming an adolescent, the child for the first time faces the following paradox: remaining in the role of a child, while at the same time gradually moving away from the position of a dependent child to that of an independent adult. Adolescents apparently settle for 'ritual signs of independence' such as part-time jobs and enjoying a social life independent from that of their families.

From the start of adolescence, the influence of their peers becomes increasingly prominent. One of the most important reasons for this is the fact that peers provide the opportunity to compare and evaluate opinions, abilities and even physical changes, a process referred to as social comparison.

Due to greater concern about how they are viewed by their peers, it therefore appears that early adolescents are more likely to succumb to peer pressure. From this, it may further be deduced that early adolescents whose parents are supportive and approachable, may be held in high regard, and that this attitude of respect could serve as an antidote to undesirable peer pressure.

(v) Conative development

Conation is regarded as the will or the 'longing for' of the human psyche. It works outwardly and constantly strives for transformation in the surrounding reality of the person. The purpose of the will lies in the action by which the self is actualised and includes the dynamic, progressive orientation, shaping and re-shaping of an entire life that is constantly in transit through change and improvement in order to attain a more structured and integrated existence.

The desire to be grown-ups is particularly evident among most early adolescents, which implies that they are involved in every task of learning or becoming. The educator working with the early adolescent is in an ideal position to assist him or her in assigning meaning to the task of becoming. Similarly, parental involvement could in all likelihood form part of an efficient support structure whereby the early adolescent child may be guided toward becoming.

From the above summary, it clearly emerges that should an early adolescent learner experience discouragement resulting from the total absence or inadequate environmental support structures, he or she may become de-motivated and despondent. In his or her experiential world, the innermost feeling in such a child may be that of un-involvement, discouragement and hopelessness, which in turn may impede his or her personal development. Therefore, school attendance may be assigned a secondary position in such an early adolescent's life, since his or her future aspirations seem bleak, which in return may invariably serve as a catalyst for truant behaviour.

6.3.2 Main findings and concluding summary of the empirical investigation

6.3.2.1 Quantitative research

The quantitative research attempted to investigate four factors that are believed to be related to truancy, including the influence of friends, caregivers, educators and the self.

The data was collected by means of a group administered questionnaire completed by a sample of three hundred fourteen and sixteen year old secondary school learners in the eastern EMDC of the Western Cape. Statistical techniques such as percentages, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and chi-square analysis were used to carry out the data analysis.

Four research problems and related hypotheses were formulated.

(i) Research problem 1

The question asked was how secondary school learners feel about various truancy aspects such as interacting with friends, parents and caregivers' involvement in their school activities, educators' influence on their school work and their self-esteem regarding schooling.

In terms of the perception of learners about their feelings concerning the first aspect, namely interacting with friends, it was clearly reflected by the findings of this investigation that the minority (29.3%) mix with friends who are conscientious and work diligently in school. The majority (70.7%) indicated that they associate with friends who may be considered to be irresponsible, rebellious and display a negative attitude regarding school work.

In terms of parental/ caregivers' involvement in their scholastic activities, it emerged that the majority of respondents agree strongly that they do not enjoy much interest, support and motivation at home.

As far as educators' influence is concerned, the findings suggest that the majority of the respondents experience their school as an extremely unfavourable and uninteresting place to be at.

Based on the findings regarding learners' thoughts and feelings about themselves, it has emerged that the vast majority of the respondents consider themselves to be largely incompetent or unable to make any noteworthy and satisfactory progress in school.

(i) Research problem two

The question was asked whether there is a significant difference between different groups in terms of gender, age, home language, persons with whom the learner is living and the number of people sharing the house, regarding the previously mentioned truancy aspects.

According to the research findings, significant differences only occurred for groups of different gender and people with whom the learners are living.

Based on the outcomes of the Bonferroni t-tests, it was revealed that the male learners presented with a significantly greater likelihood of engaging in truant behaviour, compared to female learners who participated in the investigation. In terms of whom the learners live with, it was found that those who live with a single parent or caregiver, are significantly more negative in their perceptions with regard to all the truancy aspects mentioned earlier.

(ii) Research question three

The question was asked whether learners who participated in the investigation have ever truanted or not.

The outcome of this question revealed that the majority (66,33%) of the learners who participated in the quantitative research have displayed truant behaviour in the past. Based on this, it seems reasonable to deduce that truant behaviour may be relatively common in most secondary schools in the particular area of investigation.

(iii) Research problem four

The question that was asked is whether there is a significant difference between the different groups on the basis of gender, age, home language, persons whom they live with and the number of people they are sharing the house with, as to whether they have truanted or not.

Significant dependencies were found between truancy and two moderator variables, namely gender and with whom the learner lives.

In terms of gender differences, a strong dependency between gender and truancy occurred, which means that significantly more male than female learners (173 compared to 26), have truant. One questionnaire was spoilt.

Based on whom they lived with, more or less the same number of learners who lived with both parents truant than those who have not yet truant (46 truant and 48 have not yet truant). The same applies to those who stay with grandparents, sisters or aunts (9 truant and 11 have not yet truant). However, in cases where learners live with a single parent, significantly more have engaged in truant behaviour (136 have truant, compared to 39 who have not yet truant). One questionnaire was spoilt.

(iv) Interpretation of the qualitative open-ended question

Respondents' reactions to the open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire as to whether they have ever truant or not, indicated that the majority (199 out of 300) have in the past engaged in this type of behaviour. The balance of the respondents indicated that they have not yet truant and supplied their perceptions as to why other learners practise this form of behaviour. Refer to 5.4.6 for a broad summary of the responses to the open-ended question, obtained through the questionnaire.

6.3.2.2 Qualitative research

Two respondents were selected on a pragmatic basis from the sample population to whom the questionnaire was administered, for the purpose of conducting in-depth case studies.

One of the respondents (Gary) who presents as a typical truant was randomly chosen on the basis of the selection criteria set out in 4.4.3.4. The random selection of the other respondent, (Stephan) who presents as a typical non-truant, was done by gauging all the participating learners' responses to the questionnaire in order to ascertain who may be considered to be a typical non-truant. The inclusion of both learners in the case studies was subject to their own willingness to participate as well as by obtaining permission from their parents.

(i) Main findings and conclusive summary for the truant learner: Gary

From the interview that was conducted with Gary, it appeared that he is trapped in an entirely negative social life-world. Generally, his home circumstances seem grossly unfavourable and particularly plagued by a noticeable lack of emotional bonding between his family members.

Besides experiencing serious difficulty in coping with the academic challenges at school, he also appears to be subjected to humiliation, rejection and marginalisation by most of his peers and certain educators. Furthermore, it may be concluded that his poor academic self-concept and lack of interpersonal skills, seemingly hamper Gary from engaging in activities in and outside the classroom. His home and the school that he attends are situated in an area that is characterised by alarming criminal and gangster activities, which occasionally even disrupt surrounding schools' programmes.

His personality assessment revealed low ego strength, anxiousness, loneliness, impatience, distractibility, dependability, laxity, a tendency to quit easily and to disregard rules as well as being over-sensitive to others' approval or disapproval.

Gary displays poor study habits and his general attitudes towards scholastic activities seem to be negative and typical of that of a learner who is underachieving and not particularly interested in school.

In terms of his interpersonal relationships, he clearly experiences difficulty forming and sustaining desirable and lasting friendship with members of the opposite sex. He generally seems to be suspicious of people and seeks guarantees of their approval before engaging with them.

Based on Gary's poor score obtained in the Self-Esteem Index (65 out of 160), the conclusion may be drawn with a fair amount of certainty that he presents with relatively poor self-esteem.

(ii) Main findings and conclusive summary of the non-truant learner: Stephan

Based on information obtained from the interview which was conducted with Stephan, it is evident that he is a stable and well adjusted type of person in his global social context. It is

particularly his home environment that seems to play a pivotal role in his social and emotional development.

Gauging from the outcome of his personality assessment, Stephan appears to be an emotionally stable, friendly, self-assured, cheerful, trustful, co-operative, responsible, determined and socially precise person.

In terms of his academic progress, it seems likely that Stephan is coping exceptionally well at school. Based on the assessment of his study habits and attitudes, it may be reasonable to conclude that he uses highly effective study methods and generally demonstrates a positive attitude towards his school work, educators and peers.

On an interpersonal level, it was revealed by the Sacks Sentence Completion Test that Stephan maintains positive relations with his family members. Comparatively speaking, he seems to have a better connecting and understanding with males than with females. Furthermore, he expressed positive attitudes and feelings towards authority figures and also projected ease and acceptance, should he be promoted to an authoritative position.

In view of his score of 121 out of 160 obtained in the Self-Esteem Index, which is considered reasonably high, the deduction may be made with a fair amount of certainty that Stephan presents with reasonably high self-esteem.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing findings derived from the literature study and the empirical investigation, the following recommendations are proposed whereby truant behaviour among early adolescent learners may be addressed effectively:

- Create an attendance philosophy for the school which should be publicised in the learner/ parent school manual, in assemblies and on plaques or posters in all classrooms. Typical statements of this philosophy might read:
“Our school is committed to the philosophy that every learner should attend every class every day”.

“Regular attendance and promptness are expected in all classes and are essential for success in school”.

- Create a structured attendance policy. This policy, which should be communicated to everyone in the school, describes the responsibilities for learners, parents, educators and principals. The school’s attendance policy should outline the steps to be taken if truancy continues, such as administrative and counsellor contact with the learners and parents, stiffer penalties, involvement of truant officers and the possibility of court referral.
- Establish a database of regular truants and divide the responsibility for regularly contacting them among principals, class educators and educator support team members, so that each educator has four or five truants to keep tabs on. Each educator should contact the truant periodically by note, letter or phone call to let them know someone cares about them and that someone is watching.
- Be understanding. Listen to learner’s reasons for not attending school or certain educators’ classes and encourage them to express their feelings about it. By actively listening to learners, underlying conflicts which may be causing truant behaviour are likely to be discovered. Give whatever remedial or guidance support the learner needs to handle his or her particular difficulty.
- With the support of the Specialised Learner and Educator Support of the local EMDC, involve truants in group counselling. Including truants in groups that are not composed exclusively of students with attendance problems, provides them with positive reinforcement and encouragement from their peers.
- It appears that many more boys than girls become truants, possibly due to their experiencing difficulty in adapting to conditions at secondary schools such as having to assume the identity as junior members of the school population, being bullied, cultivating new friendships and so forth. To address these obstacles predominantly experienced by boys, programmes may be developed in consultation with the professionals from the EMDC, whereby boys could be exposed to skills training in problem solving, as well as stress and conflict management. The implementation of

such programmes may be considered even prior to the commencement of their secondary school careers.

- ❑ Hold learners personally accountable for their unexcused absence by ensuring that they make up time missed in class through detention, in-school suspension, or Saturday school.
- ❑ Develop a “buddy system” for early adolescent learners with attendance problems.
- ❑ Survey learners to determine why they skip school.
- ❑ Plan a workshop on school absenteeism, to be tied in with the learner survey.
- ❑ Reward good attendance. Be generous in rewarding and praising good attendance at rewards assemblies. Attendance certificates, pins, charms and attendance patches that can be sewn on jackets and sweaters may serve as encouragement to improve school attendance by learners.
- ❑ Chronic truants may be assessed to determine if a possible cause of their absenteeism is frustration with school work, emotional problems, domestic difficulties or barriers to learning. If so, a case study evaluation may be conducted to determine if the learner qualifies for any specialised services.
- ❑ It is strongly recommended that educators set an example for learners by attending school every day, reporting to their classes punctually, creating a pleasant classroom environment, exhibiting a friendly personality and maintaining a positive working relationship with all learners in their classes.
- ❑ Involve the parents of all learners more in the education of their children by, for example, establishing a policy that holds them responsible for contacting the school in the event of their child being absent. Should no contact be made, notify parents of the absence of their child. Parents of chronic truants may be invited to school or be paid a home visit to address their child’s irregular attendance and to explore ways how it may effectively be dealt with in a co-operative endeavour between the home and the school.

- Establish co-operation with local agencies including the police department to pick up and deliver to school truants they find on streets during school hours. To create a physically safe and educationally friendly environment around schools, the police's visibility and sporadic patrols executed by them, may cripple criminal activities such as robbery, theft, illicit drug trafficking and gang fights. These incidents interfere with the smooth operation of schools in the area where the present investigation was conducted and invariably result in extremely high levels of anxiety among certain learners or may even lure others away from school to engage in similar types of activities.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study has achieved its intended objectives, it has opened the following avenues for future research:

- A provincial or national survey regarding truant behaviour could be conducted, and/ or a survey among different socio-economic groups in the Western Cape.
- There is a need for a study which could concentrate even more intensively on the family system, parental attitudes and socio-economic circumstances which may influence truancy.
- An investigation of how the peer group as a system can be included in a treatment programme for truant behaviour may be carried out.
- The present study suggests that there is much to be explained with regard to situational and school variables such as learning content and support, educator attitudes and behaviours and school climate.

6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This investigation was conducted among a particular socio-economic group and in a certain geographical area. To a certain degree this may limit the generalisability of the research findings.

6.7 CONCLUSION

Truancy, especially among early adolescent learners has become a pervasive problem in most secondary schools in the eastern EMDC of the Western Cape. It is not uncommon for many learners in this age group to have accumulated several days of questionable absence. The degree to which it may contribute to social disorder, delinquency and educational failure led to my interest in the problem of school non-attendance particularly displayed by adolescent learners in the junior phase of their secondary school careers. In the area where I render psycho-educational services, there is, however, a complete absence of empirical research into the phenomenon of truancy or school refusal. Yet, certain indications clearly reveal that the problem has become rampant and indeed, worthy of research.

It was found in the study that truants may perceive the world around them as unstable, threatening and confusing. Many come from dysfunctional families with seemingly weak internal structures, high rates of conflict and emotional insecurity. Evidently in their school setting, truants seem to question their academic prowess, exhibit low self-esteem and have difficulty establishing positive relations with peers and school staff. Based on this, it seems reasonably fair to conclude that truant behaviour may be regarded as a possible sign that a young person is beginning to give up hope.

However, throughout this study, it has occurred to me that in a real sense, the truant is a child asking for help, seeking to belong and be connected to an inviting, stable and nurturing world. I am positive that with a little effort on the part of concerned educators and nurturing parents, the school can become such a world to all children.

According to Govender, (2006:10), the National Education Department plans to commission a panel of experts to investigate the phenomenon of school dropout and truant behaviour and make a public pronouncement on this issue. To this, Professor Jonathan Jansen, dean of the education faculty of the University of Pretoria added that he welcomed the before-mentioned investigation on school dropout and absenteeism, suggesting that learners should be tracked through the schooling system. Jansen further cited that "We don't have solid research on exactly why kids, especially boys drop out of the school system, but what we do know is that there's a serious problem and that very little is being done to address it."

In this very sense, it is sincerely hoped that this investigation may serve as an invaluable contribution to better understand the multi-faceted nature of school absenteeism among early adolescent learners. It presents useful insights into a rather complex educational issue, if not definite answers, as well as useful guidelines in addressing the phenomenon of truant behaviour.

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ANNEXURE A

Questionnaire applied in the
quantitative research

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear learner

Attending school has changed considerably over the past few years. A research team is currently investigating how learners in your area are experiencing their school life. Would you kindly assist us in this exercise? It will take approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete this questionnaire.

Please keep the following in mind while completing the questionnaire:

- Your anonymity will be secured and not linked to the questionnaire.
- There are no correct or incorrect answers – all questions should be answered as honestly as possibly.
- The majority of the questions may be answered by simply drawing a circle around the relevant code.
- In some cases you are required to write a few words or enter a number in the relevant block.
- Do not encircle more than one code per question.
- After completing the questionnaire, kindly return it to the person who issued you with it.

PLEASE NOTE:

Please answer all questions frankly and honestly, since your personal particulars will be treated anonymously and confidentially and your identity cannot be linked to the questionnaire.

Thank you for your valued assistance and co-operation.

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

For
Official
use

KINDLY COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING PERSONAL PARTICULARS (JUST CIRCLE THE RELEVANT BLOCKS OR WRITE DOWN THE ANSWER ON THE LINE OR IN THE BLOCKS PROVIDED)

EXAMPLE:

Questionnaire number	
----------------------	--

			3
--	--	--	---

Gender: *Male*
 Female

①
2

1. Indicate which school of the following you attend:
(mark the number with an x)

- Blackheath High School
- Eerste River High School
- Forest Heights High School
- Kleinvlei High School
- Malibu High School
- Wesbank High School

1
2
3
4
5
6

<input type="checkbox"/>	4
--------------------------	---

2. Gender:

Male
Female

1
2

<input type="checkbox"/>	5
--------------------------	---

3. Your age in full years _____

		7
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4. Which language do you regard as your HOME LANGUAGE?

Choose One	
English	1
Afrikaans	2
Xhosa	3
Zulu	4
Other	5

<input type="checkbox"/>	8
--------------------------	---

5.1 Whom do you live with presently?

Both parents	1
One parent	2
Grandparents	3
Aunt	4
Uncle	5
Brother	6
Sister	7
Friend	8
Other	

<input type="checkbox"/>	9
--------------------------	---

5.2 If other, please specify. _____

5.3 Apart from yourself, how many people live in the house, flat or backroom etc. where you live presently? Please specify exact number

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		11
--	--	----

SECTION C – YOUR PARENTS’ AND/OR CAREGIVERS’ INVOLVEMENT IN YOUR SCHOOL ACTIVITIES									
14.	My scholastic performance is important to my parents.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	25
15.	My parents always attend parent meetings at my school.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	26
16.	The way my parents and I get on at home, motivates me to work hard at school.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	27
17.	My parents have a positive attitude towards my teachers.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	28
18.	My parents and I often discuss my school work at home.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	29
19.	My parents expect me to obey the rules that apply at home.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	30
20.	My parents allow me enough time to do my homework.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	31
21.	My participation in cultural activities at school is important to my parents.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	32
22.	My parents expect me to succeed in my school work and to pass grade 12.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	33
23.	Should my parents discover that I’m not attending all my classes at school, they will be very upset about it.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	34
SECTION D – YOUR TEACHERS’ INFLUENCE IN YOUR SCHOOLWORK									
24.	My teachers always give me attention at school.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	35
25.	My teachers treat me with respect.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	36
26.	The contributions I make in class are always valued and respected by my teachers.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	37
27.	My teachers encourage me to attend school regularly.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	38
28.	My teachers always try to make lessons interesting and meaningful.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	39
29.	I know most of my teachers have my interests at heart.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	40
30.	I feel very comfortable to discuss anything with my teachers.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	41
31.	My teachers do not say any negative or bad things about my work in front of other learners.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	42
32.	My teachers do not really make unreasonable demands on me.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	43
33.	I will take any of my teachers as my role model.	☺	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	<input type="checkbox"/>	44

For
Official
use

BELOW IS AN AGREE/DISAGREE RATING SCALE. PLEASE EVALUATE YOUR OPINION ON EACH OF THE STATEMENTS BELOW AND INDICATE YOUR EVALUATION BY ENCIRCLING THE APPROPRIATE FACIAL EXPRESSION

PLEASE NOTE:

If you strongly agree with the statement, encircle	
If you agree with the statement, encircle	
If you are not sure , encircle	
If you disagree with the statement, encircle	
If you strongly disagree with the statement, encircle	

Please encircle one facial expression only for each statement

SECTION B – INTERACTION WITH YOUR FRIENDS

1.	Being present at school every day is very important for me and my friends.						<input type="checkbox"/>	12
2.	We encourage each other to attend school.						<input type="checkbox"/>	13
3.	We think that school is interesting.						<input type="checkbox"/>	14
4.	We like our teachers very much.						<input type="checkbox"/>	15
5.	It is important for all of us to participate in sport activities at school.						<input type="checkbox"/>	16
6.	We like all our learning areas.						<input type="checkbox"/>	17
7.	We attend all our classes.						<input type="checkbox"/>	18
8.	My friends and I smoke.						<input type="checkbox"/>	19
9.	My friends and I take alcohol.						<input type="checkbox"/>	20
10.	Some of my friends occasionally take drugs.						<input type="checkbox"/>	21
11.	In my circle of friends stealing and disobeying of rules occur occasionally.						<input type="checkbox"/>	22
12.	In my circle of friends theft occurs occasionally.						<input type="checkbox"/>	23
13.	I hang around and mix with friends who work very hard in school.						<input type="checkbox"/>	24

SECTION E – YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ABOUT YOURSELF REGARDING YOUR SCHOLING							
34.	I consider all my classes important to attend.	😊	😊😊	😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊😊	<input type="checkbox"/> 45
35.	Generally, I find schoolwork very interesting.	😊	😊😊	😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊😊	<input type="checkbox"/> 46
36.	All classroom activities are relevant to my everyday life.	😊	😊😊	😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊😊	<input type="checkbox"/> 47
37.	All the things that I learn in school will help me to find work one day.	😊	😊😊	😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊😊	<input type="checkbox"/> 48
38.	Through education obtained at school, I will be able to live a comfortable life one day.	😊	😊😊	😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊😊	<input type="checkbox"/> 49
39.	I always feel happy with my test and examination results.	😊	😊😊	😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊😊	<input type="checkbox"/> 50
40.	Generally I feel that I'm coping very well with my school work.	😊	😊😊	😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊😊	<input type="checkbox"/> 51
41.	I'm sure one day when I have finished with school, I'll certainly miss it.	😊	😊😊	😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊😊	<input type="checkbox"/> 52
42.	Regular school attendance will help me to achieve my goals and dreams in life.	😊	😊😊	😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊😊	<input type="checkbox"/> 53
43.	Even if I had a choice, I would choose to go to school.	😊	😊😊	😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊	😊😊😊😊😊	<input type="checkbox"/> 54

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING OPEN QUESTION IN THE SPACE PROVIDED:

Have you ever truanted ("bunked" classes)?
Please mark your answer with an X.

YES NO

55

Briefly explain your reason(s) for truanting or not truanting.

If your answer is NO, why do think other learners truant?

ANNEXURE B

The Pilot Study - focus group interview

THE PILOT STUDY - (FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW)

Researcher: "Good day all of you and thank you very much for being here. Today we're going to talk about an issue that affects all of you. Before we begin, let me make a few requests of you. Firstly, you should know that the session is tape recorded so that I can refer back to the discussion when I write my report. Secondly, please speak up and let's try to have just one person speak at a time and please say exactly what you think. Before we start, it will be helpful for us to get acquainted with one another so let's begin by introducing ourselves or by just making some very basic comments about ourselves.

Let me start with myself, my name is Maynard van Breda. I'm a psychologist, employed by the department of education and your school is one of a number of schools where I render services. Any of you can be next, who will that be? ... Fine, let's start with you".

Stephen: "My name is Stephan and I'm fourteen years old and doing grade eight this year".

Brian: "I'm Brian Jacobs. I attend Blackheath High School. It is my first year at this high school this year and ... I'm also in grade eight this year.

Ashley: "I am Ashley... It is my first year at this school and I'm fourteen years old. I live in Greenfields."

Jonathan: My name is Jonathan, I live in Eerste River, but I prefer to attend Blackheath High School, because most of my friends attend this school. I am fourteen years old."

Grant: "Hallo, my name is Grant, I'm in grade eight. My family moved to this area last year, that's why I'm attending this high school".

Mickhael: "I'm Mickhael, I'm fifteen years old and I'm in grade eight this year.

Researcher: “Thank you for introducing yourselves, so let’s begin our activity for today. Now as all of might have heard of read about recently, is that there appears to be a drastic increase in the number of learners, particularly at grade eight and grade nine levels who present with high levels of disinterest in their schooling...They would for example stay away from school without permission or simply just disappear during the course of the day.

Therefore, a decision was taken by the education authorities to investigate how learners generally experience their school life and to find out why so many of them develop a disinterest in school... So, with regard to the problem that I have just outlined to you, I would like to hear your opinions about the following issue:

‘There is an increasing number of new comers to high school who prefer not to be at school at all, or deliberately miss certain lessons’

Remember even if you personally have been guilty of ‘bunking’ classes or stayed away from school without any legitimate reason, I would still like to hear your opinion about this kind of behaviour. So... let see, who will volunteer to kick off?” It can be any one of you. Ok! It seems that Ashley wants to set the ball rolling for us... so let us hear Ashley, what you would like to tell us.”

Ashley: “Well, I just want to say that I agree with what you just said now, yes it is true... I also noticed that many children walk around inside and outside the school grounds when it is not interval yet or the end of the day ... many of them.”

Researcher: “Do you see this happening often, Ashley and what time during the day do you think it occurs more frequently?”

Ashley: “I see it happening almost every day sir and I noticed that especially in the afternoons, normally after second break, many children don’t go back to their classes ... I think they go to the whole in the fence at the back of the school and then they escape and just run away from school.

Researcher: How do you know about the whole in the fence Ashley, could you please tell us?

Ashley: "I know about it sir, I think almost everybody at school know about it".

Researcher: "Ashley have you, or any one else here, ever in the past escape through that whole and please tell me exactly what exactly it was that spurred you on to skip your classes?"

Ashley: "Yes sir...It happened a long time ago, when I was still new at the school. I didn't actually like this school...although I liked my primary school a lot. In primary school you stay in the same room with the same educator, but in high school you keep moving around all the time and that is not so nice for me. It almost feels like you don't know anybody and they don't know you...The educators don't care also, because some of them don't check up where you are if you not in their class. I suppose their classes are too full, that's why they don't even notice it if one or two learners are not there.

Researcher: "We'll get back to you later Ashley, but I would first like to hear what the others have to say about their experiences."

Stephan: "I got behind in my work because of illness...and it was too hard to catch up with all the work that I missed, so then I thought an easy way out for me would be to stay away from my classes. I did speak to my educators, but some of them are not very helpful. All they say, it's my own responsibility to get my work done, without helping me. It's not all of them that have this attitude, just a few of them... And if you go their classes and your work is not up to date, they get very upset and send you to detention for almost a whole week and I think that is very unfair, you don't even get a chance. Sometimes I really don't understand my work, but I don't feel like asking my educators for help, because they get annoyed when you ask them to explain to you again."

Researcher: "Stephan, please tell us what do you mean by: "That is very unfair and that you don't even get a chance?"

Stephan: "Ok sir, I know it wasn't the right thing to do to just stay away from some of my classes...but you see, I don't understand some of these educators, they don't know that you can have a valid reason for not being in their classes. I think they assume that some learners do it on purpose... And when you go back to class, they don't want to believe you, they just want to scold and 'go on' with the children."

Jonathan: "That is true, because almost the same happened to me. My mother couldn't go to work because she was very sick and in bed. So she asked me to stay at home to help her, and one of my teachers didn't believe me. When I went back to school two days later that teacher checked me in class in front of all the children in class... I still tried to explain my side of the story, but she didn't want to listen to me. She didn't even want to read the letter that my mother wrote why I couldn't be in school... I felt she was unnecessarily nasty to me...how could she insulted me in front of all my friends, so I decided not to go to her classes anymore. I'm not going to do her subject next year anyway."

Mikhael: "The bigger boys in the higher grade bully me sometimes; they hurt me for no reason and call me names which I really don't like... It all makes me very scared to come to school, so most mornings I make as if I'm going to school with my books, but I don't pitch up at school."

Researcher: "How do you spend the day if you don't come to school Mikhael?"

Mikhael: "I travel to school by taxi in the morning... and days when I just feel like coming to school, I don't get off at school, normally two stops before the school. Then I walk to the mall and buy me something to eat. Most times I see learners from other schools also walking around in the mall. I go to the bathroom and get dressed in my casual clothes and then walk around in the mall the whole day, playing games in the game centres or I go watch movies in the cinema...Later in the afternoon say so by two o'clock, I leave the mall ...and then I try to be back at home just before my parents get back from work, so that they can think I was in school for the whole day."

Grant: "Sometimes nothing happens in our classes, especially when were done with the examination. Like for example after we completed the June exams this year (2005), I stayed at home."

Researcher: "Did your parent know that you were not attending school?"

Grant: "No sir, they didn't know about it."

Researcher: "What do think how will they react, should they find out that you are not in school while you are supposed to be there?"

Grant: "I'm not to sure how they will react, but I think they won't worry too much about it. The only thing they are interested in is that I pass my exams. The educators are also not worried, because many children don't come to school after exams. That is the time that school is very boring, nothing exciting happens. May be only one or two educators give us work to do, but the others don't give anything...I think they are busy marking our exam papers."

Researcher: "It seems that you look for more exciting things to do after you are done with your exams?"

Grant: "Yes sir, I just can't see myself getting up very early in the morning and spending all my money on taxi fare and then there aren't much to do at school, you sit around in most classes."

Ashley: "That's true; I agree...I also think it is a waste of time to come to school after exams, because you just get irritated by the educators so quickly. You can't even walk around and then they want to know what you up to. That is why it is better just to stay away from school 'one time'."

Researcher: "And you Brian, what is your opinion regarding the problem that we are talking about?... Would you like to share it with us?"

Brian: "It is a very serious problem especially here at this school, but not just only here, also at other high schools in our area, not actually at the primary schools."

Researcher: "What do you think could be the reasons why it mainly happens at high schools and not so much at the primary schools?"

Brian: "I think it is because the children feel that the teachers are very distant from them".

Researcher: "What do you mean by that Brian?"

Brian: "All the teachers are the same here at this school ...I think they've got to share their feelings with so many pupils, that they haven't got any time for one person ...They're all mad crazy on the use of the word good. Be 'good' in class. Be a 'good' attender. Be a 'good' boy and so on ...They don't know or believe you're a real person ... that you can have real problems too. They don't understand your feelings, because once when I was away from school and missed a test, my miss blamed me ... she didn't even bother to ask me why I had been away. They don't care. All they think about is themselves and their work. Nothing else matters ... it's always your fault and never theirs."

Jonathan: "Once we were supposed to write a test and then my friend Jeremy dared me run away from school, both of us are in the same class and we didn't study for the test. So we went to his house, because nobody was there ... and then we played with his older brothers' motor-cycle and watched a movie afterwards ... So the next day at school our sir asked us where we were ... and because we knew that he was going to scold anyway, we just told him that our books were stolen and that we were in the school library busy catching up with our work. So he became very, very angry with us and scolded us in front of all the other children in class and we felt very embarrassed."

Grant: "That is something that I've also noticed already ... only certain children in our class get scolded, but not others ... There's lots of favouritism going on here at this school".

Researcher: "Can you tell us more about the favouritism, Grant?"

Grant: "I know quite a few sirs who make it very obvious that they only take note of the clever children in class ... you know ...the one's that come from the nice areas. They always speak to them and never scold them like they scold us ... They're a bit like my mother who only spends time with my younger brother and gives him anything he wants. Now, the teachers are just like that ... Maybe they think that some of us live in poor areas that's why they don't still have to be bothered with us. But that's not our fault ... I mean ... can we help where we are living?"

Mikhael: "They just want to hit a person, even if you did nothing wrong. Sometimes I just get so mad that I feel like running away from school ... Once I came late into a sir's class because I was struggling to get done with my maths and I still had to walk far to class. The lesson was already on ... so when I walked in the sir just grabbed me at my chest and pulled me a few times, shouting at me and told me that I'm always late for his classes ... But if others come late he allows them in and doesn't even say anything."

Researcher: "How did this treatment make you feel on that day Mikhael ... and how did you react?"

Mikhael: "It made me very, very cross, I didn't like it ... I went straight to my seat ... but after a few minutes I got up and just walked out of the class, I was too angry ... I wanted to go to the principal's office to tell him what the teacher did to me, but then I thought maybe he won't believe me. So I walked to the fence at the back, threw my bag over it and crept through the whole and went straight home...I just couldn't care... But while I was walking pass the flats near the school, I saw a few guys who looked like gangsters ... and I really felt like going to them and tell them what the sir did to me. I think they also know him, because maybe they were also at the this school. They looked dangerous and I thought they could 'sort him out' after school ... But then I just left it."

Stephan: "Sometimes our teachers really treat us like small children, like grade one or grade two children ... they also like to pick on a person if you don't understand

your schoolwork. Sometimes other children in class also make fun of a person if you're struggling with your work ... and the teachers can hear that, but they don't say anything about it. This makes a person not very eager to go to your class, because you know what 's going to happen, you become put off and just stay away... The teachers at this school really show favouritism, I agree with what Grant said earlier."

Jonathan: "Primary school was nicer for me ... because our teachers made their lessons very interesting, but not here. The work is boring and very difficult ... sometimes you feel that you can't cope with everything and the teachers expect you to do the work. But you can't go to them for help ... because then they get cross with a person. That 's why some of my friends and I decided to stay away from our classes and rather go to someone's house during school hours.

Brian: "Yes it's true ...they only help the clever children in class, that why I have don't like high school. My 'plug' to finish school is already gone, because the work is difficult and the teachers are full of nonsense ... Sometimes I even feel scared of them. They put one off by the way they treat you. I don't know if I'll be able to finish grade twelve and get a job one day ... Maybe I'll become just like some of the other young people where we live."

Researcher: "Brian, please tell us more about the young people in your area."

Brian: "Many of them don't have jobs, some are gangsters who sit around whole day and sometimes rob other people in the streets where I live. They are very dangerous, but I think they don't have to stress over school work and teachers that are giving them a hard time."

Ashley: "Here isn't interesting activities like at primary school and they never take us out. That is what I've enjoyed the most about primary school, it's not like here where the teachers just want to put a person down all the time. That is why it is nicer to be outside rather ... away from school, because my friends understand me much better than the teachers ... they don't care."

Stephan: "To be really honest ... I don't know what I'm going to do when I'm big one day. It also doesn't matter to my parents, because they don't show any interest in my schoolwork. They never any parent meeting. They will never find out that I'm not in school everyday ... I think they also didn't go very far with their schooling. My mother told me once that she didn't go to high school ... not so sure about my father. He works for the city council and my mother doesn't work, she is just at home the whole time."

Researcher: Anyone else who would like to say something or make any comment?

Mikhael: "Once before I asked my parents what I must go study for when I'm done with school, so my father reckoned to me that they are too poor to sent me to university or college... They told me that I won't find work easily anyway, because work is very scares nowadays. That made me feel very bad ... and also negative towards school that I just lost interest in my work all together. And when I haven't done my homework, I sometimes just decide to stay away from the class, it's better that way, because then my sir doesn't find out and can't say bad things about me in front of the other children in the class."

Jonathan: "There are times when I sit and daydream in class, especially when I find the lessons very boring ... Then I think of more interesting things I could have been doing if I wasn't in class."

Researcher: "Things such as?"

Jonathan: "I could maybe sit around with the guys or play games in the café on the corner there by us ...I'll really do anything not to sit in a lesson that I don't enjoy at all. I easily fall asleep then or I just stay away especially if it is late afternoon already and almost time to go home again."

Researcher: "Thank you very much Jonathan, I think we can now stop right here, because its is going to be the end of this period and we have permission to use this venue only until ten o'clock."

I would like to thank you all for your time and willingness to participate in this interview and for all your input. I wish you all best of luck for the rest of the year and I hope that you will despite all your difficulties, still make a success of this year. Thank you once again, all the best to all of you and go well.”

ANNEXURE C

Interview with truant learner

Interview with truant learner:

- Researcher : “Good day Gary, welcome here and thank you very much for allowing me to interview you this morning. We are going to talk about your school experiences and also about your life outside school, at home, when you with your friends after school and so forth. I hope it’s fine with you, Gary?”
- Gary : “Good morning... it’s fine with me, sir.”
- Researcher : “So let’s start by asking you to briefly telling me a little bit more about yourself, exactly who the person Gary is.”
- Gary : “My name is Gary Andrews ... I’m fourteen years old. I live in Dennemeer and I attend Blackheath High School. I’m in grade eight this year ... I started grade here last year, but I didn’t write the final exams so ... now I’m doing the grade over again this year.”
- Researcher : “What made it not possible for you to write the examination at the end of last year, Gary?”
- Gary : “... I wasn’t up to date with lots of my work and projects ...and I didn’t write all my class tests. I was also absent a lot, sir.”
- Researcher : “Oh, I see ... so it ‘s your second year at Black Heath High School. Be that as it may, Gary, I’m just very glad that you’re back at school this year to make another effort. Good luck with that ... Can you now please tell me a bit more about your family life and the area where you live?”
- Gary : “I live with my mother and my grandmother, and my two cousins. We live just around the corner from the school ...not far away from here... But we first lived somewhere else, and then my parents separated about six and a half years ago. So my mother and I moved in with my grandma here in Dennemeer.”

- Researcher : "What does it feel like living with your grandmother and your cousins?"
- Gary : "It's not always so nice, sir"
- Researcher : "Exactly what do you mean by that Gary?"
- Gary : "I never see my father, because my mother and him don't worry with each other. You see sir, he used have a job before, but not anymore, now that is the big thing... He had a job as a general worker at a nursery in Bellville, but I think he was retrenched and he is still without work at the moment. Now, my mother doesn't want him to see me or to visit me. My grandmother is just so strict with me. I can't do what I want to ... or how can I say ... she has far too strict house rules. She likes to spoil my two cousins and allows them to do the things that they want to ... and she doesn't even give them all the things to do that I must do at home. Once, a friend of mine organised a job for me at Shoprite near to our house, so my mother and my grandmother didn't want me to take it."
- Researcher : "How did it make you feel?"
- Gary : "I was very disappointed and cross about it, because they don't want to enough pocket money. Sometimes I have to beg them for money on a Saturday and they always tell me they haven't got. But I notice that my cousins always have money and I think my grandmother gives it to them. I mean I'm also just a child still, why can't I also get pocket money every weekend? ... But my mother can go out with her friends and sometimes she goes out with her boyfriend and then I just have to sit at home, do all the things that my grandmother wants me to do ... or sit and watch boring stuff on television."
- Researcher : "Gary, I get the idea that you feel your family is not treating you fairly and kindly. What are your comments about that?"
- Gary : "Yes sir, I think it's true, I think about it often. I feel like a very lonely child

at home. What is worst for me is when my mother sometimes speaks to my father over the phone ... She doesn't say any decent word to him, just scolding and swearing and it actually makes me very, very sad and unhappy that I sometimes just feel like crying ... Many times in the past already, I felt like running away from home, but then I always consider the dangers of what might happen to me, because it's not very safe where I live, and that keeps me back. But I might still do it one day."

Researcher : "You've just mentioned something about the dangers of the area in which live. Can you please elaborate a bit more on that for me?"

Gary : "It's very rough there by us, sir... There is a lot of different gangs in our area and they keep on looking for trouble ... and sometimes they interfere and hurt innocent people and children. I know some of the gangsters, because they were at the same primary school that I attended... Sometimes they call me ... and then I talk to them, but don't do the stuff that they do."

Researcher : "What do you talk about?"

Gary : "They ask me how high school is ... and if it isn't boring. They also know some of the teachers and warn me about them, and they say very bad things about the teachers... They say I'm stupid to go to this school and I must come sit and hang around with them... Sometimes when the teachers drive pass us on their way home after school, and then the gangsters call them ugly names and swear at them. It makes me scared, because the teacher may think it's me who shout these ugly things to them."

- Researcher : "How do you respond to all the things that they tell you?"
Sometimes I don't listen to them, but other times I talk with them and tell them that I don't like this school ... and about the bad attitudes of some of the teachers and their ways."
- Researcher : "And at your school ... aren't any gang related activities taking place there as well?"
- Gary : "Yes sir, there are gangsters at our school also. The teachers know about them, but I don't know why they don't do anything about it."
- Researcher : "Can you tell me a bit more about these gangsters at your school?"
- Gary : "They have outside friends ... how can I say ...older friends who don't go to school anymore. They sell cigarettes and drugs to other children on the school grounds and they ask for protection money from the smaller children and if the children don't want to give money to them, the gangsters hit them."
- Researcher : "Have there been any gang fights at your school and in the area in which you live?"
- Gary : "It happens a lot sir ... not every day, but it does happen. Say for example there was a fight over the weekend, then in the following week the outside gangsters come on our school grounds to look for children who belong to the gang that they were fighting against over the weekend ... and then there is big trouble. They come into the school ground with weapons."
- Researcher : "Tell me what happens then, and how are these dangerous situations diffused at your school?"
- Gary : "There is total chaos at school when these fights take place ... the whole

place is like a mad house. They chase the kids around and if they catch them, they beat them up with belts and sometimes they break the branches of the trees and hit them with that also. Then some of the teachers come out of the staff room or their classes and then the gangsters jump over the fence and run away ... Or sometimes when it's very bad, the principal phones the police and then they take long to come to school, but when they come, they catch some of the gangsters and take them away. After a few days or so, you see that the same gangsters back again, walking in the streets near the school."

Researcher : "How do you feel about these dangerous situations and how do you deal with it, Gary?"

Gary : " ... I'm a bit scared and I feel very nervous. This never happened at primary school. It used to happen in our area, but never at school. Because I think, primary school children don't worry about gangsters and they are not involved with them... But here it's different, high school children think it's cool to talk and to hang out with hooligans and gangsters... And when the fight sometimes start here, me friends and I get a chance to slip away through the wholes in the fence, not because we are scared that something might happen to us, but because there is chaos at school and we know that nobody will see us.

Researcher : "And the times when you run away from school, how do you normally spend your time?"

Gary : "Sometimes we go to someone's house, not really to mine, because my grandmother is always there ... We sit around and talk a lot of nonsense or we play computer games or we smoke cigarettes. There is no where else that we can go to ... There's not even a library that we can go, if we want go to a library, we have to go to Forest Heights, but there is always children who interfere with us, because they know that we are from their area ... And when it's almost three o'clock, we go home."

- Researcher : "Can we now move to your scholastic performance Gary? How do you find the work in grade eight?"
- Gary : "The stuff that we learn about is not very interesting, most of it is actually very boring and difficult for me."
- Researcher : "Please tell me more about it?"
- Gary : "Sometimes I don't understand what to do, but I'm too scared and shy to asked in class, because the other children laugh at a person. Here at this school, other children like to make guy of a person. Even the teachers are funny with you ... Say now for example they give homework and you can't do it and you come to school the following morning and you tell them that you didn't do the work because you didn't understand, then the teachers don't believe a person ... They get very angry and they scold and say very bad and hurtful things to you in front of the other children or they put you in detention for a few days ... They've got no feeling for a person."
- Researcher : "Has it always been difficult for you to cope with your school work, Gary?"
- Gary : "No sir, not really."
- Researcher : " What exactly do you mean with: Not really?"
- Gary : "You see sir, I know I'm not a clever person. But at primary school I also used to struggle a bit, but there was a teacher, Mrs Engelbrecht, the learning support teacher ... she helped us a lot with our work and she is a very nice teacher and understands if you are struggling and she sits with you until you get the work right ... That's what I liked about her."
- Researcher : "And your experience here at high school is completely different, I assume?"

- Gary : "O yes sir! It's not the same. Here isn't a learning support teacher and the other teachers are not 'lekker' with a person, sir... They're just nice to just certain children."
- Researcher : "... What make you think that they are nice to certain children only?"
- Gary : "I think it is because they don't have time for children who are struggling with their school work. For example, they never ask me why I don't complete my homework and assignments. The only time they talk to me is when they scold me when I 'bunk' their classes or when my work is not done ... otherwise they cant care less about me."
- Researcher : "And how does that make you feel?"
- Gary : "It makes me feel as if I don't belong in class... Even the children who are favoured so by the teachers, they don't take much notice of a person... That's why I always feel lonely and, and very one-sided at school ... and there are more children who feel like this, because we always talk about the way some of our teachers go on with us ... and how full of nonsense they are sometimes. That is why some of us don't even want to talk to the teachers' favourites, because they are too full of themselves also ... You see sir, they think they better than us, just because we don't look so nice also."
- Researcher : "So, Gary, it seems that for quite a number of reasons, your teachers display rather discriminatory conduct towards you and your friends, even on the basis of how you look. ... Is that that really so?"
- Gary : "I think it so sir, because how come the children who come to school well dressed and the ones who look nicer than some of us, are not so badly treated like most of the others who are poor and don't have money to buy nice clothes and other stuff?"
- Researcher : "I get the impression that you aren't very happy with the way you look,

Gary? Do you have anything to say about that?"

- Gary : "Yes sir, I don't have nice clothes to wear sir. My mother didn't buy me new school clothes, she said she couldn't afford it... That's why I'm wearing second hand clothes, because she bought it from my aunt. It is actually my cousin's clothes, who was also at this school a few years ago. And you see sir, I think the teachers also like the other children more, because they are nicer looking than some of us ... They're the ones with nicer hair, they have lots of pocket money and ride on their bicycles to school every day."
- Researcher : "So, you feel that your teachers do not treat all the children at your school the same?"
- Gary : "Yes sir, that is the case, they are not the same with everybody."
- Researcher : "How does it make you feel?"
- Gary : "It's not a nice feeling, sir... Most of the time I feel like an outsider. I cant help it if my mother's money matters are not looking good ...Some teachers make as if the world only belongs to good looking and rich children. Sir can go ask all the children in my class, because they'll say the same thing. It makes me feel very unwelcome in their class ... and I really don't feel like being there. That is why some of my classmates and I sometimes bunk their classes, because we cant handle the teachers' ... Once we leave the school ground, we don't go back to class until the following day or sometimes we just stay away for certain teachers classes and then we go back to school again."
- Researcher : "Gary, are there teachers at your school that are different to the ones that you have just told me about, and if there are, tell me what do you think make them different?"
- Gary : "There's only two or three of our teachers who are very nice ... The one is

our Life Orientation teacher, she is very cool and understanding ... I think it's because she has a feeling for a person and knows how to treat us. What's very, very nice about her, is that she doesn't make more of the children who think they're smarter than some of us who live in the township areas... That's what I like about her."

Researcher : "Lets now, take a look at your future Gary. I see that you're fifteen years old at the moment if I'm not mistaken. So, tell me, where you would like to see yourself in ten years time from now when you will be a man of twenty five years old?"

Gary : "You are right sir, I am fifteen years old. I really don't know how to answer you on this one ... because I'm not really worried about the future."

Researcher : "Can you perhaps tell me, what it is that's making you not worried about your future at this stage of your life?"

Gary : "... You see sir, it's just that my life is so full of bad vibes. I don't really have any direction yet ... sometimes it feels like there is just no hope, because I have nothing to look forward to."

Researcher : "What do you think why would that be the case?"

Gary : "Many time I don't even feel like coming to school, because ... I just don't feel like being here and there is nothing that's motivating me to be here. Honestly sir, there are just so many things that are not working for me ... I feel like leaving school and find myself a job, even it is just small ... so that I can earn something."

Researcher : "What difference do you think will it make in your life if you should earn your own money?"

Gary : "I won't have to beg my mother for pocket money anymore ... And I think it will be very easy to find me something to do, because there's a lot of drug

dealers in our area and I know they selling drugs to school children also. So, I know they will easily let me work for them, but that's not really what I would like to do sir, because I don't want to mess up other children's lives. Just now I land in big trouble also ... like going to jail or so... But what if I reach the stage where I have no choice to fall for that kind of live? Many kids at our school do that for money ... I really cant think that far at this moment. Then I'll rather wait till I'm older and look for a proper job"

Researcher : "So, I hear that you wouldn't like to cause any further problems for yourself and for other people?"

Gary : "No sir, I really don't want to do that. All I want is a better life for myself, ... because at the moment, I'm not very happy with my life."

Researcher : "What kind of life are you really longing for, Gary?"

Gary : "Hhhmmm ... Where I can feel that there is something to live for. At the moment, It feels to me that almost everybody and everything is against me ... I would like to feel special and accepted by other people, but I only get that feeling when I'm with my friends whom I sometimes run away from school with ... I can still handle my situation at home, but at school ... that's where my biggest problem lie ... its different, this place makes a person loose direction and motivation in life. Here's no care from the teachers. Also this place where I'm living ... it makes me sick sometimes. Maybe if I lived in a nice place, or a better area, my whole life would have been different."

Researcher : "Thank you Gary, we are going to stop right here with our interview. Thank you once more for allowing me to interview you and for your willingness to share your experiences of your everyday life so freely. I will be seeing you again on another day, but in the meantime, I wish you all the best and good luck with your school work. At another time we will speak more."

ANNEXURE D

Interview with non-truant learner

Interview with non-truant learner:

- Researcher : “Good afternoon Stephan, thank you for allowing me to interview you. I’m really looking forward to hear what you have to say. As you know, we are going to talk about your experiences as a learner here at school, but also about what kind of life you live when you are not at school.”
- Stephan : “It’s fine sir”.
- Researcher : “Can you tell me a bit more about yourself than I have seen in your profile here at school? ... How would you describe yourself to any stranger like myself?”
- Stephan : “Ok sir ... My name is Gary and I’m fifteen years and I live Kuils river. The reason why I’m attending Kleinvlei High School is because It’s a nice school and almost all my family attended this school. But I must say, the area where the school is situated is not so nice, as you can see. But I don’t think it was always so bad, because here’s all kinds of people living here nowadays, even gangsters, but that doesn’t really bother me such a lot. Well, if I can tell you about my hobbies and other stuff ... I do participate in quite a few activities at school, like for example I play soccer and hockey in winter and I take part in athletics in summer. I have a sister who is in grade eleven also here at Kleinvlei High School. My father works in Somerset West and drops me and my sister at school every morning on his way to work and in the afternoon, we travel home by taxi.”
- Researcher : “It sounds to me that this school has in the past and is still today playing a significant role in the lives of your family?”
- Stephan : “Yes sir ... that is really true.”
- Researcher : “So let us talk a bit about your family background and a bit later we will also speak about your neighbourhood. But let’s start with your immediate family, who are they and what do they do for a living?”

Stephan : “My father works for the municipality in Somerset West, I think it is called the Helderberg-Basin municipality and he does clerical work there. My mother is a teacher at a primary school in Kraaifontein. Then I have an old older brother whose studying at university, but I not so sure what he is studying, I think it is something to do with law ... My sister that I spoke about just now, is also at this school and she is doing grade eleven this year.” The four of us live together in our house in Soneike in Kuils River, quite a distance here from the school ... about fifteen kilometres.”

Researcher : “Tell me more about your neighbourhood?”

Stephan : “It is a very quiet place where we live, a lot quieter than here where the school is. The streets are also cleaner and there quite a few parks and a library also near our house and a few small shops in the main road. Soneikeshopping mall is also not too far from where we live ...There is also a sport complex where I sometimes train with the soccer players, but don't play for any of the clubs there ... I only play for the school.”

Researcher : “Do have many friends in your neighbourhood? If you do, please tell me a bit about them.”

Stephan : “Yes sir, I have a few friends, but I wouldn't say that they are close friends, although we do get together sometimes. My parents allow me to go to their houses especially when they invite me for a party or so. When its my birthday, I invite them over to our house also ... They are all very nice and decent children and their parents are just as strict as my parents. We like play computer games when we all together or we listen to CD's. Sometimes we out together, like to the Waterfront or to the ice ring, then our parents take turns to go with us to see that we are ok.”

Researcher : “Do you as a family ever go out together, if so, please tell about it?”

Stephan : “Yes sir, we go out, but not that often. Sometimes we go to Tygervalley Centre to have a meal or watch a movie, but my older brother doesn't

always go with, because he is always busy with his books and stuff at home. But we also go on holiday to other places than all of us usually go. What I like about these holidays is that I sometimes meet lots of new friends and do very exiting stuff together.”

Researcher : “Let’s now focus on your school career a bit Stephan. How do you experience life at school and coping with your school work in general?”

Stephan : “I like school, its so exiting to me and our teachers are really nice. They are very concerned about us, especially if they see that you are working and completing your work ... I don’t want to get behind with my work, because then my teachers might put me in detention or just ignore me, like they do to children who are not working and ‘bunk’ classes sometimes. Especially my mother wants me to do well in my schoolwork.”

Researcher : “So I hear that you are coping fairly well with your school work Stephan, your comments on that?”

Stephan : “I’m happy with my results, sir ... I must say there is a big difference in the work that we used to do in primary school, we also have to work a lot on our own and in also groups. But most times I understand what to do and if I don’t, I ask the other children in my group or the teacher for help ...We help each other a lot in our group work activities.“

Researcher : “Have you ever thought about what kind of work you would like do one day when you are big?”

Stephan : “I would like to do computer programming, I’m good in maths and our maths teacher told us that have to understand maths if we want to do computer studies the at university when we get there.”

Researcher : “That’s great Stephan, I’m pleased to hear that you have big plans for the future, good luck! Now, earlier you mentioned something about some

children who “bunk” classes here at your school. I would like you to tell me more about it, please?”

- Stephan : “It’s only certain children who do that, especially the ones who live near the school and some who don’t like being at school, I think.”
- Researcher : “What make you say this?”
- Stephan : “I don’t really know what their problems are, but think they find school boring and some of them never do their schoolwork and that’s why they are scared of certain teachers ... because they know they are going to be sent to detention after school, they scared, you see sir... Sometimes during the day, while the school is still on, I see some of our school’s children walking around outside the fence, they talk to people who are not at school anymore and they smoke cigarettes ...Then I always wonder why are they doing this, because I’m not like that ... I come to school to learn and to do my school work and I feel very happy to be this way. I just want to be who I am... and not too big for my boots.”
- Researcher : “Earlier you mentioned something about the area in which the school is situated ... Are there in your opinion perhaps any negative influences here in this particular area, that according to you, might interfere with children’s school attendance and for example cause them to skip school or certain classes sometimes?”
- Stephan : “There could be sir ... I’ll say all the gangsterism and the drugs may play a role. I know that here are some boys, especially the older ones, but also some of the grade eight’s and nine’s who like to walk around with the gangsters during school time ... may be they think they’re ‘kwaai’ or very important if they do that ... I don’t know. I really think they’re just plain stupid ... Because now they don’t do their work in class and they stay in trouble by the teachers and the principal.”
- Researcher : “I heard you saying earlier that you are happy with the way you are and

who you are, any further comments on that, Stephan?"

Stephan : "... I know who I am sir and I accept myself the way I am. I'm very happy with way the God made me. He made me like this and gives me everything that I need every day. I know that I am a bit small for my age, but that's fine ... I don't mind that. I'm happy with the way I look."

Researcher : "You are in grade six this year Stephan, still a long way to go to grade twelve, isn't it?"

Stephan : "It's only five years ... and if I work really very hard, the time will fly."

Researcher : "Yes, I'm sure, and I hear that you know exactly what your goal is, so you know where you're going?"

Stephan : "Yes sir, I do know what I want to one day, as I said, I'm interested in computers ... so that's where my heart lies. And I know that I must work very hard, which is exactly what I'm going to do. My mother always tells me everything in life, one must work very hard for, because some people buy their stuff, like for example a paper to say that they have studied, but then they never actually did."

Researcher : "So you saying that you are one of those people, you want to earn your achievements ... and the papers that go with it?"

Stephan : "That's right sir, I want to do my best in school and do in a honest way."

Researchers : "That is the best policy, they say, Stephan. I wonder how the other children at your school, the ones who sometimes skip their classes, will get ever get where they want to be in life one day? ... Have you ever thought about that?"

Stephan : "Not actually yet sir ... But I must say that if they can only come to their

senses and realise that they are wasting their time and their parents' money when they bunk classes like that. If they have problems, they can speak to the teachers ... I'm sure they will find help somewhere, if they really want to be helped. But the way they go on now ... I don't about them."

Researcher : "So your message to the children who play truant, is to seek assistance, should they be grappling with issues that are causing them more problems and also disrupt their school careers in the process."

Stephan : "Yes sir, because in the end they just give our school a bad name, our results will be weak and the people will say Kleinvlei High School is a school for bunkers and hooligans ... and that will be bad for all of us."

Researcher : "I'm sure that is not where you would see this school going one day, hey Stephan?"

Stephan : "No sir, definitely not, then I will ask my parents to find me another high school."

Researcher : "Let's hope that won't ever have to happen, Stephan. Anyway, I think we can end our interview here, because we have covered all the things that I wanted to ask you about. Thank you very much for your willingness to sit for the interview, Stephan, I will be seeing you again at another time to administer some tests. In the meantime, all the best and good luck with all your plans ... go well."

ANNEXURE E

Correspondence requesting permission to conduct the proposed research

M. J. van Breda
46 Devon RD
LANSDOWNE
7780
8 June 2005

The Chief Education Specialist: Dr M.G. Bunding
Education Management and Development Centre (EMDC) - East
Private Bag X 23
KUILSRIVER
7975

Dear Sir

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENT LEARNERS IN EMDC – EAST

I hereby kindly request your permission to conduct research regarding truant behaviour among early adolescent learners attending the following secondary schools in the above-mentioned area: Blackheath, Eerste River, Forest Heights, Kleinvlei, Malibu and Wesbank.

The proposed research is intended to contribute to the understanding of truancy, particularly displayed by early adolescent learners and to offer educators, *in loco parentis*, guidelines to deal with this form of behaviour that is increasingly becoming a matter of urgent concern in the area referred to previously.

The study attempts to answer the following question:

How can educators, in loco parentis, be equipped with the skills and resources necessary to address the problem of truancy?

Thanking you for giving this matter your attention.

Yours sincerely

.....

Maynard van Breda
(Educational Psychologist: EMDC East)

Letter of response from Dr. M. Bunding

Chief Education Specialist: EMDC East

Navrae
Enquiries **Dr M. Bunding**

Telefoon
Telephone **(021) 900 7000**

Faks
IFeksi **(021) 903 2149**

Verwysing
Isalathiso



Wes-Kaap Onderwysdepartement

Western Cape Education Department

ISEBE leMfundo leNtshona Koloni

M. J. van Breda

Your submission of 8 June 2005 has reference:

The Specialised Learner and Educator Support pillar of the EMDC has given favourable consideration to your request and permission is therefore granted for you to conduct the proposed research.

However, you are expected to:

- Negotiate access to all schools with the relevant officials.
- Respect the confidentiality of participants' responses.
- Kindly supply the EMDC with a copy of the completed research document.

On behalf of the EMDC East, I wish you every success in your worthy endeavour.

Yours sincerely

DR. M. BUNDING

(Chief Education Specialist: EMDC East)

ANNEXURE F

Covering letter to schools, participating in the empirical research

M. J. van Breda
EMDC East
9 February 2006

The Principal

Dear Sir/ Madam

COVERING LETTER TO ALL PRINCIPALS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING IN
THE RESEARCH ON TRUANT BEHAVIOUR AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENT LEARNERS:

The proposed research aims to investigate the nature and extent of truant behaviour prevalent among early adolescent learners at secondary schools in EMDC East.

The following documents are enclosed:

1. A copy of the approval letter from the EMDC to conduct the research.
2. A copy of the questionnaire to answered by the participated learners.
3. A copy of the primary and secondary aims of the research.

After consulting with your personnel, kindly notify me of a suitable time for a meeting with you and/or your senior management team in order to discuss logistical arrangements for the administering of the questionnaire.

Thanking you for giving this matter your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Maynard van Breda
(Educational Psychologist: EMDC East)

ANNEXURE G

Letter of request to parents/ guardians

M. J. van Breda
EMDC: East
9 February 2006

Dear parent/ guardian

REQUESTING YOUR PERMISSION FOR YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH ON TRUANCY:

Your permission is hereby requested for your son/ daughter to participate in a study regarding truant behaviour among early adolescent learners which is drastically increasing at the school attended by your child as well as other schools in the surrounding area.

The aim of the research is to investigate the nature of this type of behaviour among learners and to propose recommendations to schools in addressing it.

We/ I..... grant permission for my son/ daughter..... to participate in the study and if randomly selected, to be included in an in-depth case study on truant behaviour.

Kindly mark your response with an X:

YES

NO

Thank you for giving this matter your immediate attention.

Yours faithfully

Maynard van Breda
(Educational Psychologist EMDC: East)