

CHAPTER 1

ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

People are typically drawn to study psychology out of a sense of curiosity. They are interested in questions like “How do people fall in love?”, “How does memory work?”, and, in this case, “What role does the school environment play in developing a sense of identity?”. Such questions are most interesting and they, and many other psychological topics, can be fascinating to learn about and to investigate. However, investigating a topic for the sole purpose of satisfying one’s curiosity does not justify the expense in time and money that are involved. One of the key transformations that learners of psychology undergo in the course of their study is from being *consumers* of psychological knowledge to being *producers* of it (Haslam & McGarty, 2003). A key part of a psychologist’s training is to be able to participate *actively* in the research process and subsequently, to add to the body of psychological knowledge. I hope the research that I conducted for this thesis will fulfill this mission.

Hoshmand (1999) argues that psychology is, essentially, a cultural science. He asserts that researchers are accountable to the scientific or professional community, as well as to the larger social community. In other words, our research practices should serve the larger social system and not only the academic community where it originates. I hope the results of the research conducted for this thesis will fulfill this second mission by serving the academic community, the educational community, parents and most importantly, the subjects of the research, adolescents.

1.2 Objectives

The necessary and sufficient social conditions for adolescent identity development have hardly been explored. Furthermore, few studies have investigated the relationship between classroom environment and adolescent identity (McEachron-Hirsch & Ward, 1993). The comprehensive evidence presented by a number of researchers clearly establishes that the nature of the classroom environment has a potent influence on learners’ academic, social and psychological development (Fraser & Walberg, 1991).

Thus the logical next step would be to specify what kinds of environments are conducive to identity development. This thesis sets out to advance the idea that a taxonomy of relevant optimum conditions for identity formation can serve to illuminate thinking and research on the impact of the classroom environment on identity development in adolescence.

While each young person is unique in personal history, talents and attributes, certain underlying and predictable structural organizations do appear to comprise the identity formation process. Once they are recognized, the opportunity exists for the facilitation of identity development. The purpose of this thesis is to provide an examination of the elements in the school systems that are conducive to the identity development of the learners. The following themes will be explored:

- Processes at work in order to obtain identity formation.
- The impact of these processes in relation to identity formation.
- The optimization of the process of identity formation.

1.3 The structure of this thesis and an overview of the chapters

One difficulty in studying adolescence is the definition of the period itself. It is somewhat variable, but specific in its commencement with the physiological changes of puberty. It is highly variable and nonspecific in its end. Chronologically the end of adolescence is usually defined by the attainment of the age 20, but mastery of the psychological tasks of adolescence, for example, identity attainment, continues well into adulthood (Colarusso, 1992; Danielson, Lorem, & Kroger, 2000).

A second problem in studying adolescence is the definition of it. Scholars of different disciplines hold different views of this period. These different views will be briefly discussed in 1.4.

An overview of each of the subsequent chapters will now be presented.

1.3.1 Chapter 2: Identity in the social system

Identity is an even more difficult term to delimit than is adolescence (Marcia, 1980). Differences among theorists in how they define identity and differences within and among individuals in their various self-conceptions complicate answering this question.

Furthermore, the concept of identity is used in different ways, even within the same discipline. In this chapter, I will offer a brief explanation of identity, rather than a definition. Consequently I will discuss the development of personal identity and offer a brief explanation of the identity statuses as proposed by Marcia (1966). In the final section of this chapter I will discuss Social Identity Theory as a key approach for theorizing about the psychological effects that membership of a group can have on the individual.

1.3.2 Chapter 3: Understanding social systems

Contemporary adolescents struggle for survival and growth in a dynamic, complex, and often chaotic social milieu (Pearson, 1991). Different social systems influence the course of their development and continue to exert a dynamic influence on their current experience. They are unavoidably assigned membership to family, school and neighbourhood. With each passing year, membership in other social systems becomes available to them. They choose some by virtue of their own inclinations and have others thrust upon them because of their behaviour or experiences. Each social system has its own set of rules that governs the interaction among the adolescent and the other members of the system. Individual conflicts associated with multisystem membership are characteristic of the adolescent developmental phase, when, for example, the teenager may choose membership in peer groups whose values conflict with those of his/her parents.

Adolescence, and the psychology of adolescence, can therefore only be fully understood using an approach that takes notice of the social context in which developing people live. This approach, aptly named Social Systems Theory, sees the person continually developing throughout life. This development involves a contextual view of the person, that is, the person is embedded in his/her world. According to this approach, adolescence involves changes within the person, in the person's context, and between the person and the social context.

In this chapter, Social Systems Theory will be discussed. The value of a systems orientation in the examination of educational contexts will be explained.

1.3.3 Chapter 4: The high school as a social system

Far less attention has been paid to social development during adolescence than any other life stage (Akers, Jones, & Coyl, 1998; Pugh & Hart, 1999). This is a serious deficiency in developmental psychology because by the time the child reaches adolescence, there is less reliance on parents for attachment and security. As adolescents' social experiences become more extensive, their social relationships become more complex, more exploratory and an increase in interaction with others occurs (Akers, Jones & Coyl, 1998). Adolescents spend many of their waking hours in either schools or various community settings, such as classrooms, playgrounds, and neighbourhood streets. These changes in social and environmental interactions involve major life event changes and may cause opportunities for growth for some children, and difficulties for others.

Schools hold a central place in the developmental agenda set forth for children in almost all countries. They play a central role in promoting children's acquisition of knowledge and shaping their social, emotional, and behavioral development. Most secondary school prospectuses contain a commitment to the "all-round development" of their pupils (Galloway & Edwards, 1992). There is a growing professional consensus that schools should be preparing pupils for the choices and challenges of life outside the school. Therefore, apart from academic instruction, topics such as social skills development and career counselling should be addressed in a more systematic manner than was formerly considered necessary.

Traditionally, research and evaluation in education have tended to rely heavily and sometimes exclusively on the assessment of academic achievement and other learning outcomes. Although one cannot dispute the importance of outcome measures, they do not present a complete picture of the educational process. Research findings (Adams, Ryan & Keating, 2000; Meeus, 1993) highlight the importance of school environment as a potential facilitator or inhibitor of identity development.

The dynamic qualities of the learning environment, with specific attention to the classroom, will be explored in Chapter 4. Attention will be given to the characteristics that either promote or inhibit effective learning and, ultimately, identity development.

In order to provide information on how South African teachers experience their classroom environments, a summary of a study by Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2002) is provided.

The chapter is concluded with a discussion of effective schooling practices. The learner-centered education approach is examined as an alternative to the current teacher-centered education policy.

1.3.4 Chapter 5: Methodology

The qualitative method of research was employed in this study. Unlike other disciplines in the human sciences, psychology has undervalued the role of qualitative research methods in scientific inquiry. This has done a disservice to psychology, depriving its practitioners of skills that can simultaneously liberate and discipline through the theoretical imagination. An advantage of qualitative research is that theory is generated which is contextually sensitive, persuasive, and relevant. The more pragmatic argument is that the outcomes of research will be evaluated in terms of their persuasiveness and power to inspire an audience. Theory that is represented at diverse levels of abstraction, but which nevertheless fits the data well, should be challenging, stimulating, and yet highly plausible in the sense of clearly reflecting substantive aspects of the problem domain. Echoing this, Rennie *et. al.* (1988, in Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992, 100) believe that the generation of grounded theory ‘gets to the bone’ while Marshall (1988, in Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992, 100) describes the process of conducting research in this way as ‘productive, fun and appropriate’, leading to ‘the “aha” experience of discovery’. I believe that the qualitative method can contribute to our understanding and I sincerely hope that the readers of this thesis will find the results of this research “productive, fun and appropriate” as well as experience an “aha” response!

This study was conducted in two parts. In the first part of this study, sixty-three Grade 11 learners were asked to answer seven questions in paragraph format. In the second part, two interviews were conducted with five Grade 11 learners who completed the questionnaires.

1.3.5 Chapter 6: Results

The results of the study are presented in this chapter.

1.3.6 Chapter 7: Discussion

The results of this study are discussed in this chapter. The results obtained in this study are compared with the results reported in the literature study of the previous chapters.

1.3.7 Chapter 8: Conclusion

The thesis is concluded with a discussion of the purpose of the study, the achievement of the objectives, limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.

1.4 Understanding adolescence

Adolescence encompasses the second decade of life. It has sometimes been referred to as a time of *transition*, as a time of *storm and stress* (Hall, 1904; Freud, 1953), and as a time of being *marginalized* (Lewin, 1936). Although not all adolescents are likely to experience this life stage in a negative way, of all the stages of the life span, the teenage years are the most tumultuous. Adolescents are no longer children, yet are not quite adult. Physically, they are experiencing complex physiological changes, for example the rapid development of internal and external genitalia. Emotionally, some adolescents can be unsettled as they suffer mood swings and experience bouts of depression. On a cognitive level, the ability to reason and to think abstractly emerges. For many adolescents this period of life is exciting and challenging, yet for others it is often filled with turmoil and confusion (Nims, 1998). It is important to recognize this condition, in order to avoid both overestimating its significance and ignoring its meaning as a signal of emotional suffering and possible gateway toward subsequent psychopathology, such as depression or conduct disorder (Masi, Brovedani, & Poli, 1997). On the other hand, Erikson expressed the thought that some adolescents only had an identity crisis because they thought they were supposed to have one and because they could afford to have one (Violato & Travis, 1995).

Factors that may complicate the life of adolescents, are the erosion of family and social support networks, and an easy access that they now have to drugs, alcohol and other life-

threatening substances, such as weapons and fast vehicles (Bachar, Canetti, Bonne, Kaplan, De-Nour & Shalev, 1996). They are highly vulnerable to emotional maladjustment and risky behaviours such as early sexual activity with associated health risks, depression, suicide, drug use, delinquency and dropping out of school (Nims, 1998).

What is adolescence? One way to answer the question is to approach it from various points of view; from the studies of the biologist, psychiatrist, psychologist, sociologist, ecologist, anthropologist, and social psychologist. This thesis will examine the problem of adolescent identity development from a social psychology point of view. However, it is useful to observe the views of representatives and influential scholars from other disciplines in order to gain a truer, more complete picture of the various aspects of adolescence (Rice, 1992). It is not within the scope of this thesis to present a detailed discussion of the theories in question. However, I will attempt to summarise and present the main assumptions of the theories as they pertain to adolescence (Violato & Travis, 1995).

What are theories and what do they do for us? When something intrigues us, or when we face some problem, we observe, reflect, speculate, and try to get a better understanding of whatever is involved. We imagine order in a puzzle, structure in the problem, regularities or occurrences and their relationships in the sphere of interest. When we give formal expression to the conceptions of formulations that we believe summarize the putative order of things, we theorize. A theory, then, is a statement of belief about what is important in a realm of interest, and how these things are related. Such statements direct attention or guide observation, and confer meaning to relationships between whatever the theory's author supposes are important. Patterns of fact confer meaning on theory when they respond with what the theory has implied or suggested.

Theories, then, are like maps: they show important features of realms with which we may commence, but they are not the territories themselves. They are, rather, simplifications that select and represent whatever the theorist believes to be important. It has to be noted, however, that a theory can hardly capture all that is true.

In adolescent psychology, a theory may often disregard or place in the background some matter that is of great significance to people with different concerns and knowledge than the theorist. Each discipline has its own categories and ideas about what matters most and a characteristic manner of simplifying matters with theory.

Aries (1962, in Manaster, 1989) notes that adolescence is mentioned in a 13th Century translation from Latin of ancient Byzantine writers. Jean Jacques Rousseau, in 1762, formally proposed the idea of *adolescence* as we now understand it. G. Stanley Hall's *Adolescence* (1904) really signified the beginning of a new scientific field – adolescent psychology.

1.4.1 Biological theories

There can be little doubt that G. Stanley Hall was the primary early figure who provided the impetus for study in this area (Rice, 1992; Sison, Hersen, & Van Hasselt, 1987). His monumental two-volume treatise, *Adolescence: its Psychology, and its Relations to Physiology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* appeared in 1904. It profoundly affected the study of adolescence and the treatment of adolescent problems for some 25 years. He lived during a time when inquiry into the social sciences was just beginning, leading to a new synthesis of human development. He was the first psychologist to advance a psychology of adolescence in its own right and to use scientific methods in his work. It can be said that he bridged the philosophical, speculative approach of the past and the scientific, empirical approach of the present (Muuss, 1996).

Hall was influenced by the increasingly popular biological evolutionary perspective of his time. According to his *Theory of Recapitulation*, each individual retraces the history of humanity (phylogeny) in his/her own course of development (ontogeny). Consequently, each person, beginning in childhood, lives through preprogrammed periods. Adolescence corresponds to the period when the human race was in a turbulent, transitional stage. Therefore, Hall described adolescence as a period of upheaval, suffering, passion, and rebellion against adult authority and of physical, intellectual, and social change. Hall popularized “storm and stress” as adjectives describing adolescence (Nielsen, 1996).

The adolescent period was particularly significant because the provision of appropriate educational experience would, according to Hall, create the potential for internalization of character traits that were believed to be genetically transmissible to offspring.

The recapitulationist interpretation of adolescent “storm and stress” quickly became obsolete. The idea of inheritance of personality traits was criticized severely, and the theory itself is now interesting primarily for its historical significance. However, elements of Hall’s approach have had long-lasting effects. For example, through his writings and lectures, Hall encouraged parents, educators, and scientists to recognize adolescence as a crucial period of physical, intellectual, and social change. In addition, Hall correctly observed that males and females develop differently, that adolescence is the most important time for developing a sense of individuality, and that adolescents are capable of reasoning, of complex emotional expression, and of appreciation of beauty (Fuhrmann, 1986).

The theorist who most emphasized the biological underpinnings of common developmental patterns was probably Arnold Gesell. Gesell, a biologist, introduced the concept of *maturation*, which we might define as *genetically programmed sequential patterns of change* in such physical characteristics as body size and shape, hormone levels, or coordination. All members of our species share these developmental sequences, which begin at conception and continue until death. Thus, abilities and skills appear without the influence of special training or practice (Rice, 1992).

This concept implies a sort of biological determinism that prevents teachers and parents from doing anything to influence development. Because maturation is regarded as a natural ripening process, it is assumed that time alone will solve most of the minor problems that arise in raising children. Difficulties and deviations will be outgrown, so parents are advised against emotional methods of discipline.

Gesell tried to allow for individual differences, accepting that each child is born unique, with his/her own genetic make-up and innate maturation sequence. However, he considered many of the principles, trends, and sequence to be universal among humans. Gesell attempted to describe changes as gradual and overlapping, but his descriptions often indicate profound and sudden changes from one age to the next. He saw adolescents as alternating between integration and balance on the one hand, and tension and

moodiness on the other. In doing so, he contributed another voice to the “turmoil” theories of adolescence. Gesell’s books have been used by thousands of parents and exerted tremendous influence on childrearing practices during the 1940’s and 1950’s. The books were considered the “child-development bibles” for many learners and teachers during those years (Fuhrmann, 1986; Rice, 1992).

Zeller also predicted disharmony in adolescence. He was a biologist who postulated a relationship between changes in the constitution of the body and changes in the psychological functions (Fuhrmann, 1986). The bodily and hormonal changes of adolescence are reflected in psychological disharmony. This disharmony causes a critical attitude, nervousness, anxiety, and impulsivity.

Thus, from the biological viewpoint, many of the changes in an adolescent’s behaviour are related to the physiological changes that occur during adolescence. Likewise, many of the differences we notice between adolescents are related to differences in their physiological makeup. For example, researchers have found associations between certain aspects of adolescent behaviour and physiological factors such as disorders in the neurological system, hormonal imbalances, and inherited disturbances. An example of this is the finding that male delinquents who continue to engage in criminal activities beyond adolescence have lower levels of adrenalin secretions than male delinquents who do not become criminal adults (Nielsen, 1996). Likewise, other aspects of our personality remains basically unchanged from the time we are born. This is an indication that our genes play a part in how we behave and who we become in adolescence and beyond.

Research supports the theory that certain aspects of an adolescent’s behaviour and mental health are influenced by biological factors (Nielsen, 1996). Most researchers who currently study adolescence from a biological perspective consider themselves advocates of *biosocial theories*. According to them, biological and environmental factors together account for behaviour during adolescence. When trying to understand an adolescent’s behaviour, his/her genetic predispositions and other biological factors must be considered simultaneously with aspects of the immediate environment. In this sense, biosocial theorists agree with behavioural and social learning theorists.

1.4.2 Psychological theories

Sigmund Freud introduced psychoanalytic theory to North America in the early 1900's (Sison, *et.al.*, 1987). As Hall's contemporary, Freud was also affected by the post-Darwinian consciousness of evolution and also gave strong support to the *storm and stress* interpretation of adolescence. While Hall focused on the relationship between biological and psychological forces during adolescence to the exclusion of developmental events during infancy and childhood, Freud believed that personality growth was nearly complete by the end of the fifth year of life.

Nevertheless, Freud (1953) dealt briefly with adolescence in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. He viewed this period as the culmination of a series of changes destined to give infantile sexual life its final, normal form. According to Freud, earlier resolution of childhood conflicts between instinctual demands and ego mechanisms are disrupted at puberty when maturation of the external and internal genitalia brings about new tension. This increased inner turmoil leads to feelings of guilt, anxiety, isolation, and confusion. It also causes behaviour to vacillate widely between extremes of egocentrism and altruism, dependence and independence, and rebelliousness and affirmation. Freud's authoritative presentation of an intriguing theory promoted a large following among psychologists as well as philosophers, educators, and novelists.

Freud's daughter, Anna Freud, was more concerned with the period of adolescence than her father was. She characterized adolescence as a period of internal conflict, psychic disequilibrium, and erratic behaviour. This is caused by the psychic disequilibrium and internal conflict that accompanies sexual maturation at puberty. She emphasized the internalized conflict between sexual impulses (id) and guilt (superego) as the primary characteristic of adolescence (Fuhrmann, 1986; Rice, 1992). Her theory is the most extreme of the turmoil theories. She describes a continual battle between the impulses and conscience, with neither gaining control. The adolescent who succumbs to sexual impulses may frantically search for new love objects, engage in promiscuous behaviour, and experience short-lived and meaningless relationships. An adolescent who succeeds in repressing impulses may repress all pleasures and become ascetic and emotionally dulled. The adolescent is challenged with the task to develop an appropriate

balance (resulting in the establishment of the ego) between sexual satisfaction and self-control.

Sullivan was trained by Freud but later rejected the Freudian notion that sexuality is the basic motive in life. However, he continued to recognize the importance of sexuality as it relates to other needs (Fuhrmann, 1986). According to Sullivan, a person is driven by a need to overcome basic feelings of anxiety that probably developed in infancy when his/her parents disapproved of his/her childish interest and pleasure in his/her own genitalia. Because he/she values his/her parent's approval, the person denies those early sexual impulses. However, during adolescence, the sexual impulses are reawakened by the action of the hormonal changes in puberty. A clash between the need to satisfy sexual drives and the need to be free of anxiety resulting from disapproval ensues. Furthermore, the adolescent is aware that he/she is supposed to form an intimate relationship and to experience sexual pleasure eventually. This expectation is in opposition to the concept of sex as a source of anxiety. Finally, stereotypes about the opposite sex cause additional anxiety about how to relate to them.

1.4.3 Sociological theories

Lewin, a social scientist, was interested in the effects of the environment on behaviour (Fuhrmann, 1986). According to Lewin, behaviour is a function of the interaction between the characteristics of an individual (for example, gender, age, intelligence and talents) and the environment (for example, family, school, and neighbourhood). During adolescence, both the individual and the environment change dramatically, and stress is the result. The individual must cope with a multitude of physical changes as well as with a host of new expectations emanating from the environment in which he/she lives. In addition, the adolescent is accepted neither as a child nor as an adult. Consequently, he/she occupies the unique and stressful position as a "marginal man" in which neither childish nor adult behaviour and expectations are consistently applied. The environment wants adolescents to be "responsible" (adult), but also "obedient" (child). The result of these discrepant expectations is tremendous conflict. This conflict coincides with the adolescent's experience of rapid and unpredictable physical and emotional changes. In

order to clarify these conflicts, the adolescent may develop extreme views on subjects about which he/she has little knowledge.

1.4.4 Anthropological theories

Since anthropology involves the study of the similarities and differences among cultural groups and questions the universality of any single pattern of development, it is not surprising that it was an anthropologist who first challenged the turmoil theories.

The theories of Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict have been called *cultural determinism* and *cultural relativism* because anthropologists emphasize the importance of the social environment in determining the personality development of the child. Because social institutions, economic patterns, habits, morals, values, and religious beliefs vary from society to society, culture is relative. The kinds of influences that mold the child depend on the culture in which the child grows up (Rice, 1992).

In *Growing up in Samoa* (1928, in Rice, 1992), Mead publicized the fact that in Samoa adolescence poses no conflicts or stresses. She observed, for example, that there were no rituals surrounding the onset of menstruation and no sexual taboos. Cultural expectations for behaviour and emotionality were no different for adolescents than for children or adults. As a result, Mead saw that growing up was continuous, with no surprises and no conflict (Fuhrmann, 1986; Nielsen, 1996).

These views have been challenged, most recently by Freeman (1983, in Rice, 1992). He claims that Mead's methods and observations were biased and that the Samoa that he studied gave a surface impression of calm that masks a society that experiences turmoil no less than more highly developed ones.

Benedict, in studying the varieties of experiences among different cultures, noted that American society, unlike some others, actually emphasizes the contrast between children and adults. Whereas children are expected to be non-responsible, obedient, and sexless, adults are expected to be responsible, to command obedience, and to be sexual. According to her, parents do not provide the support for effective transition from one state to another (Fuhrmann, 1986).

Benedict argued that continuity in all aspects of behaviour makes for the smoothest adolescence. However, she also noted that some societies that do not expect different

behaviour for children and adults nevertheless smooth the transitions by establishing very specific age-graded groups, with ceremonious graduation from one to the next. Appropriate behaviour in one group may not be appropriate in another, but everyone knows who belongs to which group, and the expectations are clear and consistent within each group. Consistently knowing what behaviour is expected makes the difference.

The later writings of Mead and others have undergone more modification; they show some recognition of universal aspects of development (for example, incest taboos) and more acknowledgment of the biological role in human development. Today, both geneticists and anthropologists generally disregard extreme positions. They agree that a composite view that acknowledges both biogenetic factors and environmental forces comes closer to the truth.

What did Mead and Benedict say about adolescence? Anthropologists emphasize that the sociocultural milieu determines the direction of adolescence and strongly influences the degree to which adolescents are welcomed into the adult community (Rice, 1992). Achievement of adult status is the separation from parents as well as the establishment of personal identity and new roles in the community. In modern industrial society, adolescence has become a prolonged stage of development: its completion is imprecise and its privileges and responsibilities are often illogical and confused. Adolescents want some control over their lives, make some choices, and take responsibility for their own behaviour. This is exactly what being an adult involves.

Anthropologists challenge the basic truths of all “age and stage” theories of child and adolescent development. According to Mead (1950, in Rice, 1992) and Benedict (1938, in Rice, 1992), adolescence in primitive societies does not represent an abrupt change or transition from one pattern of behaviour to another. In contrast, children in Western culture must assume drastically different roles as they grow up: they must shift rather suddenly from non-responsible play to responsible work.

Anthropologists challenge the inevitability of the *storm and stress* of adolescence by minimizing the disturbance of physical changes and by emphasizing the interpretation of those changes. For example, in certain cultures, menstruation is seen as a blessing while in other cultures it is seen as a danger to the well-being of the tribe. Therefore, the stress and strains of pubescent physical changes may be the result of certain cultural

interpretations of those changes and not due to any inherent biological tendencies (Rice, 1992).

Mead felt that close family ties in Western cultures should be loosened to give adolescents more freedom to make their own choices and live their own lives (Rice, 1992). Adolescents should be given a greater voice in the social and political life of the community. By requiring less conformity and less dependency and by tolerating individual differences within the family, adolescent-parent conflict and tension can be minimized. Adolescents can be accepted into adult society at younger ages by, for example, being employed on a part-time basis. Parenthood should be postponed, but not necessarily sex or marriage. These measures would eliminate some of the discontinuities of cultural conditioning in children growing up in Western society and would allow for a smoother, easier transition to adulthood.

1.4.5 Psychosocial theories

Social learning theory is concerned with the relationship between social and environmental factors and their influence on behaviour.

According to Bandura, except for elementary reflexes, people are not equipped with inborn repertoires of behaviour – they must learn them. He did not reject the role of biology and pointed out that hormones or inherited propensities can effect behaviour, but specific experiences with the world around a person has a profound effect on development (Bee, 1989).

Bandura linked stress in adolescence with poor socialization resulting from parent-child relationships that are based only on the exercise of power (Fuhrmann, 1986; Rice, 1992). According to him, stable loving families that grant children appropriate responsibilities, foster adolescents who are well socialized: conventional and conforming. On the other hand, families in which there is a great deal of conflict, foster aggressive, hostile and volatile adolescents. Adolescence is stormy only if families make it so.

Spanger, a psychologist, offered an *individual variability* theory (Fuhrmann, 1986). He believed that people are individual and unique to the extent that no single theory can explain behaviour. Adolescence is not necessarily stressful, though it might be. Spanger identified three basic patterns of growth in adolescence: stormy, calm, and dynamic. For

some adolescents, storm and stress indeed characterize development, and for them adolescence is painful. For others, it is continuous and peaceful. For the third group, both storm and calm are present. These dynamic young people experience crisis, but overcome it by participating in their own development.

Spanger's conceptualization of development is remarkably similar to findings of Offer, whose research with adolescent boys revealed three patterns of growth that remain stable throughout childhood and adolescence (Fuhrmann, 1986). Apparently, the psychological system of development is established early, and coping strategies remain consistent throughout life. Approximately 23% of his sample of 73 normal adolescent males experienced *continuous growth*; 33% experienced *surgent growth*; 20% experienced *tumultuous growth*; and the remainder displayed a combination of continuous and surgent patterns.

The continuous growth subjects had good genetic and environmental backgrounds: stable families who encouraged independence, respect, trust, and affection as well as good relationships with peers and adults. They were purposeful, self-assured, aware of feelings, able to cope with trauma, and able to integrate and use experiences to further their own growth.

The surgent growth subjects, the largest of the three groups, grew in developmental spurts. Sometimes they mastered tasks well, other times they got stuck, and their self-esteem and coping skills wavered. They experienced more family problems, were sometimes in conflict with their parents, and developed many skills somewhat later than their continuous growth peers. Their overall adjustment was good but they tended to suppress emotions.

Only the tumultuous growth subjects demonstrated considerable inner turmoil, behavioural problems, consistent self-doubts, parental conflict, and psychological pain. They tended to come from lower socio-economic groups, had strong but conflicted family ties, were unsuccessful academically, and had not developed good communication skills. These are the 20% of the population about whom mental healthcare workers should be most concerned, for they are likely to carry their conflicts into adulthood.

The work of social-learning theorists is of great importance in explaining human behaviour. It is especially important in emphasizing that what adults *do* and the role

models they represent are far more important in influencing adolescent behaviour than what they *say*. Teachers and parents can best encourage human decency, altruism, moral values, and a social conscience by exhibiting these virtues themselves (Rice, 1992).

1.4.6 Cognitive theories

Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, began his work in Alfred Binet's Paris laboratory, where modern intelligence tests originated. Piaget disagreed with Binet's insistence that intelligence is fixed and innate. He began to explore higher-level thought processes and became more interested in how children reached conclusions than whether their answers were correct. Using a developmental approach to the study of cognitive development, he discovered that children at different stages of development think in qualitatively different ways, with each stage building on the previous one (Fuhrmann, 1986; Rice, 1992).

Piaget believed that cognitive development is the combined result of environmental influences and the maturation of the brain and nervous system.

During the *Formal Operational Stage* (11 years and older), which is Piaget's fourth stage of development, adolescents move beyond concrete, actual experiences and begin to think in more logical, abstract terms. They are able to engage in introspection - to think about their thoughts. They are able to use inductive reasoning, to bring a number of facts together and to construct theories on the basis of these facts. They are capable of deductive reasoning and metaphorical speech. They can think beyond what is to what might be, to project themselves into the future and plan for it (Fuhrmann, 1986).

In developing his model, Lawrence Kohlberg attempted to retain the best of Piaget's analysis and fit it into a more refined, comprehensive, and logically consistent framework. Kohlberg saw moral development as occurring in a series of specific, sequential stages of moral reasoning. People at different stages of moral development use very different arguments to defend their moral choices. The end product of these stages is a sense of justice instead of other moral principles, such as love for humanity (Fuhrmann, 1986; Hoffman, 1999).

An important feature of Kohlberg's approach is that all individuals, regardless of culture, are viewed as going through the stages in the same order, varying only in how quickly and how far they move through the sequence. These stages are constructed by the

individuals as they try to make sense out of their own experience, rather than implanted by culture through socialization. In addition, progress always moves forward through the stage sequence, never backwards.

Developmental approaches to the study of human behaviour have become popular because they meet the needs of sound theory. They are clear, consistent, and testable. They have provided us with a conceptualization of human development that is helpful in understanding and working with both individuals and groups.

Social cognition is the ability to understand social relationships. It is the ability to understand others: their emotions, thoughts, intentions, social behaviour, and general points of view. It is basic to all human relationships. Knowing what other people think and feel is necessary in getting along with them and understanding them.

One of the most useful models of social cognition is that of Robert Selman, who has advanced a theory of *social role taking* (Rice, 1992; Shaffer, 1989). According to Selman, social role taking is the ability to understand the self and others as subjects, to react to others as like to the self, and to react to the self's behaviour from others' point of view.

Selman's fourth stage of development is the stage of *In-depth and Societal Perspective Taking* (Adolescence to Adulthood). There are two distinguishing features of adolescents' conception of other people. First, they become aware that motives, actions, thoughts, and feelings are shaped by psychological factors. This notion of psychological determinants now includes the idea of unconscious processes, although adolescents may not express this awareness in psychological terminology. Second, they begin to appreciate the fact that a personality is a system of traits, beliefs, values, and attitudes with its own developmental history.

During adolescence the individual may move to a still higher and more abstract level of interpersonal perspective taking, which involves the coordination of all possible third person perspectives – a societal perspective. The adolescent can conceptualize that each person can consider the shared point of view of the “generalized other”, that is, the societal system. This appreciation of the societal perspective enhances accurate communication with an understanding of other people. Further, the idea of law and morality as a social system depends on the concept of consensual group perspective.

Selman emphasized that not all adolescents or adults will reach stage four in social cognitive development. Stage four corresponds with Piaget's level of formal operations in logical reasoning and to Kohlberg's conventional and post-conventional stages of moral development. Selman's theory implies a movement away from limited concern with the cognitive side of learning, toward an inclusion of interpersonal, social, and cognitive awareness.

1.4.7 Developmental theories

From a developmental point of view, life consists of a sequence of invariant stages, each qualitatively different from the others. There is a logical relationship between the stages, and characteristics within any one stage can be generalized to the entire population in that stage.

According to Havighurst, each individual "learns his way through life". His developmental task theory is an eclectic one combining previously developed concepts – it has been widely accepted and considered useful in discussing adolescent development and education (Fuhrmann, 1986; Rice, 1992).

Havighurst sought to develop a psychosocial theory of adolescence by combining consideration of individuals' needs with societal demands. What individuals need and society demands, constitute the *developmental tasks*. They are the skills, knowledge, functions, and attitudes that individuals have to acquire at certain points in their lives through physical maturation, social expectations, and personal effort. Mastery of the tasks at each stage of development results in adjustment and preparation for the harder tasks ahead. Mastery of adolescent tasks leads to the adolescent's happiness, to success with later tasks, and results in maturity. Failure to master adolescent tasks results in unhappiness, anxiety, social disapproval, difficulty with later tasks and the inability to function as a mature person.

According to Havighurst, there exists a teachable moment – a critical period during which the individual is most sensitive to learn a particular task, and consequently the learning of this task is easier (Fuhrmann, 1986; Rice, 1992). Some of the tasks arise from biological changes, others from societal expectations at a given age, or the individual's motivation at certain times to do particular things. Furthermore, developmental tasks

differ from one culture to another, depending on the relative importance of biological, psychological, and cultural elements in determining the tasks. A certain task may be determined primarily by biological factors or by cultural elements and adolescents may face different tasks at different points in their lives. Significant differences in developmental tasks occur among different social classes. Finally, some tasks recur throughout development, like getting along with other people and being socially responsible.

According to Havighurst, if the eight tasks of adolescence are achieved successfully, the tasks of adulthood will be made easier, and it is likely that adulthood will also be successful.

Perhaps the most comprehensive developmental theory of all is that of Erikson, whose psychosocial theory includes aspects from virtually all the other theories. His approach was based upon Freudian analytic theory. However, his theory diverges from Freud's biologically-based psychosexual orientation to personality development in his emphasis of three major areas (Sprinthall & Collins, 1995). Firstly, Erikson moved beyond classic psychoanalysis with its focus on id and libidinal drives of development to emphasize the ego and its adaptive capacities in the environment. Secondly, Erikson introduced a new matrix: the individual in his relationship with his parents in their wider historical-cultural heritage. This social complex replaces the classical Freudian matrix of the child-mother-father triangle. Thirdly, whereas Freud's mission was to prove the existence and operation of the unconscious, Erikson's mission has been to point out the developmental opportunities in the individual, which help him/her to triumph over the psychological hazards of living. Erikson, then, gave a new direction to psychoanalytic theory. This approach allows a more optimistic interpretation and a wider application to everyday life.

Erikson saw development as an evolutionary process based upon a universally experienced sequence of biological, psychological, and social events. His fifth stage, acquiring a sense of identity while overcoming a sense of identity diffusion, is the stage of adolescent development.

1.4.8 Who is right?

There is no simple theory that consistently explains or establishes the causes of all types of adolescent behaviour. Some theories can better explain a particular type of adolescent behaviour than others. For example, bipolar disease and schizophrenia seem to be more closely linked to genetic factors, whereas teenage pregnancy and delinquency seem to be more closely linked to social factors, such as poverty, than any biological factor.

The best way to approach the research on adolescence is to consider the analogy of the blindfolded people and the elephant (Nielsen, 1996). Without knowing what an elephant looks like, each blindfolded person holds onto a different part of the elephant. When each person is asked to describe what the animal looks like on the basis of the data they have, they describe an entirely different animal. If you hold on to the trunk, and the next person holds on to the tail, you will each have a small part of the total picture. Even though each person is very intelligent, logical, and honest, they arrive at different truths and different realities about elephants. In the same vein, researchers gathering data and hypothesizing about adolescence or specific adolescent behaviour, have only part of the whole picture from their different theoretical perspectives.

So, rather than feel that one should choose one theory over the other, one should choose the theory that is best suited to study the specific phenomenon of adolescent development, for example identity development. In addition to this, one should keep in mind that each theory has something to contribute to explain the richness and diversity of adolescent development. Biological and environmental influences are continually interacting with one another as a person develops during childhood and adolescence. By conducting research in this manner, one is more likely to get a clearer picture of his/her elephant or adolescent.

Theories serve an important function, since they direct our thinking and help us to understand our observations of adolescent behaviour and interpretations of research data. Each theory highlights unique or selected aspects of development. Some are based on extensive laboratory research while others are grounded in observation and subjective interpretation (Heaven, 2000). The research conducted for this thesis falls in the second category.

CHAPTER 2

IDENTITY IN THE SOCIAL SYSTEM

As is so true of many other issues, questions about the self can be traced back to the Greeks, particularly Aristotle. It has been noted that Aristotle wrote more about psychology than about any other topic. His distinction between the physical and non-physical aspects of human functioning led other philosophers to speculate about the nature of consciousness, thought, and knowledge. Soon the idea of the soul, with all its imprecision and fascination, began to be widely debated. Centuries later, Aristotle's distinction between the physical and non-physical aspects of human functioning was reinforced by Descartes. His famous statement "I think, therefore I am" not only suggested a distinction between mind and body, but also a relationship between them. Our awareness of our own thinking suggests a non-physical self that does the thinking as well as a physical being in which the thinking resides (Goethals & Strauss, 1991).

The self is a dynamic psychological system, a tapestry of thoughts, feelings and motives that define and direct – even destroy – us. It is the self that distinguishes *Homo sapiens* from even its closest evolutionary kin. Because of humans' unique capacity for self-reflection, a complex web of emotion, intention, and evaluation gives rise to the most salient aspect of human experience – selfhood (Hoyle, Kernis, Leary, & Baldwin, 1999).

Much has been written about identity, most of it during the last two decades of the twentieth century. In hindsight, it appears that the self was lost to mainstream psychology for a good part of the middle of the century, perhaps as a result of the influence of behaviourism. However, researchers in personality theory, with the psychodynamic and humanistic traditions, never gave up on the concept of self. For example, Erikson wrote about identity in 1950 (Goethals & Strauss, 1991). A number of developments within social psychology were fundamental to reintroducing the self to mainstream academic psychology, specifically Bem's (1967) work on self-perception, Wicklund's (1972) work on self-awareness, and Jones's (1964) work on self-presentation. Later work on the actor-observer bias (Jones & Nisbett, 1971), self-handicapping (Berglas & Jones, 1978), self-monitoring (Snyder, 1987), self-schemas (Markus, 1977), and symbolic self-completion

(Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982) are other examples of important work in this area (Goethals & Strauss, 1991).

The widespread interest in the self has produced a large amount of information – and misinformation – about identity. As the volume of scholarly work on the self has increased, so has the appearance of articles and books based on intuitive but unsubstantiated claims about it. In this chapter I hope to tip the scales in favour of an empirically informed analysis of the self.

I will primarily use the term “identity” in this thesis. However, when I quote the work of other researchers, I will refer to the terms they use, such as “selfhood” (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Baumeister, 1999; Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999), “self-concept” (Johnson, Jason & Betts, 1990; Schweitzer, Seth-Smith & Callan, 1992), and “self” (Baumeister, 1999; Goethals & Strauss, 1991).

What is identity? Differences among theorists in how they define identity and differences among individuals in their various self-conceptions, complicate answering this question. No one has ever proposed a definition of identity that is universally accepted. Once again the analogy of the blindfolded people and the elephant is appropriate. Nevertheless, having considered a variety of definitions and conceptions in the current literature, Mashmann (1999) has devised a brief definition of identity. He describes identity as, at least in part, an explicit theory of oneself as a person. He emphasises that any defensible definition of identity must acknowledge the subjective awareness of the self and the subjective experience of unity. An identity is an advanced form of self-conception that would not normally be seen in childhood.

Two characteristics of theories are particularly relevant here. First, theories are ideally coherent. To say one’s identity is a theory of oneself, is to say that it is not just a collection of beliefs about oneself. It is also organised to generate an integrated conception.

Second, theories are explanatory. To say one’s identity is a theory of oneself, is to say that it is an attempt to explain oneself. It is structured in such a way as to enhance self-understanding. Thus, an identity is not just an attempt to describe one’s typical behaviour, but is an account of the core beliefs and purposes that one construes as explaining that behaviour.

To say an individual's identity is explicit, is to say that it is a theory known to the individual. Although a person's identity is deeply interconnected with a variety of implicit assumptions, unconscious dispositions and socially imposed roles, unless there is an explicit theory of self at the core, such assumptions, descriptions, and roles do not constitute an identity (Mashmann, 1999).

Finally, to say one's identity is an explicit theory of oneself as a person, is to say it is a theory that construes the self as a rational agent. An agent acts and has an impact on the world. A rational agent has reasons for his/her actions (Head, 1997). Rational agency thus entails some degree of autonomy and responsibility.

Identity formation involves an effort to identify or create a sufficient degree of consistency to justify construing the self as singular. The construction of identity need not begin or end with a unitary self, but does take unity as a guiding ideal. Commitment to a unitary self includes a sense of continuity across time by taking responsibility for past and future actions. This entails commitment to a conception of oneself that extends from the past, through the present, and into the future. Head (1997) suggests that identity development can be seen as the process of making choices that allow one to live effectively as an adult. Identity itself is a life script. This does not imply that adulthood will be free from the need to redefine oneself. However, a sense of identity gives the young person a life script that is adequate to take him/her into early adulthood.

The concept of identity is used in different ways, even within the same discipline. Sometimes it is used to indicate something about a core. It can refer to the core of the individual (as in psychiatry and psychoanalysis) or to the characteristic features of a nation or ethnic grouping when identity is considered to be representing its core (for example, as in historical studies of the Celtic identity or in sociological studies on nationalism and ethnicity). Here, core points to the same valuable essence to which one feels attached. At other times, as in the work of Erikson, the concept is used to refer to such core features in relation to the social and wider cultural context of the individual. Then the interplay between environment and individuality is emphasised (Bosma, Graafsma, Grotevant & de Levita, 1994). Social Identity Theory owes its origin in part as reaction to the core-perspective (Onorato & Turner, 2002).

Identity is the overarching synthesis of dualities, bringing the individual to the social world and the social world to the individual in an indivisible wholeness. The self arises out of and is created by the relationship between the individual and the social world. Thus, identity is not merely the integration of ego functions. In its core it is psychosocial: self and other; inner and outer; being and doing; expression of self for, with, against, or despite, but certainly in response to others. More recent research has begun to counterbalance these forces (separation-individuation and connection to others) to show that identity resides in connection to others as well as in separateness (Josselson, 1994).

Adolescents undergo a separation-individuation process on the road to identity formation. At the same time, however, they do not become “lone selves”, needing no one, standing to face the forces of life alone. On the contrary, they are editing and modifying, enriching and extending their connections to others, becoming more fully themselves in relation to others. Individuation is reinvested in revised relatedness, and in these commitments lays the integration of identity (Josselson, 1994).

The most straightforward way to study identity is to ask people to describe themselves. Some descriptions emphasise the person’s membership in social groups or categories, such as being a woman or a man, or being a Zulu or an Afrikaner – *social identities* that provide a “we-feeling” and give a sense of belonging and similarity to other members of the same group. At the same time, people also report aspects of their *personal identity*, involving their unique characteristics, such as traits and preferences, which define how they differ from others (Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999).

2.1 Personal identity

Because of the diversity in how the self can be described, social psychologists have been interested in the processes whereby people select certain kinds of information about their own behaviours and drawing inferences about what they think about themselves. The information that they select says a lot about their identity. Upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that this process of constructing a sense of self is something people do not typically do alone, but that is done in their interactions with other people.

2.1.1 Intersubjectivity

Many developmental psychologists believe that infants are born without a sense of self. Psychoanalyst Margaret Mahler (1975, in Shaffer, 1989) likens the newborn to a “chick in an egg” who has no reason to differentiate the self from the surrounding environment. Only as the egg begins to form, at 3-6 months of age, will infants recognise that they are separate from their caregivers. In Mahler’s words, the child is now in the process of “hatching from the mother’s protective shell and spreading his/her wings to establish an identity of his/her own (Heaven, 2001).

Piaget (1968, in Shaffer, 1989) agrees that neonates are born without any knowledge of self. However, as they apply their reflexive schemata to the world around them, they start to become self-aware (4-6 months of age).

Not everyone agrees with this view. Newborn infants are inherently “sociable” creatures who are especially responsive to human speech and may even be capable of synchronizing certain bodily activities (for example, head movements) with those of an adult. Moreover, very young infants also seem to have a sense of *agency* – an awareness that they can make things happen. Some developmental psychologists are convinced that infants, as early as the first month or two of life, may recognize that they exist independent of other people or objects (Shaffer, 1989).

It is agreed that a core sense of self arises at a young age from experiences of intersubjectivity. This is a state of connection and mutual understanding that emerges during interaction with another person. Intersubjectivity involves a sense of coordination between one’s own and others’ actions. It first develops in the common experiences of early infancy, for example, being cuddled by parents and playing peek-a-boo games. These interactions involve emotional give-and-take between infant and caregiver. The first seed of an identity starts to grow and the outcome is to a large extent dependent on the quality of these interactions.

Gradually the infant learns to share with others a range of subjective experiences, such as intentions, attention to something in the environment, or emotional states. Infant and adult might communicate, for example, that they both are excited and happy or sad and sleepy. The mother's ability to mirror and confirm her child, together with the child's ability to perceive and respond to this, constitutes the root of identity. The way that the

infant's experiences mesh with his/her mother's responses helps the infant to clarify and recognize his/her own behaviour and internal states (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996; Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999).

The adult can, intentionally or not, influence the infant's developing sense of identity by selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of the infant's experience. When the child takes a tumble, for example, the parent can reflect back the silliness and fun of the situation, or, conversely, the danger and the fear that the child might be feeling. Consequently, the child may use this communication to frame his/her own experience (Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999).

A reasonable degree of match between the child's experience and the adult's feedback is necessary in order to establish a state of intersubjectivity. Different types of mismatches, such as when the caregiver fails to reflect the same emotional tone or energy level that the infant is feeling, can make the infant quite distressed and may lead to the development of a disrupted sense of self.

A shift from concrete to a more abstract view of self emerges during adolescence. In early adolescence, thinking about the private self becomes much more complex. Selman (1980, in Shaffer, 1989) proposes that young adolescents are aware of their own self-awareness, and believe that they can control their inner feelings. However, older adolescents eventually realise that they cannot control all their subjective experiences because their feelings and behaviours may be influenced by factors of which they are not consciously aware.

Children's understanding of their public and private selves becomes increasingly abstract from middle childhood through adolescence. The concrete six-year old who feels that his/her public image is an accurate portrayal of self will eventually become a reflective adolescent. This adolescent not only distinguishes between the public and private selves, but also recognizes that the private 'self as knower' may not always understand why the public self behaves as it does.

2.1.2 The reflected self

The nature of intersubjectivity moves to a new level as the child learns to speak. With the development of language comes the ability to interact with others in terms of

symbols, including a symbolic or conceptual self. Children gradually begin to use the pronouns “I” and “me” and to recognise their own existence as an object in the world. At the same time, generally between the ages of two and four years, they come to the realisation that other people have minds and thoughts of their own. They come to entertain the notion that *these other people can think about me!* As they grow older, what they conclude about how other people evaluate them, might be based on actual statements or reactions those people make. Conversely, they might just be assumed or inferred, based on past interactions (Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999).

According to Mead (1934, in Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999), the individual experiences himself indirectly in a certain way from the particular standpoint of the social group to which he belongs. He becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself.

Different social perspectives can be used in thinking about the self. One can experience one’s self in terms of how one relates to a specific person, such as a particular friend or a teacher. One can also imagine how some reference group, whose acceptance one desires (for example, the “cool” kids in school) would see one. Mead (1934, in Hoyle, 1999) described a second stage in the establishment of identity in which the person goes beyond imagining how he or she appears to specific people. Over time, on the basis of experience with many different audiences and a variety of contexts, the individual organises, and then generalises, the attitudes of particular others. Rather than thinking “Mom thinks I’m stupid” and “my classmates think I’m stupid” and “my teachers think I’m stupid”, the person forms the generalisation that “people think I’m stupid”. Mead termed this abstracted social perspective the *generalised other* and saw it as the internal representation of the larger community in which one takes part.

Mead (1934, in Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999) emphasised the social functions of reflexivity. By seeing oneself through the eyes of others, a person learns to navigate his/her interaction with them. He used the term *looking-glass self* to emphasise that our understanding of our identities is a reflection of how other people react to us: one’s self-concept is the image seen in a social mirror (Shaffer, 1989). A great deal of cognitive effort usually goes into trying to anticipate how the other person will react to certain things one might say or do. Interaction with other people influence how we think about ourselves.

An even more direct means by which social interaction can affect identity is through explicit feedback from others. When someone you know tells you that you are “smart” or “inconsiderate” or “a good cook”, these comments can lead you to think about yourself in a new way. One is more likely to attend to feedback from significant people in one’s life.

These encounters continue to influence one’s self even when the other people are no longer around. We might imagine interacting with them, thinking about what we would say to them, or how other people would see us and respond. Our thoughts often involve conversations with a “private audience”. These internally represented interactions and performances represent the internalisation of the social world, and they are thought to be a major factor in the social construction of identity.

2.1.3 Self-presentation and negotiating the social self

Although our identity is shaped and maintained to a large extent by our interactions with others, it does not mean that we are at the mercy of others’ opinions. Many people are relatively inaccurate in judging the kinds of impressions they are making on others. The evidence of many studies indicates that peoples’ self-views are similar to how they *think* others see them. People’s sense of who they are coincides reasonably well with their own hunch about what others think of them, even if it does not always match up with what others *actually* think of them (Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999).

Because of the potential for social influence on identity, most people try to control the kinds of impressions others form of them. People’s identities are not merely bestowed on them by others. They negotiate them. Social psychologists have examined in some detail the processes by which people take an active part in the social construction of their own identity. People often seek out relationships that provide social validation for their own self-conceptions.

A more direct way to control the impressions people form, is through *self-presentation*. The person begins with a self-image that he/she believes to be true and presents that self to the audience. He/she then looks for validation of this identity in the way others respond; the reaction of others provides a confirmation of the identity (Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999). An influential early work by Goffman (1959, in Baumeister, 1999) analysed social behaviour in terms of theatre and drama, suggesting that people play roles for audiences.

The view that people change their behaviour when others are watching, in order to make an impression on them, has been well supported.

Motives for self-presentation can be classified into two groups: strategic and expressive. The strategic ones aim to manipulate the audience, often for ulterior ends. Expressive motives for self-presentation involve claiming desired identities for the self. In this case, self-presentation is based more on the presenter's own standards and values than on the audience's. Sometimes people will seek to prove to others that they are not what the other people want or expect, that they refuse to go along with what others want them to do, or that they hold opinions and values that differ from those of others (Baumeister, 1999).

Sometimes people present information that creates a positive view of themselves, but self-presentational behaviour often expresses the true, privately held views of self. Even when people are strategically self-presenting to achieve some social goal, they do not usually need to fabricate an utterly false image of themselves. People have many aspects to their identity, and the task of self-presentation often involves selecting from this repertoire of self-images a particular version to suit the communicative context of the moment (Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999).

Part of establishing and maintaining an identity involves presenting one's self-image to others. The most common way to do this is found in the many situations in which people describe themselves to others, for example, in job interviews or on plane trips. Various psychologists have characterised this form of self-presentation as a *self-narrative* (Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999). When people talk about themselves, they select certain events that seem particularly important or representative. They then organise them into a sequence that tells a story. The way they tell this story determines the identity they ultimately develop.

Self-narratives are shaped, from early childhood on, in communication with others. As with any kind of self-presentation, people generally tailor their self-narratives to show themselves in a good light. In addition, there are a number of ways in which people can come to believe privately in the public self they present. As the symbolic interactionist notion of the looking-glass self would suggest, research has shown that people's self-presentational behaviours often have the strongest impact on their private sense of self

when the behaviours in question are performed in an interpersonal context (Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999; Ryan, 1991).

Presenting a public self of some kind can generate evidence, both external and internal, that leads people to see that role or self-narrative as accurately representing part of their true self. A key process in identity construction is *self-perception*: given that our own attitudes, personality traits and motivations may often be ambiguous to us, we are left in the position of inferring them on the basis of observations of our own behaviours.

Self-descriptions can include both general and situational-specific aspects that describe the person in particular situations. It is easy for most people to describe themselves in general terms, such as being honest and having a short temper. Yet, knowledge about the self is usually more detailed than that. It usually includes representations of the kind of person one is in different situations. A person may say that he is easygoing when with friends, but short-tempered when stuck in traffic. Therefore, many people feel that general trait descriptors do not adequately capture the complexity of their own behaviour (Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999).

Although the relative importance of physical characteristics of personal identity has been emphasised, developmental and cross-cultural self-concept research has suggested that several other types of characteristics may underlie personal identity in some individuals. For example, Hart (1988) found that the self's social relationships and qualities are frequently being mentioned by young adolescents. They frequently describe themselves in terms of their social relationships and their location in a social network. However, older adolescents base their personal identity upon their psychological nature. If identity in early adolescence is nested in interpersonal relationships, as the results of this study suggests, it is not surprising that young adolescents are slavish to the demands of peers and that they perceive ruptures in friendships as personally threatening. The slackening of over-conformity to various social norms may reflect, in part, identity individuation. Thus, the sense of identity is partially divested from the immediate social environment and instead derived from the self's psychological characteristics.

2.1.4 Identity formation in adolescence

Identity formation during adolescence differs from identity formation during previous developmental periods, mainly because the adolescent is experiencing a growing awareness of his/her own identity. Identity formation requires re-evaluating and synthesising identifications from one's childhood. Areas of previously unquestioned commitment are revisited for extensive re-examination. Religious values, political ideology, cultural identifications, and attitudes and prejudices are examined. Parental authority, sex-role stereotypes, vocational possibilities, and occasional choices are tested. Questions related to the meaning and purpose of life are some of the many conflicts and issues requiring resolution or at least meaningful exploration.

No chapter on identity formation in the adolescent years would be complete without at least a brief reference to the work of Erikson and Marcia (Head, 1997). In a series of books, starting with *Childhood and Society* (1950), Erikson elaborated his model of personal development incorporating the concept of identity. Essentially, he saw development occurring through a series of eight stages. These stages are seen to be hierarchical and possess an inner logic. Only after a satisfactory outcome at one stage, can an individual cope effectively with the next. Certain biological and social determinants will ensure that each of the eight psychosocial stages will be faced in a particular phase of life.

Each of the eight stages presents psychological challenges, and it would be an error for adults to see childhood and adolescence as completely untroubled and carefree times. Erikson identified the fifth stage, *Identity versus Role Confusion*, as the stage of adolescence. If a sense of identity does not emerge during adolescence, the individual will be confused when making decisions that will affect his/her adult life. Such confusion may be marked by the making of rash choices or by refusing to face the necessity of choices.

According to Erikson (1956, in Swanson, Spencer & Petersen, 1998), an increasing sense of identity is manifest as a sense of psychosocial well-being. This sense of well-being is, to some extent, depended upon and augmented by recognition from significant others. Personal identity develops within the context of role relationships. Its

development presupposes a community of people whose values become increasingly important to the growing individual.

Erikson (1956, in Adamson & Lyxell, 1996) includes two aspects in the concept of identity: the personal identity and the ego identity. The first refers to a sense of self-sameness and continuity in time, coupled with the perception that others also recognise one's sameness and continuity. The second is related to developing a defined ego within a social reality. This identity model also implies a dimension of time where questions of individuation are emphasised during the early development and questions of integration during the later stages. This model does not imply a strictly sequential relation between these two themes. Instead, the relation between individuation and integration should be described as interactional. Identity formation may be seen as a continuous interplay between the psychological interior of the individual and his/her socio-cultural context. A sense of identity only develops if the efforts of the ego to find its boundaries and to integrate within the societal system are reinforced by society. The effort to find this balance results in a high degree of anxiety. Effectively facing this anxiety enables the individual to grow emotionally as well as socially, thus developing a healthy ego identity while building positive peer and family relationships (Nims, 1998).

Researchers from within the Eriksonian tradition sometimes characterise the identity of the young adolescent in terms of its deficits in respect to the older adolescent. The young adolescent does not seriously consider the possibilities of adult life (identity foreclosed) and he/she must still develop commitments (identity diffuse). Latent in Erikson's theory, however, is the conception of identity as a life-long task. A description of transformation of identity from childhood through adolescence would be consistent with this theory, instead of accounts of its sudden emergence in the late high school years. The findings of Hart (1988) confirm the existence of an interpersonal facet of identity even in early adolescence. These findings can contribute to a positive characterisation of identity development in which the changes occurring in late adolescence, discovered by Eriksonian researchers, are but one stage in the transformation of identity across the life span.

One of the limitations of Erikson's theory is that he essentially developed a theoretical model and did not say how it might prove useful in practice. It was left to others, for

example Marcia, to develop empirical methods of studying personal identity. Marcia (1966, in Head, 1997; Heaven, 1994) identified two key processes occurring in identity development. First, it is necessary for the individual to actively explore the possibilities, a process involving the matching self-knowledge with knowledge of the world. Still working within the paradigm and language of psychoanalysis, Marcia (1966) described this process as ‘undergoing a crisis’. The second process involves making decisions, or what Marcia called ‘commitment’. At some point in time the adolescent has to make decisions relating to such matters as career, if progress is to be made into adulthood.

From the interaction of these two processes he postulated the existence of four possible identity conditions, which he called *identity statuses*. The first correspond with the situation of identity achievement, in which the person has experienced crisis and made a commitment, and the second with identity diffusion, in which neither processes has been undertaken. Marcia (1966) then suggested that there were also two possible intermediate positions, the states of moratorium and foreclosure. In addition, Marcia (1966) recognised that some identity decisions may be made by foreclosure, by seizing on a solution without subjecting it to personal scrutiny. He suggested that these two intermediate states represented four possible resting points in the path of identity development, described below.

(a) Identity diffusion:

Identity diffusion exists when adolescents have not yet made a personal commitment to a set of beliefs or an occupation. They have not yet felt compelled to make choices from a range of available options. Although they may mention a preferred occupation, they seem to have little conception of its daily routine. They are either uninterested in ideological matters or take a smorgasbord approach (Head, 1997). In other words, they have not yet experienced an identity crisis.

Adolescents with diffused identity may lack role models for the relevant identity (Kerpelman, Pittman, & Lamke, 1997). This, in part, may be due to diffusion of standards resulting from using situation specific experiences to determine identity and the avoidance of processing identity challenges. These adolescents typically approach identity challenges using a diffused/avoidant-oriented style, often procrastinating or avoiding the exploration of identity challenges. Consequently, in response to social

feedback about the identity, adolescents with diffused standards may respond with apathy or attempt to reduce the emotional distress connected with identity challenges without engaging in the actual evaluation of identity standards.

Identity diffused adolescents appear to have lower self-esteem scores than those in other status groups. They also appear more willing than other groups of teenagers to accept incorrect personality descriptions about themselves, and are prone to change their own opinion (Heaven, 1994). These findings therefore underscore how little these individuals know about their true identities.

It is quite natural that teenagers in early adolescence may have diffused identities. They may not yet have faced crises regarding attitudes, values or behaviour, and are therefore unlikely to have made a personal commitment. It would be a cause for concern should identity diffusion persist into the late adolescence or adulthood.

(b) Identity foreclosure

Identity foreclosure exists when adolescents have made a personal commitment to certain values, beliefs, acceptable behaviours and an occupational course of study. They have not, however, experienced a crisis or had to struggle and consider different alternatives. They hold inflexible belief systems, which make these adolescents less tolerant of ambiguous identity formation and resistant to changing their identity standards (Kerpelman, *et. al.*, 1997).

These teenagers tend to use a normative-oriented identity style and often adopt the beliefs and wishes of their parents (Head, 1997; Heaven, 1994; Kerpelman, *et. al.*, 1997). Foreclosure teenagers have been strongly socialised by their parents or peer group. It is difficult to tell where their parents' goals for them leave off and where theirs begin. Muuss (1988, in Heaven, 1994) notes that they have not been sufficiently challenged to make their own decisions and have adopted a set of 'pre-programmed' values and beliefs. They are becoming what others prepared or intended them to become.

Foreclosure can be seen as the direct introjection of a personal identity standard from reflected appraisals of an authority figure (for example, a parent) or a significant other (for example, a friend). For a brief period virtually all identity standards could appear to be foreclosed, due to the social origin of initial standards and the power of normative expectations in social process. The statuses become differentiated through differing kinds

of identity-relevant experience. An adolescent with a foreclosed standard may avoid disturbances or challenges to this identity, and will resist any accidentally encountered disturbances by disbelieving or discounting the inconsistent feedback or its source. The future of a foreclosed standard depends on the consistency of significant others' feedback within and across social contexts. If these contexts provide experiences that disturb the standard, the foreclosure may end. Alternately, without such experiences, the foreclosed identity may remain effectively unchanged (Kerpelman, *et. al.*, 1997).

(c) Identity moratorium

Adolescents in this phase may be experiencing a crisis, but have not yet made choices or a personal commitment. In some instances it may take some time to resolve this crisis, and require professional guidance. During this stage, adolescents are engaged in a personal struggle and are busily evaluating alternatives.

During this phase adolescents tend to experiment with different roles and behaviours. They may follow peer group pressure one moment and then abandon that for something else. Contact may be lost with friends, while new friendships are formed. Although parents may find this rather tedious, the adolescent is fully engaged in identity formation. Moratorium, therefore, is essential for identity achievement (Heaven, 1994; Head, 1997).

Adolescents in the moratorium phase tend to use an information-oriented identity style. They are open to new information or accidental experiences and may offer less resistance to change in response to discrepant feedback. Rather than experiencing distress in response to conflicting types of social feedback, this input would be received largely as information about the self to be tried out (Kerpelman, *et. al.*, 1997).

(d) Identity achievement

This stage is synonymous with maturity and, ultimately, identity formation. It marks the completion of adolescence, and signals that identity crisis have been successfully resolved. Having experienced a crisis (or crises), the individual has now made a commitment. He/she has seriously considered occupational choices and with respect to ideology, he/she seem to have re-evaluated beliefs and achieved a resolution. This is an important accomplishment. It has been suggested that an achievement of identity helps link in the mind of the adolescent future aspirations with the past, thus creating a sense of personal continuity (Head, 1997; Heaven, 1994).

Adolescents in the achieved phase have undergone more development through exploration. This is consistent with the information-oriented identity style. Adolescents using this style tend to approach identity challenges with problem-focused coping strategies, seeking out and evaluating identity-relevant information. These adolescents will accommodate and modify their identities when new information demands such changes. They tend to be more self-reflective and capable of greater cognitive integrative complexity than adolescents with foreclosed identities. The integration and consolidation of varying discrepant experiences via exploration make an achieved standard more multidimensional.

Not all adolescents who move into early adulthood will have accomplished complete identity achievement. One would expect development shifts to occur throughout adolescence. Such shifts or changes can take several forms. For example, it is possible to be in the moratorium phase for most of adolescence before seriously contemplating making firm commitments. Research evidence has shown that younger adolescents are more likely to be in the identity diffusion and foreclosure stages (Heaven, 1994). One may therefore expect progressive identity formation as adolescents move through the teenage years. This is manifested in a number of ways, such as stability of attitudes, values and personality traits.

The results of a study conducted by Akers, Jones, and Coyl (1998) indicate that adolescent friends share important similarities in identity statuses and in many behaviours, attitudes, and intentions related to identity.

During the last two decades, social cognition has focused on intrapsychic structures and processes that constitute the self. Previously, intrapersonal aspects of the self – particularly the cognitive structures that constitute the *me* self - have tended to be viewed as somewhat more fundamental than social aspects, such as interpersonal components. More recently, researchers have argued for the need to go beyond the intrapsychic level of analysis, to consider the influence of the interpersonal context of self-conception, including the effect of interpersonal relationships, social comparison, and real or imagined audiences.

2.2 Social identity theory

Social Identity Theory was first published by Tajfel (1978, in Capozza & Brown, 2000). There is no doubt that the field of intergroup relations (as opposed to interpersonal relations) has since come to be dominated by the social identity approach. This becomes clear when examining the theoretical basis of most of the empirical studies about different facets of intergroup behaviour now being published. It has proved influential in stimulating new theory, not just in intergroup relations, but also in the whole domain of group processes. The empirical work resulting from it has been extensive in its quantity and variety, encompassing conventional quantitative methodologies in the laboratory and the field, as well as alternative techniques.

Social identity theory views group processes as being fundamentally distinct from one another. It asserts that group phenomena must be understood in their own right, and not simply as an averaging of individual processes. Such a view is a reaction in some ways to the highly individualistic approach found in modern psychology. It signals a return to the earlier group-focused concerns of social psychology, which argued that the individual behaviour cannot always be explained from knowledge of the individual. Belonging to a group has psychological effects that can change the nature of the individual (Cotterell, 1996).

Social identification is now recognised by most social psychologists as a key concept for theorising about social processes. One of the reasons for this increasingly central role is the ability of social identification to speak to various levels of analysis. Social identity can be used to describe (a) the self-structure of individuals, as they are defined by categorical memberships; (b) the character of intergroup relations; or (c) the relationship of the individual to the broader social structure (Deaux, 2000). Social identity theory is essentially concerned with the social construction of group membership, and the consequences of finding a place in society for the individual's self-definition (Cotterell, 1996).

Many different investigators and several different theoretical models have addressed the question of social identification over the past couple of decades, and different degrees of attention have been directed to the three levels noted above. For psychologically-trained social psychologists, the best-known model of social identity is the cognitively-

oriented theory of self-categorisation that distinguishes between personal and social identity on the basis of situational saliency (Deaux, 2000; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

There are four linked concepts in social identity theory: social categorisation, social identity, social comparison, and psychological group distinctiveness. The social experience of belonging to a group or a community and participating in its activities is linked with psychological experiences. This is achieved through the cognitive processes of social categorisation and social comparison in a path that begins with group definition and then moves to self-definition. Social identity is the product of social knowledge whereby society forms the psychology of its members to pursue social goals and give meaning to everyday existence (Cotterell, 1996).

It is commonly assumed that personal identity is the only appropriate level of analysis when it comes to the study of the self, and that personal identity regulates all major cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioural processes (Onorato & Turner, 2002). In contrast, the proponents of self-categorisation theory believe that multiple levels of self-categorization are possible. Self-perception is always varying between these levels, and the personal level of identification is no more critical or central to self-definition than are other levels. To the extent that one's attention is directed away from one's own individuality, and toward an identity that is socially shared with others (for example, gender identity or national identity), self-conception will be *depersonalised*. The self will be experienced as relatively interchangeable with other in-group members, rather than as unique and individuated.

There are many aspects to the self-categorization analysis as it applies to the self. One central aspect of the analysis is the concept of the *psychological group*. Specifically, the theory is based on the understanding that groups do not just exist in the physical or social sense; groups are also 'real' in the psychological sense. A psychological group is a group that is psychologically significant for its members. The members privately accept membership to this group, from which they derive their norms and values. The self-concept (including its individual and group aspects) is assumed to be derivative of psychological group memberships. The psychological group may be some large-scale collective entity, such as the society or culture we belong to. Alternatively, it may be

more definite and specific, such as membership in a social category, for example “we South Africans” instead of “the Americans or Australians”. In this perspective, the sense of self implies at some level a psychological relationship between self and other. In this sense it is truly a *social* theory.

Self-categorisation theory provides a cognitive as well as a social account of the self. At the level of cognition, the self takes the form of *self-categorisations*. Self-categorisations are cognitive groupings of oneself and some class of identical stimuli in contrast to some other class of stimuli. From the perspective of self-categorisation theory, the term self-concept is used to refer to one’s current self-categorisation(s). Self-categorisations are the variable and context-dependent products of a dynamic process of social judgement. Traditionally, the term *self-concept* has implied a long-term knowledge structure, which represents “me” and differentiates “me” from “not me”. This long-standing emphasis within social psychology has implied that the self is set at the personal level. Further, the content of this personal self is stable and embodied in long-term memory. In contrast, self-categorisation theory rejects the view that there is an enduring, one-to-one correspondence between a particular performed cognitive structure and the self-concept (Onorato & Turner, 2002).

It assumes that self-categories are constructed on the spot as a function of a creative interaction between the perceiver's motives, expectations, background knowledge and beliefs, and the particular relationships between self and other being represented. They vary as a function of the social context within which the perceiver is defined. This social variability of the self provides human beings with great behavioural and cognitive flexibility. This theory should not be misread as denying the existence of long-term knowledge structures in memory. Undoubtedly this complex knowledge base includes information about the self. However, this long-term knowledge (like other cognitive resources, such as values, norms, ideologies) is recruited flexibly when one comes to categorise self and others.

This perspective further asserts that self-categorisation exists as part of a hierarchical system of classification. For present purposes, I will focus on the distinction between personal and group self-aspects (or personal and group social identity) as two components of the self. Personal identity refers to self-categories that define the

individual as a unique person in terms of his/her individual differences from other (in-group) people. Social identity refers to self-categories that define the individual in terms of his/her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories (Onorato & Turner, 2002).

The formation of personal self-categories is a matter of relative similarities and differences. Personal identity is made possible because of self-other differentiation in terms of some shared higher order identity that provides a context for social comparison. Even at the personal level, self-definition is inherently social, contextual, and relational.

According to self-categorisation theory, self-conception is the product of the categorisation of self versus others, which implies *social comparison*. The personal self may become quite stable if the perceiver habitually compares his/her personal attributes and qualities to the same in-group category (Onorato & Turner, 2002).

Self-categorisation theory further postulates that self-perception tends to vary from the perception of self as a unique individual to the perception of self as an in-group member. Individuals will tend to define themselves as moderately different from in-group members, who in turn will be perceived as moderately different from out-group members. Personal and social identity are likely to be interdependent and correlated.

The possibility arises that social identity may on occasion function nearly to the exclusion of personal identity. Consequently, at certain times our salient self-images may be based solely or primarily on our group membership. This leads to depersonalisation of individual self-perception. Depersonalisation is not a loss of personal identity, but represents a cognitive redefinition of the self – from unique attributes and individual differences to shared social category membership and associated stereotypes. This mechanism is seen to make all group behaviour possible, for example, group action and stereotyping.

Self-categorisation theory argues that one level of self-categorisation depends on another, implying a positive relationship between social and personal identity; hence social and personal identity are likely to be interdependent and correlated.

It is argued that individuals are predisposed to using certain categorisations of self; in particular, categorisations that have prior significance, or that are relevant to the

perceiver's current goals, motives, values and needs, may be highly accessible (Onorato & Turner, 2002).

Fit has two aspects, namely comparative and normative. The principle of comparative fit predicts that when intra-personal differences are less than intra-group differences, personal identity will tend to be salient, for example, traits and dispositions. In contrast, social identity will come to the fore when inter-group differences are greater than inter-individual differences within the in-group (for example, when I observe the behaviour of women, including my own, to be distinctly different from that of a group of men).

Normative fit is assessed by asking whether the instances being represented match the category label in terms of substantive content. To categorise a group of people as South Africans versus Australians, the first group must differ (for example, in attitudes and behaviour) from the second group more than from each other (this is comparative fit). They must also do so in the right direction on specific content dimensions of comparison.

Does social identity theory have heuristic value? Social identity theory offers generally superior explanations of the way groups exert influences upon conformity and attitude polarisation, and offers a plausible explanation for intergroup relations such as group cohesion, social stereotyping, and crowd behaviour (Cotterell, 1996). Although a large part of the research associated with the theory is experimental, there is sufficient evidence from research on adolescent group relations to suggest the value of this theory.

2.3 Social identity theory and adolescence

Adolescents find themselves caught between childhood and adulthood. They must deal with physiological maturity and the impending demands and roles of an adult life. It is not surprising that adolescents become preoccupied with their own subculture. In this regard, the influence of the peer group assumes a growing importance. As the adolescent explores an awakening socio-emotional, sexual and physical identity, the peer group will play a prominent role in providing acceptable role models, and will set the boundaries for behaviour through specific social feedback (Heaven, 2001). The general supposition in the psychology of adolescence is that during adolescence, peers replace parents as the most important reference persons. Meeus and Dekovic (1995) confirmed this supposition through research results of a national Dutch survey.

Peer relations are an essential component of adolescent identity development. Adolescents are exposed to different norms and values when they interact with peers both within and outside their own peer group. They compare themselves to their peers as they interact. Participation in new activities allows adolescents to explore different norms and values. Discussion with friends and peers about these norms and values assists them in understanding where they stand on these issues. Hence, adolescents co-construct their identity with friends and peers by rejecting some norms and values and identifying with others (Pugh & Hart, 1999). The primary social context where adolescents come together is the high school.

Youniss and Smollar (1985, in Barber, Eccles & Stone, 2001) argued that adolescents develop a social sense of self as well as an individual and autonomous sense of self. In addition, Brown, Mory and Kinney (1994, in Barber, *et. al.*, 2001), have suggested that adolescents develop socially-construed representations of their peers' identities, or "crowd" identities, which serve as pre-existing, symbolic categories through which they can recognise potential friend or foe, tormentor, collaborator, or competitor. They also develop public identities for themselves that are recognised and accepted by peers (Stone & Brown, 1998, in Barber, *et. al.*, 2001). Thus, adolescents themselves began cognitively organising and navigating their social world through reference to crowds before social scientists began measuring crowd identification.

According to Brown, Mory, and Kinney (1994, in Stone & Brown, 1999), a crowd's norms provide a sense of security for adolescents new to the complex high school environment, while older adolescents feel less need for the security and more desire to expand beyond the boundaries of a particular crowd. Perhaps, additionally, adolescents in a new school environment concentrate their efforts on achieving acceptance within a smaller circle of friends, while older adolescents have the cognitive and self-esteem resources to negotiate for acceptance on a broader scale.

Research findings indicate that identification with the peer group is associated with adolescents' descriptions of themselves and their evaluation of outgroups. Palmonari (1990, in Cotterell, 1996) found that the type of group young Italian people belonged to, was unimportant in their evaluations of other youth. However, in terms of attitudes to others, the extent of identification with their group was significant. Those whose

attitudes and values were closely aligned with those of their peer group viewed themselves and members of their own group as well as outgroup members more favourably than did adolescents who lacked strong group identification. Group identification was also related to adolescents' difficulty in coping with various developmental tasks. Adolescents highly identified with their group reported that their group focused on the same developmental tasks that they saw as challenging, and devoted less attention to matters that they considered less important. It appears that those adolescents more attuned to the attitudes and values of their peer group were more able to obtain understanding and support from their group. They were also able to recognise positive aspects of their own group and also of other groups. Social identity may also have a self-preserving function, providing stability and certainty in the arena most important to young people – the self in social relations.

The quality of peer relationships and family functioning has an important influence on critical dimensions of self-perception implicated in the pathology/self-concept nexus. Schweitzer, Seth-Smith and Callan (1992) found that adverse self-appraisal, particularly in relation to interpersonal dimensions of the self-structure, is likely to increase vulnerability to psychiatric disturbance and, via feedback mechanisms, tend to maintain and exacerbate symptom expression.

While adults might interpret crowds as evidence of juvenile superficiality and conformity, adolescents consider them to be important vehicles of social support and identity confirmation, despite their concerns about individuality and conformity. Conformity to the peer group has often been cited as a peril of adolescence, but conformity to the peer group during the teenage years can be positive or negative (Wagner, 1996). Adolescent friends' similarities have often been used to confirm, although erroneously, the fears of many adults about the influence of friends. Adolescent friends have been implicated as overly powerful agents of initiation into negative behaviours, such as illicit substance abuse (Akers, *et al.*, 1998). However, succumbing to friends' encouragement to engage in potentially self-destructive behaviour can be contrasted with friends' insistence on the use of a designated driver when a peer has consumed alcohol. Fears regarding the negative aspects of peer pressure may have been exaggerated.

2.4 Conclusion

Beyond the primary function of high schools to enhance academic skills and transmit knowledge, the school functions as part of the macrosystem; that is, its role in transmitting the values, attitudes, and customs of the larger culture to the young person (Hogge, 1999). While school systems have not traditionally taken as an explicit goal to impact upon identity formation, there are existing practices and curricula that encourage learners to reflect upon a variety of alternative identity possibilities, promote the gathering of information necessary for the successful resolution of an identity crisis, and encourage the formation of strong, personally expressive identity commitments.

I believe that the findings generated by various studies (Hurrelmann, 1990) underscore the value of taking a broad ecological and social systems approach to understanding the development of identity and the genesis of delinquency and substance abuse, school dropout behaviour, social rejection and negative self-concept.

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL SYSTEMS

In the middle of the 20th Century, a new set of interesting and promising ideas began to find its way into the cutting edge of most major scientific disciplines, including the humanities. It offered a new narrative that promised to unite the sciences. In psychology, these ideas are currently called a variety of names. The terms *systems psychology* and *systemic psychology* are the terms used most often in the relevant literature, and will therefore be used in this thesis (Keys & Lockhart, 1999; Plas, 1986; Warren, Franklin & Streeter, 1998).

Since the 1970's, systemic thinking has taken great strides in the areas of mathematics, physics, biology, sociology, and psychology. These advances radically alter the scientific perspective for considering design, social structure, communication, cognition, and epistemology (Bausch, 2001).

We talk about systems in numerous contexts: the solar system, the endocrine system, the system of complex numbers, personal systems and school systems. The overriding concept of 'system' refers to "a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole" (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 1199, in Bausch, 2001).

The idea of systems was common to the thinking of ancient Greeks, many of whom held that a whole (for example, a body) was greater than the sum of its parts. The body was a common metaphor for a social system (for example, St. Paul called the church "the body of Christ"). The idea of the body as a system was reinforced when Harvey discovered the circulatory system in 1628. Hobbs employed the metaphor of society as an organism in the title of his book *Leviathan* (1651). In 1933, Durkheim said that the division of labour is a "phenomenon of generalized biology". Most of these early conceptions considered systems to be self-sufficient and therefore closed (Bausch, 2001).

Talcott Parsons spearheaded the application of systems theory to society in the United States of America. He considered most of the promising theoretical data about social issues that were available to him and tried to integrate them into a consistent

representation. The concept of systems that Parsons applied was that of an open system, that is, an input-output machine (Bausch, 2001).

Parsons carefully differentiated social systems theory from personality theory and a theory of culture. In his conception, these three theories combine in an overall theory of action, which explains how we actually engage in human (social) activity. According to him these three systems are intricately related: both independent of, and interdependent upon each other.

In his later work, Parsons describes his action theory of cultural-level systems as having four generic types of subsystems, which are the organism, the social system, the cultural system, and the personality (Bausch, 2001). Any human cultural activity results from a combination of organic, social, cultural, and personality effects. In this four-function schema, activities in these three different areas mutually influence, or 'interpenetrate' each other.

Parsons uses this idea of interpenetration to explain how two free, and therefore unpredictable, human beings can engage each other in mutually advantageous behaviour. He calls this situation the problem of 'double contingency'. In this situation, ego makes his/her action contingent upon the expected action of alter, and alter makes his/her action contingent upon the expected action of ego. This situation of double contingency creates the problem: ego and alter are dependent upon each other to satisfy their self-determined needs, but are unable to depend on (that is, cannot determine) each other's action. Unless this problem is solved, there can be no concerted social action. Parsons solves this problem by postulating a cultural consensus concerning action that is passed down to ego and alter.

The idea of consensus plays a major role in Parsons' conception of society (Bausch, 2001). He conceives it as coalescing around accepted values and norms of behaviour. Parsons deals with how a society maintains its values and norms in the face of deviant behaviour, and thereby maintains its equilibrium. The solidarity of a community is the degree to which its collective interests can be expected to prevail over the individual's interest whenever the two conflict.

In his explanation of how societies evolve through differentiating themselves, he explains that social systems create subsystems to deal with functions that in their earlier

stages of evolution were handled in a global, undifferentiated way. In this way, as societies become more complex, they differentiate into religious functionaries, military leaders, administrative bureaucracies, economic activities, and judicial functions. In modern societies, some of these differentiated functions have become semi-autonomous ways of coordinating activity, which Parsons calls symbolic media of exchange (Bausch, 2001).

The pre-eminent mediums of exchange is:

- *money* in the economic sphere,
- *power* which is invested in authority for the maintenance of political order,
- *commitments* to valued institutions, which articulate cultural systems, and
- *influence*, which justifies group consensus on the basis of specialized expertise.

The systems movement took hold in postwar America with the convergence of ideas drawn from biology, systems engineering, cybernetics, and sociology. Biology, with its evolutionary emphasis, contributed the idea of emergence and hierarchy among and within living systems. Systems engineering contributed the 'hard systems' approach to problem solving that grew out of the experience of engineers trying to develop weapons and logistical systems during World War II.

Walter Buckley (1967, in Bausch, 2001) provides a convenient summary of the antecedents of systems theory. He provides three social systems models: mechanical, organic, and process. According to the mechanical model, with its origin from the 'social physics' of the 17th century, a person can be considered as an elaborate machine. According to Pareto (1936, in Bausch, 2001), this 'machine' strives for equilibrium among its elements: any moderate changes in the elements of the system or their interrelationships that disturb the equilibrium are counterbalanced by changes tending to restore it.

Herbert Spencer (1897, in Bausch, 2001) dealt with social systems in terms of organic evolution. He recognized that societies and living bodies bore similarities and dissimilarities. He used the functions of the human body as illustrations of structures and functions that also apply in society. He is credited as the originator of the serious scientific usage of the organic model. Some of the followers of Spencer alleged social analogues to the heart, brain, circulatory system, and so forth. This more elaborate form

of the organic model is often called the organismic model. James Miller has produced the most sophisticated organismic model.

Spencer also coined the phrase 'survival of the fittest', and spearheaded the development of social Darwinism, which applied evolutionary and quasi-scientific ideas indiscriminately to social theory and social practice. Parsons, in his adaptation of the biological model, emphasized stability, order, cooperation, and consensus.

Walter Cannon (1939, in Bausch, 2001) coined the word 'homeostasis' to distinguish clearly between physical and biological equilibrium. Physical equilibrium operates in a closed system and results in a static equivalence of forces at the lowest common denominator. Homeostasis operates in open systems that interact with their environments in a kind of stable instability and maintain a degree of integrated complexity.

The organic model and homeostasis are basic for many cybernetic explanations of societal functioning, but are inadequate as models of social systems. It is change rather than stability that must be accounted for in social studies.

According to the process model, society is a complex, multifaceted, fluid interplay of widely varying degrees and intensities of association and dissociation. Structure is not something distinct from the ongoing interactive process, but rather a temporary, accommodative representation of it at any one time (Bausch, 2001).

Georg Simmel (1908, in Bausch, 2001) anticipated many of the principles of the process model and described his work as a 'struggle for life'. He treated topics such as power, conflict, group structure, individuality, and social differentiation. In the United States, George Herbert Mead and John Dewey, in their model of 'social interactionism', proposed a continuous process of socialization in the complexity and fluidity of interaction. Gordon Allport (1961, in Bausch, 2001) defined personality as a complex of elements in mutual interaction.

The general systems perspective attempts to explain how societies create more complicated relations on the basis of open systems that interchange with their environments across their boundaries.

This summary indicates the turbulent state of systems and social systems theorizing in the 1960's before the appearance and coalescence of the two grand unifying theories of

present-day systems thinking: complexity/bifurcation/component systems and autopoiesis (Bausch, 2001).

These two strands of thinking advanced systems theory beyond the bounds of mechanical (closed) models and organic (open) models and moved it into the arena of emergent models. Component-system thinking, which is propounded by Csanyi, Kampis and Goertzel, is an outgrowth of Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory. Component-system theory loosely includes the bifurcation thinking of Prigogine, the molecular biology of Eigen, the complexity thinking of Kaufmann and Gell-Mann, the physics of information theory, and the sociology of cognitive maps. It describes the processes that generate increasing unity and complexity in specific details that are alleged to have universal application.

Autopoiesis in its biological form, as proposed by Maturana and Varela, considers organisms as systems that are closed in their internal organisation, but open on the level of their structural composition and metabolism. Autopoiesis in its sociological form, as proposed by Luhmann, focuses on the difference between system and environment. It identifies autopoietic systems with the unity of contradiction that derives from their being simultaneously autonomous from their environment and totally dependent upon it.

Systems theory has found a formidable but receptive adversary in Jurgen Habermas. As a result of their debates, Habermas came to appreciate Luhmann's viewpoints but he continues to voice serious concerns about the systems approach to social processes.

In the 1970's, the Club of Rome released its first report (Bausch, 2001). The scientists and philosophers of the Club took a systemic look at the development of present-day civilization by considering the interactions of global subsystems in the areas of population growth, agricultural production, dwindling resources, and pollution. On the basis of computer simulation of the future course of the world ecology, they predicted worldwide calamity by the year 2025.

After concluding that our present course of accelerating and extensive growth is not sustainable, they advocated experiments in alternative growth possibilities including birth control, recycling, pollution control, and contingency planning. Their point of view has strong advocates within the general systems community. In recent years, it has increased awareness by calling the world's attention to ecological effects such as global warming

and environmental pollution. It has also gained coherence by employing the principles of nonlinear dynamics.

The phrase ‘nonlinear dynamics’ sounds more intimidating than it really is. A dynamical system is a system that changes over time. This broad definition includes such inanimate arrays as the solar system or a pack of billiard balls colliding on a pool table. It also appears to include a wide range of biological and human social systems. *Dynamics* refers to the study of these systems in the process of change (Warren, *et. al.*, 1998). I believe that the study of dynamical systems can offer important knowledge for social work practitioners whose work entails the changing of social systems, such as the classroom system.

A dynamical system can change in either a linear or a nonlinear manner. *Linear change* is ‘straight line’ change and includes simple cause and effect relationships where a change in A causes a proportional change in B. *Nonlinear change* does not follow a straight line and are applicable to human relationships. A simple cause and effect relationship does not apply. Human relationships involve feedback, and cause and effect are free to recursively act on one another in a way that reverberates through the system in an unpredictable manner that may cause very rapid change. The types of feedback systems that give rise to nonlinearity are extremely common among living systems, including human social systems. (Warren, *et. al.*, 1998).

This combination of nonlinearity and feedback gives a more intuitive depiction of the patterns one observes in human relationships than does a linear model. Nonlinear dynamics offers the possibility of a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the ways in which human systems arise and change.

Initially, in the development of psychology, some of the systems-oriented ideas were of practical value in research on visual perception. Later, their applicability was tested in clinical and community psychology. Today, the sub-field of family therapy has become the proving ground for some exiting developments (for example, Nims, 1998). What family therapists have already learned, becomes valuable as systems ideas are carried into the practice of psychology in the schools.

It has taken a bit longer for systems thinking to gain popularity in the education-related fields of psychology, such as school psychology. However, it is possible that in future,

advancements might occur in educational systems because the basic concepts associated with systems psychology can sometimes be best observed and utilized within complex systems, such as families and schools.

A system can be defined as a set of interacting units, hierarchically arrayed and characterized by similarity of underlying structure (Miller & Miller, 1992; Pearson, 1991). Systems are related to each other both vertically (hierarchically) and horizontally (laterally) through the exchange of energy and information at their boundaries. Through these activities, three primary system functions are carried out: maintenance of the system, achievement of self-regulation in the face of environmental disturbances, and achievement of progressive self-transformation to higher forms of adaptation. Systems respond to the environment in ways dictated by their own level of development and internal organization (Warren, *et. al.*, 1998).

A social-ecological perspective applies systems principles primarily to interactions among different levels of a system and across different systems (Keys & Lockhart, 1999). According to this perspective, the ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being, and the changing properties in which the developing person lives. This process is affected by the realizations between these social settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

Information from the environment can produce growth spurts, causing disorganization and rapid change. Resource limitation in turn can hamper change. Systems and environments perturb each other and are therefore both constantly changing. This constant flux is adaptive; the system will tend to adjust to the environment in a harmonious manner, and the environment will make complementary responses. A change in the person will lead to a change in the social context that will consequently force a further change in the person. The characteristics of the person at a given time in his/her life are a joint function of the characteristics of the person and the social context over the course of the person's life up to that time. The developmental outcomes of today shape the developmental outcomes of tomorrow (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

A person's development of a sense of self evolves through a similar process. The person adapts new knowledge from his/her environment to match his/her personal reality.

All pushes for personal changes in self from the environment are tested against the person's core being or present life experience. Life experiences and the subsequent pushes from the environment result in the emergence of more inclusive knowledge of the self and of the environment. As a person adapts to the environment, he/she also changes the environment, which in turn is influencing him/her. Thus, a recursive feedback loop is established. Of course, the power or status of the person involved would also relate to the nature of this equation. Thus, the Principal could have a greater impact on the school as a rebellious child. (Except if the child shoots the Principal!)

When people make substantive psychological or social changes, they experience upheaval, and change quickly (Warren, *et. al.*, 1998). These periods of upheaval may be followed by periods of subjective stability. However, this is only transitory because a certain amount of adaptation and change between the person and the environment occurs constantly. When people make changes, they always take something of what they were before, with them. Continuity of a person's personality is expressed primarily through consistency over time, in which the person characteristically varies his/her behaviour as a function of the different contexts in which that person lives. When an adolescent enters high school, he/she may become part of a new peer group and take on a new identity, for example change from a 'nerd' to a 'jock'.

Systems also have a tendency to resist change (Keys & Lockhart, 1999). A living system is characterized by established roles, relationships, and patterns of behaviour that the system may wish to maintain. The system as a whole is often more powerful than the individual within the system. When the individual attempts to change, the system may operate against the change. The system's tendency to maintain the *status quo*, or the system's tendency towards homeostasis, may be more powerful than the push for change. For example, it is not uncommon for a teacher to encourage a learner to develop new ways of thinking, feeling or behaving only to be dissuaded by other subsystems, such as the family, neighbourhood or even other teachers.

Living systems encompass a hierarchy of progressively differentiated and complex subsystems from cell to society (Pearson, 1991). Each system regulates its functions from within itself by opening, closing, expanding, or retracting its boundaries. It is through selective opening and closing of boundaries that a system interacts with the environment,

accomplishes its functions, and constantly reshapes and redefines itself. Activities at the boundary are the key process in system functioning. Attempts to influence a system must therefore start at its boundaries.

An important means by which human social systems establish and regulate boundaries is the evolution of rules that regulate the process of interaction among the members of the systems. Examples of these rules abound in history, law, and government. In a practical way, laws concerning compulsory education, the mainstreaming of learners with special needs, and the separation of grades into primary and high schools all illustrate the ways the macrosystem can affect the lives of adolescents (Cobb, 1992). Rules, unwritten and often unacknowledged, also govern the interactions among members of families and among other small groups. The unwritten rules of interaction in social systems are so pervasive that any attempt to influence a system must take account of its rules, just as it does of the boundaries.

The degree of stability, consistency, and predictability over time in any element of the system constituting ecology of human development, is critical to the effective operation of the system. Extremes of disorganization in structure of function represent danger signs for potential psychological growth, while a degree of flexibility constitutes the optimal condition for human development.

As human beings we experience membership in a variety of social systems throughout the life cycle, beginning with the closed system of symbiotic dual unity shared by infant and mother. We then proceed psychologically and socially through progressive levels of differentiation and organization. A child's growth and development from infancy through the preschool years takes place in the context of a relatively circumscribed social system, namely the family. Having established the family as a secure base of social operation, school age children can go on to assume additional membership in classroom, peer groups, and some organized activities under adult supervision.

Bronfenbrenner (1992) refers to these relationships among persons in the day-to-day environment such as home, school, peer group, classrooms, or work settings as the *microsystem*. The *mesosystem* refers to the interrelationship among the various microsystems. The *exosystem* describes larger institutions of society such as government agencies, religious organizations educational system, and economic system. The

macrosystem comprises of the overall cultural norms or common beliefs and social expectations within which other subsystems function. A multisystemic approach may engage all four of these systems, particularly when dealing with learners with complex problems. Linking schools, communities, and families becomes an important part of this change process and represents change at the mesosystem level. Creating the institutional structures and mechanisms to support these linkages may require change at the exosystem (for example, the educational department) and macrosystem (for example, laws concerning compulsory education, mainstreaming of learners with special needs and beliefs on corporal punishment in schools).

Different people can occupy a particular role at different times without necessarily affecting the structure and processes of the system. A person can also occupy roles in several different social systems at the same time and behave differently in each. For example, the principal of a school can also be a parent in a family, a member of a club and a deacon in his church (Miller & Miller, 1992).

No characteristic of the person exists or exerts influence on development in isolation. Every human quality is inextricably embedded in particular environmental settings. There is always interplay between the psychological characteristics of the person and of a specific environment; the one cannot be defined without reference to the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

The analysis of social contexts into subsystems is of practical as well as theoretical value (Miller & Miller, 1992). It clarifies the importance of looking at living systems in the ecological context of the larger systems of which they are parts. The influence of the total system must also be considered when the focus is upon one component of the system, such as a learner in school. It is essential to consider the inputs from and the outputs to other components within the larger system. Psychologists are frequently consulted to diagnose and treat pathological processes in individuals, groups or organizations. It is often useful to consider the level of the system presenting the problem as well as the components of the mesosystem. For example, when a child fails at school, the pathology may be biological (for example, poor eyesight or poor nutrition) or it may be the result of pathology in his/her family (for example, divorce or sexual abuse by a family member).

The multisystemic clinical approach posits that behaviour problems can be maintained by problematic transactions within any given system or between combinations of pertinent systems (Henggeler & Borduin, 1995). Multisystemic treatment is not limited to interventions in one system, for example the family, but encourages treatment of problems in other systems as needed.

Social systems theory expands our understanding of the individual beyond the individual's psychological development to a view that positions the individual within the context of relationships and interactions with others. Adolescents are not merely individuals or social groups, but they are also sources of social representations. They do not only construct their own representations of the social world, but other categories of their social environment construct representations of them (Doise, 1993).

In the realm of social systems interaction, adolescence is at once ripe with opportunities and fraught with vulnerabilities. The adolescent must simultaneously cope with biological changes and an expanding variety of social systems. Social systems outside the family provide the adolescent with opportunities to experiment with roles, establish intimate relationships, and work through dependency ties. This process can be likened to the "second separation-individuation" (Blos, 1967 in Pearson, 1991) and the establishment of identity that are hallmarks of developmental success in adolescence.

3.1 The school as a social system

An integrated systems perspective can broaden our approach to contextual factors and help to examine the quality and impact of educational settings. It also encompasses newer concerns about how experiences in school can change and be changed by other settings in which learners participate, such as their families. A systems framework considers both physical and social aspects of the learning milieu and their determinants and effects. It emphasizes how individuals select and alter educational settings as well as the impact that these settings have on them. Moreover, it recognizes that the influence of other life contexts, such as work and family, carries over into the school and can have consequences for educational outcomes. The systems perspective is consistent with the idea that the meaning and outcome of educational programs must be considered in a broad social context (Moos, 1991).

The growth of a systems orientation in educational settings and a focus on the connections between school and non-school contexts is a welcome trend that can complement the more established individual focus on educational processes. This system perspective will be especially valuable in addressing emerging educational issues.

An important conceptual issue concerns the differential strength of contextual factors and how cross-situational influences can modify them. The more intensive, committed, and socially integrated a setting is, the greater is its potential impact, especially on personal factors that are changing developmentally. Cohesive, homogeneous settings tend to influence incongruent individuals to change in the direction of the majority, while those in the majority maintain or further accentuate their attitudes and behaviour in the relevant areas. A heterogeneous setting has more diverse influences and provides each person with a wider choice of options. We need to identify the optimal mix of individuals in a setting and learn how to structure environments to promote personal growth (Moos, 1991).

Powerful environments alter many of the individuals who elect to stay in them, but they also carry significant risks. For instance, concentrating high-ability learners in certain classrooms can promote their aspiration and achievement levels. But social comparison processes often work to the detriment of the less able learners, who can feel less competent and alienated in such classes. Any setting that is powerful enough to produce constructive personal change is also powerful enough to elicit concomitant stress. Because such settings can create significant problems, we need to learn more about how other life contexts can buffer such problems. For example, adolescents who enjoy a cohesive family and supportive peers could experience less tension in highly competitive or controlling school settings (Moos, 1991).

Using a systems approach to solve problems within schools contributes to a child's healthy identity development. When the position is taken that the problem is one of systems incongruence, rather than the fault of one member, it suggests that a child's reactions may, to a large degree, be a reflection of some systemic or intersystemic imbalance. The key to healthy identity development does not only lie in issues of identity, but also in the environments in which the child lives. The child internalizes life experiences and integrates them in his/her own way, thus creating the essence of an

individual. Identity is typically communicated through functional, observable characteristics. One can evaluate these variables from a behavioural, psychoanalytic, or social perspective. However, regardless of orientation, it is difficult to ignore the impact of systems, of which the school is a very important one in the life of a child from approximately six years of age to adolescence.

Schools are similar in administrative and personnel structure. However, in practice, there are considerable differences in how they function. Members of the school 'family' possibly comprise the most diverse personalities, complete with interdisciplinary education, experience, goals and objectives. Schools' formal goals, informal norms, staff relationships, and procedures can have a differential impact on the behaviour of teachers and learners (Gallas & Hardinge, 1993).

Like families and all other systems, schools are hierarchically organized. Viewing school personnel from a family system's perspective, principals act as the parent member of each school. They yield the most power and typically set the tone for developing norms regarding the flexibility of boundaries. There are many administrative styles. Some principals may be at the center of all educational, curricular, and disciplinary concerns. Information and advice may be sought from staff members and the Principal may be highly visible in the daily working of the school. As a result of such accessibility, communication boundaries may be more permeable. Relationships that have the potential of becoming more fluid and relaxed allow more flexibility between systems, as well as between personal boundaries. Flexibility in boundaries is viewed, from a systemic standpoint, as healthier.

Other principals may take a more distant or singular stand, leaving much of the pragmatic, day-to-day activities to the educational staff. Distant principals may not be as accessible to staff, learners or parents. In this instance, a more rigid boundary may be set up between the school, staff and parents. Principals also vary in how broadly or narrowly they interpret school system guidelines and rules as applicable to their own school.

The status of other members in the school community is often determined by alignments with the Principal or whoever exercises power within the school. By definition, the Principal should hold the power. If this is not the case, there is likely to be a hierarchical problem resulting in boundary violations throughout the school. Any

conflict regarding boundary violations or misalignments will be felt, at some point, by the entire system. Teachers are part of the larger school ecosystem, but they also represent the leadership role within the classrooms.

The primary subsystem within the school is the teacher in the classroom. Interactions within the subsystem are related to a variety of variables. These include personal and interpersonal characteristics, size of the class, and amount of assistance available to the teacher. A teacher with a classroom of twenty-five learners may have a different way of interacting with his/her learners than a teacher with an aide or two teachers 'teaming' together in an expanded classroom setting.

If a teacher finds it difficult to develop and maintain authority in his/her classroom, the learners may inappropriately take too much control. The teacher's development of a professional self-concept is essential in assisting learners in developing an identity and what it means to be a learner.

In addition to the classroom subsystem, there are a host of educational support staff and itinerant personnel that are often involved when a learner exhibits academic or behavioural problems. School psychologists, social workers, and special education specialists join the in-school counsellors, teachers and administrative staff to form another subsystem, known as the Child Study Team. The different roles and types of power these individuals yield within this subsystem can be confusing and transitory, depending on the focus of the intervention. For instance, a school psychologist or special education teacher may have considerable influence in a special education eligibility meeting, but have little or no influence on the daily functioning of the school.

Another important member of the school community is the guidance counsellor, who may be perceived as closely aligned with the learner or with the teacher and/or principal. This alignment will have strong implications for learners as well as other school personnel. The guidance counsellor who may be closely aligned with the learner may be at risk of triangulation, contributing to the development of unproductive coalitions. Counsellors are much like family members who, over time, may develop a sense of possessiveness toward "their" learners. This can happen when counsellors maintain contact with learners over a number of years of schooling. The effect of this sense of

ownership leads to rigid boundaries where the counsellor discourages interference from other staff members.

Underlying any evaluation of how school personnel function, is the belief that a healthy system will prove to be a productive environment in which the child can develop. Once school communication networks are understood, utilization of a systems approach enables school personnel and members of the helping profession to move beyond an encapsulated view of the child within the school. Using a systems approach confirms the impact of the environment on the child.

When there is a heightened sense of conflict or lack of cohesiveness, the sense of one's identity and one's fit with the world is disrupted. The result can be a threat to one's developing identity. A major challenge for schools is to confront the learners' conflicts, which are viewed as normal reactions to anxiety and problems in life, in a constructive and creative manner.

Using a systemic approach is one way of recognizing the importance of all the pieces of a child's life and creatively addressing the issues of adolescence. The practical application of respecting and responding to all components of a child's life reflects a more humanistic approach to education. A systemic approach reflects how systems merge to effect change and resolve problems. If the goal of the school is to contribute to the healthy development of the adolescent's capabilities, values and identity, then the major subsystems, as well as the mediating factors (for example, the quality of interaction between the resources), should be viewed as essential in that development. The high school as a social system will be explored in depth in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

THE HIGH SCHOOL AS A SOCIAL SYSTEM

4.1 Introduction

Most adolescents experience several years of formal relations in the shape of institutionalised schooling. In this respect, there is continuity between their childhood and adolescent experience. There may be some differences associated with adolescence – the schools may be larger units than those of the childhood years and they may be associated with greater formality. Beyond some point, continued participation in full-time formal education becomes voluntary. The decision made at this time, whether or not to leave full-time education is fundamental, as it has repercussions for almost every detail of the individual's subsequent life course. How young people adapt to formal education is central to their relations with the institutional order of society generally (Emler, 1993).

Because the school plays such a critical role in development, it is also the context in which many problems of development originate or express themselves. Academic underachievement, delinquency, social rejection, and a negative self-concept are all problems that may be associated with the school environment. The school also represents a useful venue for introducing interventions designed to address these problems and, for this reason, assessments focusing on the school environment assume considerable importance (Hogge, 1999).

It has been established in Chapter 3 that the social matrix wherein they are embedded, profoundly affects individuals. In recognition of this fact, educational researchers have developed ways to conceptualise and measure aspects of learning environments, their determinants and impacts. Numerous assessment procedures are available to identify the most salient aspects of school settings. Such methods can be used to describe distinctive types of learning environments, to examine how learning environments influence learner morale and academic performance, to understand why some classrooms and schools are much more cohesive and task oriented than others, to monitor the implementation of new instructional programs, and to help educators create more satisfying and effective educational settings (Moos, 1991; Plas, 1986).

These developments are important steps toward understanding the dynamic qualities of learning environments. School culture and climate, teacher qualifications, curriculum frameworks and instructional approaches, and a myriad of other factors interact synergistically to produce growth in learner academic skills and knowledge. However, the learning environment should be placed in the mesosystem and consideration should be given to how the characteristics and influences of schools are altered by other factors in the lives of learners and educators. These factors include:

- personal propensities and resources of the learner (cognitive and non-cognitive),
- physical and mental maturation,
- home environment,
- cultural heritage, and
- institutional and community resources (Kupermintz, 2003).

Although LeCapitaine (2001) agrees that personal and psychological development is the most important task of education, he believes that basic needs (for example, to be healthy, to be fed, to be housed, and to be safe) are important foundations for such development. Therefore, the ethnographic, economic, cultural, and other contextual experiences need to be addressed in our communities. It is within these contexts that the effects of formal education should be understood.

Contemporary secondary schools render a variety of functions. Not only do they educate, but they also convey less well-defined social skills and concepts that can be generalised to other organisational structures that adolescents will encounter as adults. For example, through participation as learner, school leader, athlete, or learner government representative, adolescents learn about their specific, individual roles and about the roles of other people; they also gain appreciation of how the interrelatedness of these roles maintain the cohesive structure of the high school environment. The primary purpose of the school is similar to that of the family, namely to prepare the learners to become successful adult employees, members of families, and citizens in their communities (Cummings, 1995; Pearson, 1991).

For the adolescent the school is not only a workplace but also an intersection of diverse peer and community social groups – a laboratory for experimenting with identity. The central concerns of adolescents remain those of finding a place in society and a sense of

the future by establishing a viable and accurate identity of oneself (Cotterell, 1996). One basic question regarding education during adolescence is: how, and to what extent do educational institutions enhance adolescents' efforts in self-finding, or does traditional education actually interfere with identity development? Numerous critics of the educational system – Dennison, Elkind, Friedenberg, Goodman, Holt, and Silverman, in Muuss (1996) – have maintained that, rather than foster a moratorium-like exploration of individual growth experiences, schools require adolescents to suppress their creativity, individuality, and identity exploration to a routine of a skill- and knowledge-oriented curriculum. Thus, schools seem to be encouraging foreclosure to the extent that they demand conformity to the *status quo* and submission to authority rather than aiding the adolescent in the search for and exploration of a personal identity. Indirect support for this idea comes from the Waterman and Waterman (1970, in Muuss, 1996) findings, which suggest that foreclosure subjects felt more comfortable in school and held more positive attitudes toward their educational experiences. In contrast, the uncommitted, searching, and experimenting moratorium subjects evaluated their educational experience rather negatively. Apparently, the structure of the school – the curriculum, schedules, attendance, and grades - encourage foreclosure rather than efforts directed toward self-finding and self-definition, which lead to questioning and challenging of existing values and rules. Successful identification depends upon whether the conventional classroom environment, with the concurrence of the teacher, allows the learner enough breathing space to explore identity.

Traditionally research and evaluation in education have tended to rely heavily and sometimes exclusively on the assessment of academic achievement and other valued learning outcomes (Fraser, 1991). Although few responsible educators would dispute the worth of outcome measures, they cannot give a complete picture of the educational process. We need to consider what it is really like, from the learners' point of view, to spend five years in a typical high school (Kohn, 1999). Kohn (1999) believes that the string of high school shootings in the USA relate to an American penchant to ignore the structural causes of problems. He says Americans prefer the simplicity and satisfaction of holding individuals responsible for whatever happens, for example crime, poverty, and school failure. Thus, even when one high school crisis is followed by another, they

concentrate on the particular people involved – their values, their character, their personal failings – rather than asking whether something about the system in which these learners find themselves might also lie at the root of the problem. In particular, research should focus upon learners’ perceptions of important social and psychological aspects of the school environment. Kohn (1999) does not ignore the fact that there is something wrong with learners who kill their classmates and that they should bear responsibility for their actions. However, he believes it is as naïve as it is convenient to assume that the trouble resides exclusively within the heads of the killers.

The seriousness of the problems characterising many of today’s adolescents has heralded a call for research that focuses less on strictly *person* oriented variables (for example, values and anger) but should incorporate *social* experiences that represent risk or protective factors in development during adolescence (Kohn, 1999; Roeser & Eccles, 1998). Presently I will address the issues of school climate, systemic violence, and dropout behaviour. To conclude, I will discuss principles of effective schooling.

4.2 School climate

The comprehensive evidence presented by a number of researchers clearly establishes that the nature of the classroom environment has a potent influence on learners’ academic, social and psychological well-being (Fraser & Walberg, 1991).

Explanations for school failure usually cannot be traced to a single variable. Rather, every aspect of the educational experience is subject to scrutiny. Familial, societal, and institutional forces frequently are interconnected, and all contribute to the eventual outcome of school failure. Blame often shifts back and forth between the school and the family. Researchers have traditionally focused on pupils’ deficiencies (for example, lack of ability or motivation, often due to poor socio-economic conditions) or teachers’ deficiencies (for example, lack of ability or poor training). Thus, research efforts in this area have been concerned with disputing or augmenting these ‘traditional’ explanations. What are the intersections between the traditional explanations and those explanations that emphasize the often-neglected voices of teachers and learners and recognise the power of individual action? Far less information is available about the environments of

those teachers and learners who are expected to spend 180 days a year in schools characterised by a high level of failure (Hilty, 1998).

There exist a number of studies that have suggested that schools as a whole can be characterised as having:

- a 'climate' (Andersen, 1982 in Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Fraser & Walberg, 1991);
- an 'ethos' (Fraser & Walberg, 1991; Rutter, 1980, in Roeser & Eccles, 1998);
- a 'culture' (Fraser & Walberg, 1991; Maehr & Midgley, 1991 in Roeser & Eccles, 1998);
- an environment, atmosphere, tone, ethos or ambience (Fraser & Walberg, 1991).

Schools, on the surface, appear to be monolithic. However, upon deeper analysis they host a myriad of cultures. Schools have their own cultural systems and even within the same institution, people see things differently. Each group creates its own cultural meaning and symbols (Attenbaugh, 1998; Goodlad, 2000). Although school environment is a somewhat subtle concept, remarkable progress has been made over the past two decades in evaluating it and in researching its antecedents and consequences (Fraser & Walberg, 1991).

Educational environments can be considered as the social-psychological contexts or determinants of learning. Teaching is a determinant of learning, but it is more deliberate than aspects of the educational environment. Teaching, however, affects the environment and is in turn affected by it. Research on environments usually assumes that learners, curricula, and other internal and external factors, as well as the teacher, affect the environment.

For some learners, the early adolescent years mark the beginning of a downward spiral in school-related behaviours and motivation that often lead to academic failure and school dropout. Similarly-timed developmental declines have been documented for such motivational constructs as interest in school, intrinsic motivation, self-concepts and/or self-perceptions, and confidence in one's intellectual abilities as well as learner behavioural problems, such as truancy (Eccles, *et. al.*, 1996; Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991). However, the relationship between aspects of secondary school environments and indexes of adjustment beyond the academic domain, such as psychological well-being,

distress, or engagement in problem behaviours, have to a great extent been neglected. (Roeser & Eccles, 1998).

There are also reports of age-related increases during early adolescence in such negative motivational and behavioural characteristics as test anxiety, learned helplessness, focus on self-evaluation rather than task mastery, truancy, and school dropout (Eccles, *et al.*, 1991). Although these changes are not extreme for most adolescents, there is sufficient evidence of gradual decline in various indicators of academic motivation, behaviour, and self-perception over the early adolescent years to make one wonder what is happening (Eccles & Midgley, 1988, in Eccles, *et al.*, 1991).

One explanation draws upon cumulative stress theory which suggests that declines in motivation result from the fact that adolescents making the transition to secondary school must cope with two major transitions: pubertal change and change in school environment (Eccles, *et al.*, 1996; Eccles, *et al.*, 1991).

Similarly, Eccles and her colleagues proposed that these motivational and behavioural changes could result from the fact that secondary schools are not providing appropriate educational environments for early adolescents. According to social systems theory, behaviour, motivation, and mental health are influenced by the fit between the characteristics individuals bring to their social environments and the characteristics of these social environments. More specifically, the fit between the developmental needs and motivational orientation of the learners, on the one hand, and the demands and characteristics of their social environments, on the other, is assumed to influence motivation and mental health. Learners are not likely to do very well or be very motivated if they are in social environments that do not fit their psychological needs. Under these circumstances, person-environment fit theory would predict a decline in the adolescent's motivation, interest, performance, and behaviour as they move into this environment. When learners need close affiliation, they experience large depersonalised schools; when they need to develop autonomy, they experience few opportunities for choice and punitive approaches to discipline; when they need expansive cognitive challenges and opportunities to demonstrate their competence, they experience work focused largely on the memorisation of facts (Darling-Hammond, 1997, in Kohn, 1999).

Consequently, Eccles, *et. al.* (1991, 1996) attempted to identify the characteristics of typical high school environments that put early adolescents at risk for negative motivational and behavioural changes as they make the transition to junior high school. They found that such negative changes in the school environment occur at both the macro and micro levels. For example, Simmons and Blyth (1987, in Eccles, *et. al.*, 1996) enumerated the following types of macro changes: increased school size, increased bureaucratic organization, increased departmentalisation, and decreased teacher-learner individual contact and opportunity to have a close relationship with a particular teacher. They suggested that such changes put young adolescents at risk in several ways. Because early adolescence is a period of exploration, adolescents in this developmental period are likely to try out various types of behaviours and identities. Although such experimentation is both healthy and normal, it can also be quite risky. Successful passage through this period of experimentation requires a tight safety net carefully monitored by caring adults – adults who provide opportunities for experimentation without letting the adolescents seriously endanger their futures in the process. The large high school is ill suited for such a task. The increased size results in the disruption of one's peer network at a time when peer relationships are especially important. Each of these characteristics of the junior high school transition could have detrimental effects on young adolescents, especially those already somewhat at risk due to psychological, social, or academic problems.

Although few empirical studies have been done on microlevel changes in the classroom environment, there is some evidence of negative changes at this level (Eccles, *et. al.*, 1996), explained as follows:

(a) Junior high school classrooms, as compared to elementary school classrooms, are characterised by a great emphasis on teacher control and discipline and allow fewer opportunities for learner decision-making, choice, and self-management. Such differences in the opportunity for participation in decision-making and self-control are likely to be especially problematic for young adolescents. This is a time in development when they begin to think of themselves as young adults. It is also a time when they increase their exploration of possible identities. They believe they are becoming more responsible and, consequently, deserving of greater adult respect. Unfortunately, the

evidence suggests this developmentally appropriate progression is disrupted with the transition to junior high school. Such developmentally disruptive and perhaps regressive change in the school environment is likely to undermine the motivation and engagement of the young adolescents experiencing the change.

The work of Eccles and Midgley (1989, in Roeser & Eccles, 1989) suggests that developmentally appropriate school contexts, which provide opportunities that are sensitive to the developmental tasks confronting young adolescents, are critical to the facilitation of positive development. They argue that early adolescence is a time when adolescents are increasingly self-conscious, have a need for positive support and regard from adults, and experience a desire for increased autonomy and participation in decision-making. When schools provide opportunities that address these developmental issues, positive school motivation, behaviour, and mental health will follow. Concessions for learner choice and input into class discussions, high expectations from teachers for all learners regardless of their ability, and a school environment in which one need not worry about being compared to others in terms of academic abilities are the kinds of school experiences hypothesized to lead to positive adjustment and achievement. On the other hand, negative motivational, behavioural, and emotional outcomes related to school are predicted when adolescents are denied opportunities for decision making or class participation, experience low teacher expectations, and have to deal with an emphasis on relative ability and social comparison related to academic performance. Although this particular set of school experiences may facilitate or deter positive school adjustment at any age, research has supported the notion that it is especially important during the adolescent years (Eccles *et. al.*, 1991; Roeser & Eccles, 1998).

Le Compte (1987, in Franklin & Streeter, 1995) holds a similar view when he says that the public school alienates many middle class adolescents because it is too authoritarian and archaic in its orientation to build an effective culture of learning. A school environment that does not meet the socio-emotional needs of middle class youth may inadvertently fail to promote effective relationships - relationships that may motivate these learners to achieve and stay at school (Franklin & Streeter, 1995).

At this point it is important to note that adolescence represents a significant new phase in the individual's relations with the institutional order (Emler, 1993). According to

Emler (1993) it is caused by a combination of physical changes and increased independence and less by changes in the educational experience. At the heart of the adolescent's relation to the institutional order is his/her orientation to formal authority. The most important context for the development of his/her relationship with the institutional order and the formal authority it embodies, is probably formal state education.

Formal education provides most children with their first direct and extended experience of a formal organisation and institutional authority. It seems likely, therefore, that this experience will be the basis on which children construct a preliminary understanding of formal authority and the principle according to which it operates (Emler, 1993).

Given the prominence of school in the lives of adolescents, one would expect that their attitudes to formal authority would generally be related to their attitudes to formal authority as encountered in the school. Adolescents who are more delinquent than their peers, are increasingly more likely to be in lower streams or curriculum track, less likely to enter public examinations, more likely to drop out of school, more likely to have records of low academic attainment and more likely to leave school with poor academic records and examination results (Emler, 1993).

(b) Junior high school classrooms, as compared to elementary school classrooms, are characterised by less personal and positive teacher-learner relationships (Cummings, 1995; Eccles, *et. al.*, 1996). Such a shift in the quality of learner-teacher relationships is likely to be especially detrimental at this stage of development. Adolescence is a time when children are trying to find their own identity. This process often involves questioning the values and expectations of one's parents. In more traditional cultures, children have the opportunity to do this questioning with supportive adults such as religious counsellors, neighbours, and relatives. In our highly mobile, complex society, such opportunities are not readily available. Teachers are the one stable source of adult support left for many adolescents in the U.S.A. (and possibly also in South Africa). Unfortunately, the sheer size and bureaucratic nature of most junior high schools, coupled with the negative stereotypes regarding the negative characteristics of adolescents, lead teachers to distrust their learners and to withdraw emotionally from them (Eccles, *et. al.*,

1993). Consequently, these learners have little choice but to turn to peers as guides in their exploration of alternative identities. Evidence from a variety of sources suggests that this can be a very risky solution for many adolescents (Eccles, *et. al.*, 1996). Another unfortunate consequence is the likelihood that teachers will not be able to identify learners on the verge of getting themselves into serious trouble and to get these learners the help they need. Subsequently, the holes in the safety net may become too big to prevent unnecessary 'failures'.

(c) The shift to junior high school is associated with an increase in practices such as whole-class task organisation, between classroom ability grouping, and public evaluation of the correctness of work (Eccles, *et. al.*, 1996). Changes such as these are likely to increase social comparison, concerns about evaluation, and competitiveness. Such changes may also increase the likelihood that teachers will use normative grading criteria and more public forms of evaluation. These have both been shown to impact negatively on many young adolescents' self-perceptions and motivations. According to Hargreaves (1982, in Galloway & Edwards, 1992), the secondary school system exerts on many pupils a destruction of their dignity from which few recover. Subsequently, schooling is widely seen as damaging to the self-esteem of many pupils.

However, the majority of teachers unquestionably aim to raise learners' self-esteem. They achieve this by enhancing their feelings of personal involvement in classroom activities, as well as by giving them recognition as individual members of a class. Against these liberal aims stand the teacher's need for control and society's expectations with respect both to children's behaviour and to their educational progress. This is perhaps the major dilemma of contemporary schooling.

Ryan and Patrick (2001) found that learners' perception of an emphasis on comparison and competition was important to understanding changes in their social efficacy with their teacher and disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Specifically, when learners felt that their actions were compared directly to others in the class, they expressed less confidence in their ability to relate well to their teacher and also reported engaging in more disruptive behaviour. This indicates that learners may be less willing to engage in the task and may become more disruptive when they believe their performance will be viewed as an indicator of their relative ability.

(d) Junior high school teachers feel less effective as teachers, especially when teaching low-ability learners (Eccles, *et. al.*, 1996).

(e) Junior high school teachers appear to use a more competitive standard in judging learners' competence in grading their performance than do elementary school teachers (Eccles, *et. al.*, 1996). This leads to a drop in grades for many young adolescents as they make the junior high school transition. Interestingly, this decline in grades is not matched by a decline in the adolescents' scores on standardized achievement tests, suggesting that the decline reflects a change in grading practices rather than a change in the rate of the learner's learning. The impact of this decline in grades on the young adolescent's self-confidence is easy to imagine, because the material they are being tested on is not likely to be more intellectually challenging than elementary school work. There is no stronger predictor of learners' self-confidence and sense of personal efficacy for schoolwork than the grades they receive.

Changes such as these are likely to have a negative effect on many children's motivational orientations toward school at any grade level. These changes are particularly harmful at early adolescence, given what it is known about psychological development during this stage of life. Evidence from a variety of sources suggests that early adolescent development is characterised by increases in desire for autonomy, peer orientation, self-focus and self-consciousness, salience of identity issues, concern over heterosexual relationships, and capacity for abstract cognitive activity (Simmons & Blyth, 1987 in Eccles, *et. al.*, 1996). Simmons and Blyth (1987) argue that adolescents need a reasonably safe, as well as intellectually challenging, environment to adapt to these shifts – an environment that provides a 'zone of comfort' as well as challenging new opportunities for growth. In the light of these needs, the environmental changes often associated with the transition to junior high school seem especially harmful in that they disrupt the possibility of close personal relationships between adolescents and nonfamilial adults at a time when they have an increased need for this type of social support. Competition, social comparison, and ability self-assessment are emphasised at a time of heightened self-focus. These changes lead to a decrease in decision-making and choice at a time when the desire for self-control and adult respect is growing. Peer social

networks are disrupted at a time when adolescents are especially concerned with peer relationships and social acceptance.

The social status system of the high school requires that learners learn to identify existing school groups and their defining features, such as what members wear, where members congregate, what the group's reputation is in the school, and what kinds of activities group members are likely to engage in. These skills relate to learners' *ability to read* the status system, a social skill that is essential if they are to adapt to the high school social organisation and gain the expertise eventually to interact socially within the adult community. According to Newman and Newman (1987, in Cummings, 1995), certain learner characteristics are necessary for successful attainment of social status within the high school community and are related to (1) physical appearance; (2) athletic ability for boys; (3) leadership in school activities; and (4) status or popularity. Status or popularity is less influenced by academic achievement than by other variables.

Peer group membership has also been found to relate to social status and even to the formation of social skills that continue into adult life (Cummings, 1995; Ianni & Orr, 1996). A variety of peer groupings exist in every high school, each with its own characteristics and reputation. Depending on whether one identifies with the popular group, the jocks, the skaters, or the dopers, peer and adult expectations of behaviours of group members influence their reactions and responses. Consequently, certain school and community resources may open and others may close to high school learners based on their peer group membership. Furthermore, peer group membership influences one's reputation, which may follow well into adult life and which may provide a positive effect on adult activities for some and a negative effect for others. Most adolescents will identify with some peer group because of their strong need for social, emotional, and psychological support that the peer group offers.

Drawing upon current ecological theories of achievement motivation and adolescent development, Roeser and Eccles (1998) examine how adolescents' perceptions of their middle school environment related to changes in their academic and psychological adjustment. They draw attention to the important role that meaning-making at the individual level plays in the determination of school effects. Researchers in developmental and educational psychology have increasingly recognised the importance

of individual learners' construction of meaning in school as an important mediator between the actual school context and their school-related feelings, beliefs, and actions. It is the functional meaning of the environment to the individual rather than the environment *per se* that is the most important aspect of concern for the investigation of motivational and personality variables (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986 in Roeser & Eccles, 1998). Given that individual adolescents experience different academic programs, instructional treatments, sequences of teachers, and social interactions with teachers, this is an effective approach to understand how adolescents' general experience impacts the course of their development.

Educators and policy makers fail to realise the profound impact teachers have on learners (Attenbaugh, 1998). Teachers themselves do not understand the important role they play in learners' social and academic lives. Teachers certainly face significant challenges – few resources, little administrative support, apathetic parents, a hostile public, critical politicians, and unmotivated learners. In spite of these overwhelming conditions, teachers maintain the most contact with learners, shaping their concepts of social success or failure. Teachers, therefore, possess the power to alter learner perceptions of themselves as learners and their relationship to schooling, possibly mitigating school dropout.

During a time of heightened self-consciousness, a perceived emphasis on relative ability and social comparison in school may cause some adolescents to question their academic abilities, to feel that their self-esteem is being threatened, and possibly feel angry or unhappy (Covington, 1992 in Roeser & Eccles, 1998). On the other hand, positive teacher regard may provide adolescents with social-emotional resources that contribute to their academic and psychological well-being (Ryan, Stiller, and Lynch, 1994 in Roeser & Eccles, 1998). Perceived opportunities for autonomy and participation in learning may have a similar positive effect on adolescents' motivation, behaviour, and psychological well-being over time (Deci & Ryan, 1985 in Roeser & Eccles, 1998). Finally, if adolescents perceive that their middle school emphasizes social comparison and relative ability, that it provides few opportunities for autonomy, and that it has unsupportive teachers, then they may be more likely to self-select themselves out of such

an environment by skipping classes or school (Covington, 1992 in Roeser & Eccles, 1998).

Research findings by Roeser and Eccles (1998) indicate that adolescents who perceived that their teachers thought they were good learners in eighth grade showed positive changes in their feelings of academic competence, educational values, and self-esteem. Their feelings of anger or depressed mood have declined from seventh to eighth grade. Perceptions of positive teacher regard were also related to less school truancy during the years when this behaviour is known to increase (Dryfoos, 1990 in Roeser & Eccles, 1998). These results support the notion that adolescents' relationships with their middle school teachers can be important for their academic and psychological adjustment. Middle level schools can facilitate successful adolescent development by instructing teachers to base high expectations and regard for learners on effort and improvement instead of superior ability, and by structuring environments that allow teachers to get to know each learner.

A study conducted by Mboya (1995) among African adolescents achieved similar results. He examined the relationship between perceived teacher behaviours and adolescents' self-concepts. Although the results of this study are consistent with previous research on the positive relationship between teacher behaviours and learners' self-concepts (quoted in Mboya, 1995), it further indicated that specific teacher behaviours are associated with specific dimensions of adolescents' self-concepts. There was a significant positive relationship between perceived teacher support, interest, encouragement, expectations and participation, and adolescent family, school and health self-concepts. These findings reinforced the view that the teachers' influence on the formation and development of communal related self-concept is an important consideration in teacher-learner interaction.

As this study is correlational, the causal implications of the findings are unclear. It is plausible to argue that adolescents who have good relations with their families perform well at school or that those in good health evoke positive responses from their teachers. It is also possible that teachers who are supportive, demonstrate interest and are a source of encouragement enhance positive family, school and health self-concepts among adolescents. Further research is needed to clarify the causality of these relationships.

Ryan and Patrick (2001) found when learners moved into a middle school classroom with a teacher they perceived as supportive, their efficacy for communicating and getting along with their teacher increased and they more often engaged in self-regulating learning. Furthermore, when learners believed their teachers tried to understand them and was available to help, they engaged in less off-task and disruptive behaviour.

According to Bulach and Malone (1994, in Hanna, 1998), school climate has a significant impact on implementing school reform. Trust, respect, mutual obligation, and concern for others' welfare can have powerful effects on educators' and learners' interpersonal relationships as well as learners' academic achievement and overall school progress.

4.3 Systemic violence

Epp (1996) argues that educational systems are complicit in the abuse of children through 'systemic violence' and that this complicity, and the learners' reactions to it, contribute to other forms of violence. Systemic violence is not intentional harm visited on the unlucky by vicious individuals. Rather, it is the unintentional consequences of procedures implemented by well-meaning authorities in a belief that the practices are in the best interest of learners. Systemic violence is insidious because those involved, both perpetrators and victims, are often unaware of its existence. When learners are not capable enough or compliant enough, the school does not take responsibility for its failure to provide a meaningful educational experience. Instead, the blame is shifted to the learner for lack of effort or ability, or to the parent for failing to provide a positive environment or for failing to support school initiatives. The learners most damaged by systemic violence are removed from school, or remove themselves, and suffer the lasting disadvantages of an incomplete education. They accept the personal blame and economic detriments associated with academic failure as their own. The irony is that when learners who are compelled by law to attend school are failed by the school system, they accept responsibility for the institution's failure.

From the school administrator's view, it is often deemed 'for the best' that learners who have often been disruptive and whose marks are usually poor, should leave (Epp, 1996). Their removal can then be seen as an improvement in the environment for those

who remain. When learners respond to systemic violence in violent ways, administrators are forced to remove them. In these cases, school authorities feel vindicated. They can focus on the learners' acts and justify their removal as necessary to preserve the harmony of the school community. They see no need to examine the circumstances to ascertain whether or not systemic violence predicated the learners' actions. Occasionally, when the results of systemic violence are particularly obvious or disastrous, school personnel stop to question the role that they have played. A school shooting or a learner's suicide, for example, will cause authorities to pause to consider their complicity. In one case the suicide of a grade 7 learner who had recently been suspended caused a special kind of grief for the administrators and teachers in his school (Sakiyama, 1996, in Epp, 1996). Their intention in upholding school policy had not been to cause the child harm and there was no way for them to ascertain the effect that implementation of school policies had had on the child's life.

Systemic violence is 'systemic' because there is no one to blame. People applying the violence are only part of a larger process. Administrators and teachers do what is expected of them. They follow rules and they maintain standards. They do what they believe is in the learners' best interests; it is the rules itself that is sometimes damaging (Epp, 1996).

Systemic violence is visited upon all learners, but does not damage everyone to the same degree. Systemic violence constricts and directs many learner behaviours. However, it is especially damaging to those who are too creative, too sensitive, or too discerning. Even children who do not fit the confines of being 'at-risk' find themselves being punished for defiance of senseless rules or acts of rebellion against a meaningless curriculum. All learners are subjected to tedium in lesson delivery and to an expectation that they will sit still and perform tasks that often have little value for them. Teachers may justify this as preparation for future jobs, and administrators and parents will support them in this view, but conformity and routine can be mind-numbing and could hardly be classified as a meaningful learning experience (Epp, 1996).

Systemic violence is found in any institutionalised practice that adversely impacts on learners. To be damaging, practices do not have to have a negative impact on all learners. They may be beneficial to some and damaging to others. For example, a marking system

that provides positive reinforcement for only a few good learners, may have an adverse effect on other learners. Intended to encourage the others, this practice often has the opposite effect. The response is likely to be a wadded-up project in the rubbish bin, a muttered acceptance of personal inadequacy (or dislike for the winning learner), and a vow never to try again. Systemic violence occurs when the positive impact on some learners is only possible through the negative effect it has on others (Epp, 1996).

The effects of systemic violence are exacerbated for disadvantaged learners because their experiences in school are quite different from those of privileged learners, even though they will be sitting in the same classroom. It encourages disadvantaged learners to disappear from the school system and from competition for economic success.

Learners' reactions to systemic violence are seldom acted out in immediate and physical terms. Responses to systemic violence may be acted out in the form of defiance, neglect of duty, withdrawal, and addiction. Learners may become self-destructive, courting dangers, closing doors, and ignoring opportunities.

Systemic violence is carried out through a progression of assumptions that begin with a belief that it is possible to standardise learners, learner abilities and learner expectations. This belief allows school officials to stratify learners, ignore individual differences, and standardise treatment. This is done in the belief that learners will benefit in spite of the power struggles necessary to enforce this standardisation. This system does not only retard personal development and the fulfillment of personal potential, it also fails society. Children who have been arrested in their development by damaging practices in the school system, do not contribute to society in ways that they might have done had the school system lived up to expectations. If schools are to fulfill their potential as catalyst in the creation of well-rounded citizens, educational systemic violence must be addressed (Epp, 1996).

Although I personally feel that the term 'violence' is too strong a term to ascribe to educational environments where it is not policy to harm learners intentionally, it is prudent to quote opinions of researchers who truly believe that the educational system harms learners in ways that can be equated with violence.

Although not all researchers feel as strongly as Epp (1996) and her colleagues, there has been growing concern with adolescence as a time of risk. The following facts underlie this:

- the dropout rate before completing high school,
- adolescents have the highest arrest rate of any age group,
- an increasing number of adolescents consume alcohol and other drugs on a regular basis,
- a prevalence of several types of clinical dysfunctions increase at this time, for example, an increase in the prevalence in depression and eating disorders, and
- the incidence of attempted and completed suicides increase dramatically with the onset of adolescence (Eccles, Lord, & Buchanan, 1996).

There are an increasing number of learners who find it difficult to adjust to school demands, rebel at adult authority, and who are confused and easily distracted. The incidence of violent and assaultive behaviour in school settings is continuously growing (Poulou, 2005). It is evident from news reports over the radio, television and in various printed forms that adolescents in South Africa are involved in acts of suicide, depression, drug abuse, highjackings, criminal activities, assaults, murders, and many more manifestations of violence (Poggenpoel & Myburg, 2003).

Research suggests that the transition to junior high school may contribute to the emergence of these problems (Eccles, *et. al.*, 1996). Adolescents leave behind the comfortable familiarity of elementary school; a classroom they know as well as their living room, and a teacher they saw more often than their parents. They also leave the comfortable security of being the oldest and the biggest learners in school. What could be worse, for kids who desperately desire a feeling of connection, than to plop them in a giant factory of a school, a huge, seemingly uncaring place where they feel invisible, anonymous, lost? (Kohn (1999) found these to be the exact words many learners use to describe their situation to anyone who bothers to ask.) More opportunities are available in secondary school – and more is expected from them (Cobb, 1992; Hanna, 1998).

This transition occurs at a time when most young adolescents are also experiencing the physical, psychological, and social changes associated with adolescence, including the new role demands presented by parents, peers, and teachers. Moreover, the environments

of high schools are usually quite different from those of elementary schools. Several investigators have argued that those differences undermine healthy development for many adolescents (Simmons & Blyth, 1987, in Eccles, *et. al.*, 1996). Difficulties with this transition are not universal. Some adolescents adapt well to the transition, while others find the transition more difficult.

The seriousness of the problems characterising many of today's adolescents has heralded a call for research that focuses less on strictly *person* variables (for example, values and anger) and more on the kinds of *social* experiences that represent risk or protective factors in development during adolescence. (Kohn, 1999; Roeser & Eccles, 1998).

Membership within the school organisation also teaches learners to conform to certain expected norms such as obeying school rules, following teachers' instructions, and cooperating with members of the classroom group. Learners are expected to internalise school rules and procedures and to function within the school environment without much personal supervision. Although learners may differ in their willingness to conform to or approve existing rules and regulations, they all learn that the expectation for conformity is a central component of the high school organisation and structure (Cummings, 1995).

The high school also affords learners opportunities to participate in a variety of school-sponsored extracurricular activities. Participation gives learners visibility and some degree of status. For many learners who do not go to university or college, high school may provide their last opportunity to participate in such activities. Others may discover a skill through a high school activity that provides a foundation for a lifelong career direction or leisure-time activity (Cummings, 1995).

4.4 Dropout behaviour

In what she called her year of "ethnographic hanging out" in New York City, social psychologist Michelle Fine (1991, in Black, 1998) found dropouts on street corners and in probation offices, and she tracked down others who were working in such places as cosmetic counters and fast food restaurants. But some dropouts, Fine discovered, end up in jail, and some die an early death.

Discussion of the factors that influence scholastic success and school completion reflect the growing recognition that learners' academic participation and performance are determined by cultural factors, such as the uneven distribution of resources and the changing demands on the labour force; by sociological factors, such as the goals and strategies of educational institutions; by the climates provided by specific schools, families and neighbourhoods; and by the individual personalities, abilities, and motivations of learners and their teachers, parents and peers. Each of these factors has its ideological and disciplinary proponents, and each leads to different implication about the targets of educational reform designed to optimise learner learning and school completion (Skinner & Sandler, 1997).

The term 'at-risk youth' has become a well-known label that is used to describe learners who are believed to be 'at-risk' for school failure and dropout. Criteria for identifying youth as being 'at-risk' are based on research reports on the characteristics of youth who dropout and the school's experience with factors that appear to correlate highly with learners who leave school before matriculation (Franklin & Streeter, 1995; French & Conrad, 2001). Such youth have historically been low achievers, show limited skill performance, have little motivation and few aspirations, do not engage in classroom and school activities, and often exhibit disruptive or delinquent behaviours (Cummings, 1995).

There is variability in how learners go about dropping out of school. Whereas some learners formally withdraw from school at one point, many learners leave through a gradual process, as evidenced by their increasingly infrequent attendance and frequent suspensions and expulsions. The decision to drop out of school seldom has a single catalyst. Thus, becoming a dropout is actually more of an evolutionary process for most high-risk learners rather than a momentary act of withdrawal (Ianni & Orr, 1996; Obasohan & Kortering, 1996).

According to Ianni and Orr (1996), the decision to drop out is neither a willful individual act nor is it the result of irresistible pressure from social forces. Rather, it takes place somewhere in the interaction between the inner and outer worlds of each learner. According to Hess (2000), issues related to noncompletion of school may be best understood by examining the interconnections among individual characteristics,

environments, and sociocultural factors. From this perspective, the individual possesses characteristics that are neither positive nor negative; they are viewed in terms of their appropriateness within the individual's social environment. Attention to individual characteristics is important only in terms of their influence upon the individual's interactions with his/her environment. Therefore, emphasis is given to the skills, attitudes, and behaviours that direct a child's interactions within the school setting.

In all cases, the role of the learner as presented by the school, the family, peers, and the other social forces and perceived and experienced by the individual (through a conflict of expectations, roles, and culture) may not be congruent with a dropout's own developing identity, and so the feeling results that "school is not for me" (Ianni & Orr, 1996). Thus, although the focus of inquiry should be on early school leaving as a marker event, the search for causative and contributory factors needs to reach beyond the school into the community and the larger society to look at their effects on all learners as well as back into the socialisation, enculturation, and developmental history of individual learners.

Some theories and research on dropping out have focused on developmental causes, particularly the formation of a sense of self and how schooling experiences and institutional factors can thwart this for some adolescents (Ianni & Orr, 1996). As the examination of the process rather than the event of dropping out focuses more systematically on the developmental process leading to the decision to leave school, the question of how psychosocial needs are involved and what assets or deficits contribute to the presence or absence of risk factors become central. To some extent, development involves the emergence or unfolding of biological changes at various stages in life. Both the external and the internal changes impact on the achievement of the sense of self or identity, but these do not come evenly or on equal schedules for all young people. This variability in growth rates and development can produce considerable anxiety and frustration for early or late-maturing learners with important implications for self-image and esteem. The development of these two psychological qualities could influence subsequent positive and negative behaviour, such as dropping out.

It has been established in Chapter 2 that most theories of the development of self-identities are based on some form of reciprocity between the self-concept and the social structure (Ianni & Orr, 1996). It follows that how peers and teachers in his/her school life

view a learner is of considerable importance as to how he/she comes to identify himself/herself as a successful learner. One element of such a positive self-image is the need for a sense of personal competence, capability, and efficacy. Finn (1989, in Ianni & Orr, 1996) identifies school failure as the starting point in a cycle that may culminate in the learner's rejecting, or being rejected by, the school. Adolescents who have difficulty with the coursework, who have failed a course, or stay behind a grade are at risk. Many of these adolescents are in non-college tracts, which contribute to dropping out (Atwater, 1996).

Obasohan and Kortering (1996) found that teachers perceive learners as 'pulled' away from school due to learner-related and family-related factors, suggesting that dropping out is beyond their control. The learners, meanwhile, feel they are 'pushed' out of school because of the school context. They also suggest that the decision is beyond their control. This difference in perception might stem from a poor teacher-learner relationship and a failure to take responsibility on both sides.

Attitudes to school are logically related to other belief systems. Thus, learners with less positive attitudes to school are less likely to believe in self-effort strategies for getting a job and appear to be more doubtful about career advice. Importantly, these adolescents also appear to be more externally and fatalistically oriented (Heaven, 2001). "Hope in the future" significantly predicts dropout versus graduate status for at-risk learners. Learners who feel positive about their futures are less likely to drop out (Worrell & Hale, 2001).

Related to the concept of "hope for the future", is Cotterell's (1996) concept of "alienation". The concept of alienation was originally employed by Marx to capture the sense of social separation between the worker and his/her work, which left the work devoid of meaning and purpose. Later writers, especially those writing during and after the Second World War, linked alienation with notions of marginalisation and estrangement from social institutions. This alienation produced a pervading loneliness and distrust of others and a loss of purpose in life.

In the current societal context, where youth access to the workforce is increasingly delayed and replaced by extended forms of education and training, a new kind of alienation appears to be emerging. In younger adolescents it presents a carelessness and lack of persistence with respect to classroom activities. In older youth it is characterised

by a lack of purpose and direction, difficulties in forming a career identity, and a reluctance to make commitments to future plans.

Some learners struggle to find meaning in school tasks and to connect to the school, and thus they drop out of school. Early school leaving does not necessarily indicate a rejection of education as such, but rather the structures that exist within the school system.

The psychological dimension of alienation has particular poignancy when we focus on the difficulties individual young people encounter in resolving uncertainty about the future. At a global level, there are concerns about nuclear war, destruction of the ozone layer, and the greenhouse effect. At the level of interpersonal relationships, there is the risk of AIDS and the sense of lost possibilities due to the lack of employment opportunities. Without a perspective on the future, and a way of making the future imminent through some kind of recurring goal-seeking procedure that reflects the individuals' personality, motivational processes are stalled.

A number of conditions both at home and at school predict those who are most likely to drop out. One of the most important is the parents' educational level (Cobb, 1992; Obasohan & Kortering, 1999). Parents serve as models for educational success; adolescents with parents or older siblings who have dropped out of high school are more likely to drop out themselves. The relationship between parental education and socio-economic status is equally important. Socio-economic status confers numerous advantages as one moves up the economic ladder. Adolescents from higher income homes have broader cultural experiences, attend better schools, have parents with more time (and skills) to help with homework, and experience lower levels of stress within the family (Entwisle & Alexander, 1990 in Cobb, 1992). Children living in poverty lack many of the advantages enjoyed by other children. Their nutritional and health may be less adequate. Often living in crowded conditions, they may have fewer places to do homework. Their homes may lack the books and computers that are found in more economically advantaged households (Feldman, 1998).

Parental attitude towards education is also important. Parents living in poverty are less likely to be involved in their children's schooling – a factor that is related to school success (Feldman, 1998; Obasohan & Kortering, 1999).

The level of stress within the family as well as family composition is another important predictor of dropping out (Cobb, 1992; Franklin & Streeter, 1992). Learners from stressful homes and those where the father is absent are more likely to drop out of school.

Current at-risk criteria are not sensitive to all the different types of potential dropout adolescents. The diversity of the dropout problem is very complex and encompasses many factors beyond those typically associated with the problem (Franklin & Streeter, 1995). The problem of dropout in the USA was historically associated with minority and disadvantaged youth but now appears to be increasing among majority youth. Reports from educational literature and dropout statistics indicate that many high-achieving adolescents from majority groups who are from lower, middle and upper-middle class backgrounds are failing in school and are at risk for dropout. Little research exists that specifically identifies the at-risk characteristics of these teenagers. Dropping out of school is not confined to a handful of minority learners but represents a larger systemic failure (Hahn, Danzberger & Lefkowitz, 1987 in Franklin & Streeter, 1995).

Most adolescents who experience school failure or dropout would not be considered 'at-risk' by many of the conventional definitions used by schools. In fact, many of these learners, because of their seemingly lack of social disadvantage and abilities to perform academically, are viewed as learners who are more likely to succeed when compared with other high risk groups such as those who are low achieving and raised in poverty (French & Conrad, 2001).

Success in school is certainly a function of ability but differences in ability do not explain all of the variance in attainment (Emler, 1993). Academic achievement can also be a function of the child's adjustment to the particular requirements of the bureaucratic regime that he/she encounters there, accommodation to the routine and discipline of a formal timetable, and to the authority of the teachers. Adolescents who drop out tend to be habitually tardy, and they cut classes or skip school entirely. When they do show up, they're often either suspended or expelled for breaking school rules (Black, 1998).

Middle class youth who drop out of school may have some of the same social, psychological and family difficulties as their counterparts from lower socio-economic groups. Social advantage, therefore, may be relative to the multiple contexts in which adolescents function. Middle class youth who drop out may not be as poor or have a

history of oppression, racism and institutional discrimination and disadvantage experienced by certain ethnic groups but they may be 'at-risk' for special disadvantage due to their dropout status.

Dropout status, for example, may cause these middle class adolescents to experience alienation from their social roots and values because dropping out of school is not acceptable in their social environment. They may be viewed as failures, and this can lead to lower self-esteem and other emotional and behavioural problems. It also places them 'at risk' for downward mobility in an increasingly competitive job market.

In order for successful dropout prevention programmes to be developed for middle class adolescents at risk to dropout, it is important to gain an understanding of the reasons why these adolescents drop out, and the academic, psychological and family factors that may be contributing to the dropout behaviour.

Franklin and Streeter (1995) conducted a study to assess the 'at-risk' characteristics of a group of 200 middle class dropouts. The results of this study point to the complexity of dropout patterns. Reasons given may be grouped into two broad categories: psychosocial and school correlates. The top three reasons for learners leaving school are reported to be associated with their inability to get along with the school environment. Emerging as the number one reason is the fact that learners encountered difficulty with the classroom and academic experience. Authority problems, the second ranked reason, indicates that learners were having difficulty getting along with the school structure and perceived that these difficulties led to their decision to drop out. The third cited reason of truancy indicated that many of these learners were alienated from the school experience before dropping out. These reasons emerged above the psychosocial problems, such as family problems and substance abuse, which was a characteristic of a subsample.

School and academic assessment point to the fact that these adolescents have considerable difficulties in their academic performance and personal relationship with the school. These difficulties happened despite their documented abilities to achieve academically. From this vantage point, the adolescents were bright underachievers who didn't get along well with the school environment (Atwater, 1996).

Data of this study seem to support the presence of psychosocial 'at-risk' characteristics in this dropout sample and would indicate that the presence of mental problems,

substance abuse, learning disorders and related family dysfunction may be interacting as important correlates of dropout patterns. However, these psychosocial patterns only existed in a subsample of approximately 50% of the adolescent sample.

Behavioural and psychosocial functioning of a subsample of the adolescents may have contributed to some of these relationship difficulties. It is difficult, for example, to attend school, focus on your studies and get along with authority figures if you are abusing drugs. Hurrelmann (1990) found that the frequency of substance use, delinquent behaviour, and health impairment increases when adolescents are in difficult scholastic achievement situations and are confronted by a high degree of parental expectations. An additional causal pathway may include out-of-school behaviour such as pregnancy.

However, given the importance of school climate on learner achievement and dropout patterns, these results concerning the adolescents' personal relationship with the school may also be interpreted as significant correlates of dropout patterns for middle class youth.

Kagan (1990, in Worrell & Hale, 2001) argues that schools create the sense of alienation in at-risk learners. Thus, the classroom teacher will treat the learner who is labelled 'at-risk' or 'potential dropout' differently (for example, lower expectations, fewer chances to demonstrate knowledge). He/she will experience a different social climate in the classroom than his/her classmates. The most frequent perception found among dropouts is that their teachers do not care about them (Obasohan & Kortering, 1996). The altered social climate will affect the learner's perception of the school, leading the learner to identify with other learners who are similarly labelled, and will ultimately lead to dropping out.

French and Conrad (2001) found evidence that antisocial behaviour contributes to school dropout. However, the causal processes that underlie this finding are not well understood and require further research. One possibility is to look at the relation between antisocial behaviour and school engagement. Disciplinary sanctions and negative exchanges between school officials and antisocial learners, involvement with other antisocial learners, as well as the negative impact of antisocial behaviour on academic success, may also contribute to low academic engagement by antisocial learners.

Highly controlling practices in the classroom with troubled children are especially problematic, leading to escalating behaviour problems and plummeting motivation. Teachers often respond to children who show poor achievement histories or disruptive behaviours such as inattention, impulsivity, and aggression with controlling methods (for example, sanctions or public feedback). Although a degree of structure and control is critical in helping these learners to tackle their studies, excessive use of extrinsic reward and behavioural sanctions that require compliance undermine these children's intrinsic motivation and lead to an escalation of negative behaviour and feelings of defiance in emotionally troubled children (Eccles & Roeser, 1999).

Furthermore, antisocial behaviour may also interfere with participation in extracurricular activities. Involvement in extracurricular activities has been shown to reduce the likelihood that at-risk learners will drop out (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997, in French & Conrad, 2001). Learners who identify with school are more likely to participate in school and less likely to drop out. Thus, a learner's sense of belonging to school and being valued by the school is a potential protective factor (Worrell & Hale, 2001).

As adolescents move from the primary to the secondary school, schools are increasingly less supportive and less rewarding for many of them (Roeser & Eccles, 1998). Adolescents who fail to complete school often cite a lack of opportunities for success at school, low teacher expectations, and low social support from teachers and administrators as the most important reasons for their decision to leave school.

Much of the classic work on peer influences on development focused on the negative effects of peer groups on adolescents' commitment to doing well in school. More recently, investigators have turned their attention to understanding the specific mechanisms by which peer groups can either support or undermine positive development through their impact on school engagement and involvement in other positive activities (Eccles & Roeser, 1999). This research has documented that children tend to cluster together in peer groups that share the same motivational orientations and activity preferences. Such clustering serves to reinforce their existing motivational orientation and activity preferences, leading to a strengthening of these individual differences over time. Whether such effects are positive or negative depends on the nature of the peer groups' motivational values and behavioural orientations. For example, high-achieving

children who seek out other high achievers as friends should end up with more positive academic motivation as a result of their interactions with like-motivated children. In contrast, low achievers who become involved with a group of friends who are also low achievers could become even less motivated to do school work and more interested in other activity settings.

French and Conrad (2001) examined the hypothesis that peer relationship processes may be important for understanding dropout. Cairns, Cairns, and Neckerman (1989, in French & Conrad, 2001) showed that interacting clusters of adolescents who are characterized by high aggression and low achievement are particularly likely to drop out of school. This lead French and Conrad (2001) to speculate that children join these deviant peer groups as a consequence of their rejection by normal peers and an attraction to others who reinforce and accept their deviant behaviour (Dishion, Andrews, & Crosby, 1995, in French & Conrad, 2001). Thus, it is possible that relatively complex developmental processes occur whereby social status, aggression, and low achievement contribute to membership in deviant peer groups during adolescence. Among the many negative consequences of following such a path is school dropout. Very often, adolescents feel impelled by their friends to engage in new behaviour (Heaven, 2001).

The organisation of schooling may also contribute to antisocial behaviour. Large city high schools (in the USA) tend to sort pupils into streams or curriculum tracks according to attainment. Emler (1993) speculate that this selection will be sensitive to their orientations toward institutional authority. Hence those with the least positive orientations will regularly find themselves placed by the school in the company of others with similar orientations. This provides a necessary condition, namely like-minded associates, for the most consistent pursuit of anti-social behaviour.

Why are adolescents as a group less positive to authority than other age groups? There is in effect a cycle from the idealisation of authority in childhood, through disillusionment and increasing cynicism in adolescence, to realism in adulthood. A definite explanation is beyond the capacity of existing research evidence (Emler, 1993). If one is allowed to speculate, however, then one source of these attitude changes may be cognitive changes. Once children have worked out how formal authority is supposed to operate, at around 10 to 12 years, they may then become increasingly disenchanted by the

way it appears to operate in practice. Late adolescence and adulthood may see the emergence of further insight, perhaps on the basis of accumulated experience, into the practicalities of organisational functioning. Adolescents are only occasionally called upon to exercise authority themselves. If this role becomes a more common experience in adulthood, then it may contribute to increasingly positive views about authority.

Identities pursued and expressed through deviant styles of dress, drug use, life-styles and sexual preferences all potentially introduce conflicts with school authorities in its attempts to regulate conduct. The extent to which such conflict is incidental or central to these identities, is one possible avenue for future inquiry. Another is the extent to which school systems are sensitive to individual differences in orientation to authority and the different ways in which these systems may be organised to exact compliance.

In spite of the expanded responsibility that schools hold for social development and the increase in functions that they perform, the dominant public opinion is that education is failing as a social institution in both educational and socialization roles. Overburdened and unappreciated, school personnel often believe children's problems stem from families not being involved enough in their children's education (Terry, 2002).

Programmes that effectively reach dropouts are those that simultaneously address the many problems these adolescents face at home as well as at school. Many adolescents, especially those from low socio-economic families, need to work to help support themselves and their families. Innovative work-study programmes that combine academic coursework with work in a job setting for which learners also receive academic credit have been successful, as have those that establish the connection for learners between finishing high school and making a living (Cobb, 1992).

The good news is that dropping out of school does not seem to dampen an adolescent's optimism completely. Schwartz (1995, in Black, 1998) found that some dropouts do not think leaving school means they will 'sacrifice their futures', and they do not think their education is over forever. Schwartz points out that most dropouts intend to complete high school and many plan to attend vocational schools and eventually go on to college. Ianni and Orr (1996, 298) refer to this phenomenon as "exercising appropriate consumer behaviour". If the school is not meeting his/her needs, a learner may take a positive step (rather than a negative one) by leaving. This may be a reaction to poor teaching, uncaring

interest, lack of culturally relevant curriculum, and a poor climate for learning caused by the deficient physical and social environment. For quite a few dropouts their deferred dreams do come true.

Dropping out seems easy to do but difficult to prevent (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002). However, Black (1998) offers the following suggestions:

- Intervene early. Identify low achievers in elementary school and help them to learn and to enjoy learning.
- Identify potential dropouts by examining attendance records, beginning in the early grades.
- Pay attention to children's social and emotional needs, which may be hurdles to learn (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002).
- Make home visits to meet and talk to parents and other family members about the importance of attending school, learning, and achieving.
- Make the secondary school curriculum relevant to learners, and make expectations and standards clear. Schools need to broaden their curricula to include such ideas as expanded work/study options, credit for experience programs, and alternative-learning centres to provide young people with an increased chance at recognition (Adams, Gullotta, & Markstrom-Adams, 1994).
- Do not let learners slip away unnoticed – talk to them about staying in school. When children announce that they are dropping out, set up interviews with them and their parents (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002).
- Make it easy for dropouts to return to school, perhaps in an evening programme that accommodates their schedules and their child-care and transportation needs.

4.5 Teachers' experience of their school environment

Since 1994 there have been political changes in South Africa that had implications for almost every sphere of society. This is especially true for the school and classroom environment. The transformation in schools seems to have confused teachers as to their roles and even their own identities. Teachers are experiencing stress-related problems. These problems manifest in various forms of negative behaviour, such as alcohol abuse, absenteeism, and a breakdown in relationships between teachers and learners, teachers

and colleagues, and teachers and their families. Little or no information is available on how teachers experience their school environment.

Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2002) therefore undertook a research project to explore and describe how teachers experience their school environment in a society in transition and to derive guidelines to promote their health. The results of their study will be reported here.

We are living in an era that is characterised by extreme complexity and uncertainty. It is important to understand the effects that change has on people, in this case the teachers. These changes are for instance the move from 19 departments of education to one national department and nine provincial departments, and mono-cultural schools which changed into multicultural schools. Along with this process came rationalization, retrenchment and redeployment of teachers.

A qualitative, explorative, descriptive and contextual research design was utilised to gather data. Forty-eight secondary schoolteachers from urbanized areas in Gauteng were interviewed in focus groups. The interview process was directed by one central question: How is it for you in this school?

Respondents identified three themes:

Theme 1: Lack of leadership in management in schools lead to obstacles in teaching:

The obstacles in teaching because of the lack of leadership were identified by respondents as demotivation of teachers, lack of communication, experienced stress related to lack of leadership, lack of job satisfaction, inconsistencies in adhering to values, lack of staff and learner discipline, and role-players involved do not meet the criteria of their work description.

- Demotivation of teachers: The respondents are of opinion that teachers' attempts to provide learning and teaching context are not successful. They also perceive that the management team does not acknowledge their input. Respondents also verbalized that management reprimands their initiatives. They experience that they are overloaded by work and have the perception that management have the lighter load of work and do not motivate teachers, but only look for mistakes in their work.

- Lack of communication: Respondents are of the opinion that there is only one-sided communication from management. They experience management as being autocratic and not taking teachers' ideas into consideration.
- Experience stress related to lack of leadership: Respondents verbalise that they identify teachers experiencing stress because of them being ill, absent from school and leaving the profession.
- Lack of job satisfaction: Respondents perceive that there are too many problems in schools and that the leadership is reactive and not proactive. Only a few teachers are trying to address problems in the school system. Teachers are trying to make a positive difference, but get no encouragement from management. They only receive negative criticism. Respondents also experience management as not being supportive.
- Inconsistencies due to not adhering to values and principles: One respondent verbalized her frustration because management was inconsistent in adhering to values. In some schools management is also not adhering to principles of bookkeeping and conducting audit trails for spending the official money.
- Lack of staff and learner discipline: Respondents are of the opinion that management demonstrates favouritism towards some teachers and that leads to a lack of unity between teachers. Management, according to respondents, does not address behaviour of learners in a consistent manner. It seems as if there is no limit setting for learners' aggressive behaviour.

Theme 2: Teachers frustrated with the challenges of change:

Respondents verbalise that teachers are frustrated because corporal punishment is not legal anymore but viewed as a criminal offence. This clashes with teachers and parents' views that corporal punishment is necessary for discipline of learners. Teachers think that they are left in the cold with no instrument to apply discipline. They are also of opinion that implementation of new policies are not interpreted in the same manner by all teachers. This can lead to conflict between teachers and intervention from management.

Theme 3: Happiness related to having a job and colleagues:

Some respondents verbalise happiness because they experience personal and professional growth in interaction with learners and working together as a team with other teachers. They experience that they are empowered to develop as human beings.

The researchers offer the following guidelines to principals:

- the empowerment of personnel
- the mobilization of existing resources
- he/she should take responsibility for his/her school
- personnel should not blame others or circumstances
- education managers and their personnel should work towards solutions and not obstacles
- they should focus on self rather than circumstances
- one can only try to do your best – do not try to change the world
- “accept the things you cannot change and have the wisdom to know the difference...” (Alcohol anonymous)
- focus on what you need to do

Schools suffer considerable losses due to the illness and poor productivity of teachers. Absenteeism or the inability to perform consistently at a high level also affects the school. Management in schools should be structured so that clear leadership is provided.

4.6 Effective schooling

The principal problem with the above kind of research is that it is essentially descriptive and atheoretical (Galloway & Edwards, 1992). For example, Rutter *et. al.* (1979, in Galloway & Edwards, 1992) found that pot plants were more in evidence at the effective schools than in less effective schools. Does this mean that pot plants contributed to the positive ethos in these schools, or simply that no pot plants survived for long in the other schools? Were they a cause or an effect of the schools’ effectiveness? Did they contribute to the schools’ effectiveness at all? It is difficult to claim a causal relationship between factors identified in effective schools and the effectiveness of a school.

Historically, most studies of teacher practice effects focused on the impact of their personal characteristics and teaching style on learners’ overall achievement, motivation,

satisfaction, and self-concept. This research assumed that general teacher characteristics (for example, warmth) and practices (for example, directness) would enhance learner satisfaction, persistence, curiosity, and problem-solving capability through their impact on general classroom climate (for example, Cobb, 1992; Roeser & Eccles, 1998). However, more recent studies on the effect of classroom climate have disentangled factors like teacher personality and warmth from teacher instruction and managerial style. This research has shown that effects of climate depend on its association with other aspects of the teachers' beliefs and practices. For instance, Moos (1979, in Eccles & Roeser, 1999) showed that learner satisfaction, personal growth, and achievement are maximised only when teacher supportiveness is accompanied by efficient organisation, emphasis on academics, and provision of focused goal-oriented lessons. Furthermore, these practices are more common among teachers who believe they can influence their learners' performance and future achievement potential. Teacher warmth and supportiveness should affect learner effort and performance only if the teacher also runs a well-managed classroom (Eccles & Roeser, 1999).

An evolution is needed in the rules and in the relationships between the teachers and the learners in order to recognise the growing maturity of the adolescents. Because of the diversity of adolescents, not all learners need the same degree of structure. Still, limits must be established for learners to prevent them from harm, and to let them know that adults respect them enough to include them in the limit-setting process. Effective schools involve learners in establishing rules and deciding on consequences. They clearly state behavioural rules that are understood and accepted by teachers and learners, and approach discipline as part of learning responsibility, rather than punishment. Policies concerning attendance, suspension and promotion must not only be fair, but understood by the individual learners that are affected by them (Brinson, 1996; Johnson, Jason & Betts, 1990; Martin, 1993).

Classroom practices related to the structure of authority are important for the development of children's regulation of their achievement behaviour and for aspects of their emotional adjustment (Boggiano, 1992, in Eccles & Roeser, 1999). Classroom environments that do not provide an adequate amount of autonomy undermine intrinsic motivation, mastery orientation, ability self-concepts and expectations, and self-direction.

Instead it induces a learned helpless response to difficult tasks or fosters confrontation. Classroom settings in which children are given opportunities to make choices, pursue their interests, and contribute to classroom discussions and decisions, inculcate a sense of autonomous, self-determined behaviour in relation to schoolwork. This sense of autonomy is related to children's intrinsic valuing of school, quality of cognitive and affective engagement with learning, performance, and feelings of esteem and personal control. According to Dreyer (1994, in Archer, 1994) learners must be able to understand the alternatives, evaluate each one systematically, and feel a sense of personal control over the decisions he/she makes.

Schools should foster natural individual development by recognising the natural human order that displays itself daily at school. These subtle patterns of order may be termed "self-organisation". Self-organisation does not mean that all guidance is thrown aside. Guidance, however, must come in the form of support and using the adolescent's natural strengths. Teachers may prefer a superficial order, but it comes at a price. Those adolescents, who choose to subordinate themselves to it, lose a part of their souls. Considerable potential for the actualisation of unique talents and social contributions may be lost in retaining a foreclosure status. Those who rail against it are tomorrow's dropouts (Hawkins & Graham, 1997; Kroger, 1989).

One factor consistently distinguishes effective schools: the belief of the teaching staff that all learners are capable of learning (Cobb, 1992; Roeser & Eccles, 1998). These teachers have high expectations of their learners. Expecting the most from their learners and letting them know when they have come through, are just as important as the latest software and the number of books on the shelves (Good & Wernstein, 1986 in Cobb, 1992; Johnson, *et. al.*, 1990). According to Dreyer (1994, in Roeser & Eccles, 1998), an identity-enhancing curriculum promotes self-acceptance and positive feedback from teachers.

Recently, educational psychologists started investigating the implications of teachers' beliefs regarding the nature of ability. These researchers have found that some teachers perceive intellectual abilities as stable and largely inherited potentials; others perceive intellectual abilities as acquired skills. These beliefs affect the goals teachers and learners have for learning. These goals, in turn, affect both the teachers' instructional practices

and the learners' learning behaviours. Two achievement goals can be distinguished, namely performance and mastery goals. These two goals are linked to two different patterns of instruction. The first pattern, called an ability-goal orientation, emphasises relative ability, social comparison, and competition. Grouping by ability, differential rewards for high achievers, public evaluative feedback, academic competitions, and other practices can promote the notion that academic success means outperforming others and proving ones' ability. Unfortunately, most adolescents are not the best and thus may not receive rewards and recognition in classrooms that emphasize relative ability. In ability-oriented classrooms, learners are more likely to use low-level strategies to learn, experience more anxiety and negative affect, and implement strategies to make themselves look smarter or avoid looking dumber than other learners, instead of learning the material. Learners who lack confidence in their academic competence are particularly vulnerable in such environments. Learned helpless responses to academic failure, the avoidance of engaging in work, and negative emotional experience are more likely to beset low-ability learners in ability-focused environments (Eccles & Roeser, 1999).

By contrast, teachers who view intelligence as acquired skills, tend to adopt a task-goal orientation in their instructional practices. Such an orientation stresses self-improvement and effort as the major hallmarks of academic success. These teachers acknowledge individual effort and improvement regardless of a learner's current ability. They provide choice and collaborative work. They emphasise the mastering of new content, learning from mistakes, and continuing to try as highly valued hallmarks of success. Such practices reduce learners' concerns about their ability relative to peers and the feelings of self-consciousness, anxiety, and disenfranchisement that often accompany such concerns. In these mastery-focused environments, learners use deeper processing strategies to learn, report more positive and less negative affective states, and seem less concerned with their current ability and more concerned with task mastery, understanding, and self-improvement (Eccles & Roeser, 1999).

Effective schooling practices emphasise improvement, effort, and skill mastery rather than comparison with peers' academic performance (Johnson, Jason & Betts, 1990; Roeser & Eccles, 1998). Teachers are encouraged to teach low-achieving adolescents

‘learning strategies’ as opposed to simple remedial work. Adolescents who ‘learn how to learn’ will be better able to learn new skills over time, and the learning strategies approach compels learners to take responsibility for their own education.

There are many areas in which learners might achieve, including schoolwork, sport, hobbies, domestic skills, and forming friendships. Learners’ willingness to set high standards and to work hard to attain them may depend in part on the value of accomplishing these objectives or winning recognition for their efforts. They are more likely to work hard when they think they have a reasonable prospect of succeeding than when they see little chance achieving their objectives. In other words, expectation of success or failure is a powerful determinant of achievement behaviour: learners who expect to achieve usually do, whereas those who expect to fail may spend little time and effort pursuing goals that they believe to be out of reach (Shaffer, 1989).

Learners’ achievement behaviour depends, in part, on their *locus of control*. Locus of control indicates the extent to which they believe that their behaviour influences their outcomes. Learners with an internal locus of control assume that they personally are responsible for their successes and failures. By contrast, learners with an external locus of control believe their successes and failures depend more on luck, fate, or the actions of others than on their own abilities or efforts.

An internal locus of control is conducive to achievement: learners must necessarily assume that their efforts will lead to positive outcomes if they are to strive for success and become high achievers. Parents who stress self-reliance and set clear performance standards are creating a predictable world for their children – one that will enable them to determine whether their own efforts to achieve important goals have been successful or not.

It is interesting to note that high achievers do not feel personally responsible for their failures. They will often externalise them, blaming poor performance on tasks that are too difficult or on tests that are ambiguous. Weiner’s (1986, in Shaffer, 1989) attribution theory of achievement offers a possible explanation for this seemingly inconsistency. According to Weiner’s (1986) theory, high achievers generally attribute their successes to stable, internal causes (high ability) and their failures to unstable factors (for example, insufficient effort that they can do something about). By contrast, low achievers might

attribute successes to unstable causes (for example, luck or high effort) while ascribing their failures to stable, internal causes (for example, low ability). This could undermine their achievement motivation. As children progress through their school years and their grades begin to reflect the quality of their work rather than their effort expenditure, they begin to differentiate effort from ability and to make the kinds of attributes that Weiner's (1986) theory anticipates.

Do these attributes really affect learners' achievement motivation and their future accomplishments? The answer is yes, and this is confirmed by Dweck's (1978, in Shaffer, 1989) research on *learned helplessness*. Of interest in her research are the kinds of attributions that learners offer to account for the outcomes of their performances and their willingness to persist at similar achievement tasks in the future.

Dweck (1978) and her colleagues found that there are reliable individual differences in the ways learners react to achievement outcomes - particularly to failure experiences. Some learners appear to be 'mastery oriented': they tend to attribute failures to unstable causes such as insufficient effort. They will often show increased persistence and improved performance on subsequent achievement tasks. By contrast, other learners who view their failures as stemming from stable, internal causes (for example, a lack of ability), often show little effort expenditure and a marked deterioration of performance on future achievement tasks. In fact, many who fall into this latter category appear to give up in the face of failure and are suddenly incapable of solving problems of the kind that they have easily mastered only a short time earlier. It appeared to Dweck (1978) that these children were displaying a form of learned helplessness: if failures are attributed to a lack of ability that the child can do little about, then there is little reason to keep working hard at these or similar problems. Consequently, the child simply stops trying and acts helpless.

It is important to note that learners who display this learned-helplessness syndrome are not necessarily the least competent members of a typical classroom. It appears that almost anyone, even highly competent learners, who have succeeded in the past, can eventually stop trying and act helpless in the face of failure.

Dweck (1978) and her colleagues believe that the ways teachers evaluate their learners can play a very important role in promoting either 'mastery' or a 'helpless' orientation.

The pattern of evaluation should encourage learners to attribute successes to stable causes (high ability) and failures to unstable ones (insufficient effort), thereby promoting the development of a mastery orientation.

Mantzicopoulos (1997) conducted research to study social/emotional factors related to learners' coping strategies. He found that learners who coped well with their school failure enjoyed doing well at school and tended to attribute their failure experience to unstable rather than stable factors. Learners who relied on self-blame following the failure encounter, tended to attribute their failure to stable, rather than unstable, factors. These learners reported more negative feelings (scared, guilty, disappointed, angry) than learners who engaged in positive coping strategies. These findings support the inference that the experience of negative emotions following failure is more likely to generate threat/harm rather than challenge appraisals. These threat/harm appraisals, in turn, may serve as a signaling mechanism to the child that he/she has inadequate resources for managing the stressful experience effectively. Threat/harm emotions may indeed act as blinders that restrict the child's ability to evaluate the options that he/she has available for shaping the situation to a desired outcome. Moreover, as the results of this study suggest, negative affect may predispose children to be immobilised by painful self-blame feelings that might prevent them from exploring problem-focused ways to meet the demands of the academic failure.

Teachers should be aware of personal preferences that might preclude their acceptance of differences in learners' learning and behaviour patterns. They should also be trained to recognise covert as well as overt symptoms of problems. Teachers should familiarise themselves with diagnostic techniques and resources that can help learners with various problems. They should systematically monitor learners' progress on an ongoing basis. Teachers should adopt new modes of teaching as they face the changing demographics, technology and its applications, and the changing face of education delivery (Cobb, 1992; McKnight-Taylor, 1997).

Parent involvement in their child's schooling has emerged consistently as an important factor in promoting both academic achievement and socio-emotional well-being (Eccles & Roeser, 1999). Parent involvement in the form of monitoring academic activities and homework, providing assistance with homework, engaging children in educational

enrichment activities outside of school, and active participation in classroom activities and in school organisations (for example, parent-teacher associations) all represent different forms of involvement. Such parental involvement communicates positive educational expectations, interest, and support to the child. Parent involvement also helps to establish a safety net of concerned adults (parents and teachers) that can support children's academic and socio-emotional development and assist children if adjustment problems should arise (Eccles & Roeser, 1999). Families should become allied with school staff by encouraging mutual respect, trust and communication. Reaching these goals requires time, commitment and effort. However, the results can far exceed the efforts, especially when they improve the overall welfare of adolescents (McKnight-Taylor, 1997).

Schools are increasingly being called upon to provide adolescents with traditional academic resources as well as with direction and guidance in their socialisation. Preventive educational interventions can enhance personal competencies among school-age children. Considering the social problems that adolescents must confront as well as their cognitive developmental level, adolescence may be the ideal time for preventions (Johnson, *et. al.*, 1990). Cognitive and affective concerns should be interfaced, not separated (Hanna, 1998).

There is evidence that learners' academic achievement and social performance are related when considering overall social competence in the classroom. In addition, there appears to be some general overlap between cognitive and social domains of functioning. From this perspective, social competence can be viewed as a composite of adolescents' adaptive behaviour and social skills. Some research findings suggest that children maintaining high academic achievement tend to be liked by and interact positively with peers. Poor academic performance is often related to problems in successful adaptation to school social settings (Johnson, *et. al.*, 1990). Educators' rigid emphasis on basic academic skills could narrow the educational process and dismiss opportunities for school-based efforts to promote learners' socialisation and sense of connectedness. Development of basic skills should be emphasised.

Investigators in the field of social skills training continue to debate the criteria for competent social behaviour, and no consensus has been reached (Johnson, *et. al.*, 1990).

I view social skills in the school setting as a complex set of skills – encompassing academic performance, cooperative behaviours, social initiation behaviours, assertive behaviours, peer reinforcement behaviours, communication skills, problem-solving skills, and social efficacy, which allow the adolescent the ability to successfully mediate interactions between peers, parents, teachers, and other adults.

In general, the objectives of most social skills training (SST) programmes are to enhance learners' skill knowledge or concepts, help them translate this knowledge into effective social behaviour, and promote skill generalisation and maintenance across social settings (Johnson, *et. al.*, 1990). This involves basic communication, decision-making, negotiation, and conflict resolution skills. It is possible that SST can improve learners' peer relationships, contribute to their academic success and attachment to the school.

Newman and Newman (1987, in Cummings, 1995) describe the development of social competencies that occur within the context of the high school setting as a vital part of the total learning experience, even though learners' social development may be a less direct objective of the institution than is their cognitive development. Because of their daily interactions with teachers and peers, participation in a variety of school activities, and various demands for decision-making, high school learners have many opportunities to expand their social skills.

Restructuring school environments can promote social competency in adolescents. Access to clear, appropriate contingencies (for example, teacher and peer rewards for prosocial behaviour) and the absence of aversive conditions (for example, failure or impersonal teacher/learner contacts) within a school environment can potentially prevent adolescent antisocial behaviour, such as drug abuse and violence (Hurrelmann, 1990; Johnson, *et. al.*, 1990).

In Hurrelmann's (1990) opinion, the school's potential for social support should be strengthened. If schools, besides being institutions providing knowledge and intellectual training, also become social platforms, it opens up important experiences for the personal development in many dimensions. The school should offer working and training opportunities with different learning situations for adolescents that are meaningful and

important for them. A good school with a pleasant climate can be a social area with preventative effect for anti-social behaviour and health impairments.

Teachers face enormous challenges meeting both the academic and social-emotional needs of learners in their classrooms. It is estimated that between 15 and 22 percent of adolescents in the U.S.A. have social-emotional difficulties warranting intervention. Another estimate is that one in six learners internationally presents with behavioural problems (Poulou, 2005). Learners at risk for school failure are particularly vulnerable for social-emotional problems. Regular education classrooms include ever-increasing numbers of at-risk learners (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2003). Learners demonstrate two types of social skills problems, namely:

- (a) Acquisition problems: These problems occur when a learner lacks specific social skills. Each social skill must be taught to the learner directly, for example, during role-play.
- (b) Performance problems: These problems occur when the learner knows how to perform the skill, yet fails to do so. Causes for this problem include failure to determine when to use a skill or failure to receive adequate reinforcement for skill use. In the first case, coincidental teaching can be used to encourage learners to practice skills. In the second case, classmates can be recruited to praise the learner for using the skill.

Social emotional competence includes skills such as self-awareness, control of impulsivity, co-operation, and caring about oneself and others. These skills enable learners to form healthy relationships, solve their problems and respond to the challenges of daily life. The acquisition of emotional competencies has become widely known through the idea of 'Emotional Intelligence' literature (Poulou, 2005). Emotional Intelligence supporters argue that the occurrence of academic process is not incompatible with children's emotions. Emotional learning is as important as reading or mathematics. Teaching emotional intelligence in school serves as a preventive function for aggression, depression and violence while, at the same time, enhances empathy, impulsivity and anger control, resolving differences, self-awareness, and decision-making. Social-emotional learning enables learners to effectively understand, process, manage, and

express the social and emotional aspects of their lives. These skills are essential for positive relationships and functioning within a school environment.

On the other hand, teaching social and emotional learning challenges the current paradigm of school-based learning. The emphasis on the development of cognitive, emotional and social skills at a time when academic standards are attracting more and more interest, undoubtedly poses a profound challenge to the educational community. Many teachers would argue that the responsibility for such learning lies with the parents. However, the educational system offers the most efficient and systematic means of enhancing the positive development of large numbers of adolescents. Schools could promote learners' success to the academic and social domain and at the same time prevent the development of unhealthy behaviour. Goleman (1998, in Poulou, 2005) asserted that the literature on resilient children shows that what made the difference was not the terrible circumstances of their chaotic home, but the fact that one caring adult got involved in their lives and supported them. That person was often a teacher. Thus, it seems that intervention within school settings tends to be the only promising support for these learners.

4.6.1 Learner-centered approach

Over the years, teachers have felt increased pressure to ensure learners' success in learning. To cope with this problem, educators have studied numerous facets of teaching and have noted that, to ensure learners' success, more of our attention must be directed toward creating learner-centered conditions in classrooms. In an effort to contribute to the solution of the problem, the American Psychological Association, in 1993, created its Learner-Centered Psychology Principles: Guidelines for School Redesign and Reform (Brown, D., 2003).

The premise "one teaching style fits all", which is attributed to a teacher-centered institutional approach, is not working for a growing number of diverse learner populations. Twenty-first Century classrooms challenge traditional teacher-centered curriculum to meet the increasingly diverse needs of learners and make the required increases in achievement gains. Problems occur when teaching styles conflict with learner teaching styles, often resulting in limited learning or no learning.

Alton and Trombly (2001, in Brown, K. L., 2003) offer learner-centeredness as a model for countering classroom challenges because of its viability for meeting diverse needs. Learning-centeredness classrooms place learners at the center of the classroom organization and respect their learning needs, strategies, and styles. In learner-centered classrooms, learners can be observed working individually or in pairs and small groups on distinct tasks and projects. The transition from teaching the entire group to meeting individual learner needs involves extensive planning and task-specific classroom management.

Two essential factors for a learner-centered approach in education are:

- (a) **Learner characteristics:** An essential factor for a learner-centered approach is placing the learning characteristics of all learners under the microscope with specific emphasis on low-performing learners. McCombs (1997, in Brown, K. L., 2003) explained that the focus in learner-centered approach is on individual learners' heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs. He defines learner-centered approach as a foundation for clarifying what is needed to create positive learning environments to increase the likelihood that more learners will achieve success. Milambiling (2001, in Brown, K. L., 2003) extended the learner-centered definition by characterising learner-centered education as context-sensitive. The culture of the learning context is as important to learning as the content and the methods used. Milambiling (2001) recommended curricula that address the culture of the learner within specific learning contexts.
- (b) **Teacher practices:** Direct instruction is the predominant instructional practice used in the teacher-centered approach. Instructional schedules do not allocate time for teachers to pose open-ended questions or to work on problem-based projects. Traditionally teachers decided what learners would learn, and how. Orchestration in traditional classrooms is limited because learner interaction is basically responding to teacher-directed questions. Rarely do learners construct their own learning; achievement is measured on objective tests. Approaches are needed that will transform the school environment from one that focuses on processing to one that focuses on invention, exploration, and accountability.

Henson (2003) identified five premises for learner-centered education:

- (a) Learners have distinctive perspectives or frames of reference, contributed to by their history, the environment, their interests and goals, beliefs, and ways of thinking that have to be attended to and respected.
- (b) Learners have unique differences, for example, emotional states of mind, learning rates, learning styles, stages of development, abilities, talents, and feelings of efficacy that must be taken into account to promote and ensure effective learning.
- (c) Learning is a process that occurs best when what is being learned is relevant and meaningful to the learner and when the learner is actively engaged in creating his/her own knowledge and understanding by connecting what is being learned with prior knowledge and experience.
- (d) Learning occurs best in an environment that contains positive interpersonal relationships and interactions, and in which the learner feels appreciated, acknowledged, respected, and vindicated.
- (e) Learning is seen as a fundamentally natural process because learners are naturally curious and basically interested in learning about, and mastery of, their world.

The American Psychological Association identified fourteen learner-centered psychological principles. Brown, D. M. (2003) described twelve practical conditions that emanated from these principles and made recommendations as to how teachers should create and maintain the conditions in their classrooms to ensure their learners' success in learning:

- (a) Classrooms must be learner-centered, not content-centered: Teachers must be sensitive to the fact that their teaching should not focus simply on the number of skills they teach, the number of textbooks they cover, or the tonnes of facts their learners can memorise. Teachers should initially focus on learner-related factors in order to understand which content their learners will be able to learn and benefit from most.
- (b) Teachers must believe that all learners can learn: They must respect every learner and respect their uniqueness, strength and capabilities. However, teachers must have high expectations for all their learners, setting the goal of helping all achieve to the best of their abilities. They must be aware that they are not only responsible for their

learners' intellectual development, but also for their physical, social, and emotional development.

- (c) Learner-centered classrooms must be success-oriented: Teachers must keep in mind that they are responsible for the success or failure of their learners. Therefore, teachers must ensure that all their learners are being taught at a level in which they can be successful.
- (d) Learning must be active, not passive: Learners must be actively involved by acting on their environments and constructing their own knowledge. They must learn by doing and not by sitting passively and listening.
- (e) Instruction must be developmentally appropriate: Teachers must ensure that the concepts being studied and the skills and knowledge required successfully with them, are compatible with learners' levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development.
- (f) Instruction must address many different learning styles: Teachers must remember that their learners learn in different ways. Therefore, they should employ a wide variety of approaches to teaching concepts. Some learners may learn best by listening, some by seeing, and some by being involved in hands-on activities. Others may require multisensory stimulation to ensure that they learn.
- (g) Learners must be allowed to work together: Teachers must avoid isolating learners and requiring them to work alone. Instead, learners should work together in pairs or in small groups where they share information and support each other's learning.
- (h) Teachers must be facilitators of learning and not just presenters of content: A lecture approach should be used sparingly or not at all. Teachers should focus on creating learning environments and learning opportunities for their learners. They should spend time discussing concepts with learners, and guiding them toward discovering the true meaning of concepts rather than addressing superficial details that they are required to remember.
- (i) Teachers must provide learners with choices: In learner-centered classrooms, teachers must provide learners with choices regarding their assignments and how they perform them. Because learners possess many different types of intelligence and learning styles, they should not be expected to do the same assignments the same ways.

Instead, teachers should provide a variety of ways for learners to study concepts and to work with them.

- (j) Learning must be contextually relevant: Teachers must plan instruction by considering their learners' prior knowledge. Teachers must then present concepts by starting with what learners already know and then moving toward new, unknown concepts. Information should have practical use in everyday life. Teachers should provide activities that enable learners to work with new concepts in meaningful ways. Along with this approach, teachers should require learners to solve problems related to unique contexts, for example, those encountered in school, home or community situations. In addition, teachers should provide opportunities for learners to work with the problems in different physical contexts, for example, in laboratories and on field trips.
- (k) Many different forms of assessment must be employed: Learners should apply authentic activities, which require learners to apply what they have learned to solve practical problems. However, teachers should employ other forms of assessment that provide learners with many different ways to show that they have learned. Classic measures that involve reading and writing should surely be employed. In addition, learners should be allowed to prepare exhibits, make models, conduct experiments, create portfolios, give electronic presentations, and present artistic performances. Above all, learners should not be required to take only written examinations administered only at the end of each unit. Instead, they should routinely be assessed in a variety of ways.
- (l) Teachers must be reflective practitioners: Teachers must constantly evaluate their teaching and its effect on learners. Reflection should include four stages: (1) Becoming uncomfortable with some facet of one's teaching; (2) Examining the components of the situation and exploring alternative actions; (3) Summarising outcomes and/or revelations; and (4) Taking action based on the reflections. The actions should result in making changes that lead to better teaching and learner achievement. In addition to having a positive impact on learner learning, teachers become more effective instructors; they have greater sense of self-awareness; they gain confidence, and this leads to greater teacher empowerment.

Learner-centered teachers can nurture the development of identity by practicing the abovementioned principles (Combs, 1962, in Henson, 2003). “The growing self must feel that it is involved, that it is really part of what is going on, that in some degree it is helping shape its own destiny, together with the destiny of all. But to nurture positive self-development, the classroom must be relatively free from risk and fear. The competition that characterizes most classrooms must be replaced with cooperation” (Henson, 2003, 16). John Dewey (1897, in Henson, 2003) believed that the most important goals of all schools are the development of the individual, and the development of citizenship. He believed that adequate people usually possess a deep sense of duty and responsibility.

Schools are now among the few places where young people of diverse backgrounds can be found in large numbers on a daily basis. Just by bringing them together, schools give learners a chance to develop their thinking, to practice handling their emotions, to deal with conflicts, and to learn the values of our society (Lantieri & Patti, 1996).

A related pathway is the so-called curriculum integration of the twin concepts of personal and social integration. Personal integration requires the teacher to help learners engage in real-life learning experiences so that they can incorporate them into their own understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Social integration necessitates that we help learners participate responsibly in the experiences of a democratic community. When developed simultaneously, these dispositions help learners to realise the mutually influential interplay of individuality and community and to negotiate the responsibilities of life in a democracy successfully (Bergstrom, 1998).

There is no other time in a person’s life when personal and social integration demand our full attention as during adolescence (Bergstrom, 1998). Adolescence is the most important stage to focus on issues of identity, autonomy, and intimacy. During this stage human beings establish patterns for their lives around essential questions of who they will be, how they will run their own lives, and how they will interact with others. While school systems have not traditionally taken as an explicit goal to impact upon identity formation, there are existing practices and curricula that encourage learners to reflect upon the variety of alternative identity possibilities, promote the gathering of information

necessary for the successful resolution of an identity crises, and expressive identity commitments.

To ignore this opportunity to help young adolescents develop integrity and social responsibility is to miss our “last, best chance” to positively influence their lives (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989, in Bergstrom, 1998). It is during this time when they learn the fundamentals of independence and interdependence.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

Researchers who expose themselves to ‘real-world’ psychological processes and feelings, such as love, boredom, uncertainty and anger, often realize that there are ‘more’ to these phenomena than can be conveyed by mere numbers and by crude attempts to manipulate discrete aspects of the environment one at a time. One key recommendation of researchers in social areas of psychology that deal with ‘warm and soft’ phenomena such as emotions and feelings, is to adopt research practices that (a) focus on the meaning that particular behaviours have for participants themselves (this is commonly referred to as the *hermeneutic approach*) and (b) actively involve participants in the research process (a principle referred to as *participant involvement* or *user involvement*) (Haslam & McGarty, 2003, 354). Even where participants are required to complete quantitative measurements, this usually means that they will be asked individually to discuss and explain in their own words what a particular response means and why they are making it. As a result, qualitative research focuses on words and other ways of capturing the warmer, richer elaboration of experience. In this thesis, words (rather than numbers) are used to capture the learners’ experience of their school context by means of written paragraphs and semi-structured interviews.

5.2 Qualitative research

A good deal of confusion exists among human scientists over what constitutes qualitative and quantitative research. Part of the confusion arises from the narrow association of qualitative methodology, either with particular modes of data gathering (typical interviews or fieldwork), or its non-numeric character (for example, verbatim transcriptions of subjects’ discourse and field notes from participant observation studies). However, method is more than data alone. The gathering, analysis and interpretation of data are always conducted within some broader understanding of what constitutes legitimate inquiry and warrantable knowledge. In this respect, the quantity-quality debate has been anchored within two apparently opposed epistemological positions. The two

poles are respectively known as ‘experimental’, hypothetico-deductive’ or ‘positivist’ and the ‘naturalistic’, ‘contextual’ or ‘interpretative’ approaches (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

The natural science approach held to underpin the experimental method is the dominant paradigm in psychology and other forms of quantitative social research. This paradigm emphasises universal laws of cause and effect. It is based on an explanatory framework that assumes realist ontology, that is, that reality consists of a world of objectively defined facts. The hypothetico-deductive method now forms the basis of mainstream experimental psychology. Popper (1969, in Willig, 2001) was aware of the fact that a collection of observations could never give rise to a categorical statement such as ‘a follows b’. However many times we observe that a follows b, we can never be sure that our next observation will be the same again. There is always the possibility that the next occurrence will be the exception. This is the problem of induction. Popper (1969) was also unhappy about the fact that many influential theories appear to be able to accommodate a wide range of observations, interpreting them as confirmation of the theory’s claims. It seems that no scientific theory could ever be conclusively verified. This is the problem of verification. To circumvent these problems, Popper (1969) proposed that instead of induction and verification, scientific research ought to rely upon deduction and falsification. Popper’s (1969) hypothetico-deductive method does just that. Here, theories are tested by deriving hypotheses from them that can then be tested in practice, by experiment or observation. The aim of the research is to put a theory’s claims to the test to either reject the theory or retain it for the time being. Thus, rather than looking for evidence that confirms a theory’s claims, hypothetico-deductivism looks for disconfirmation, or falsification. In this way, we can find out which claims are not true and, by a process of elimination of claims, we move closer to the truth.

In practical terms, much of the work of the natural scientist concerns the methodological minutiae of operationalisation and measurement. Quantification - the sum of standardisation, measurement and number – is crucial to the natural science approach because it renders the concepts embedded in theoretical schemes or hypotheses observable, manipulatable, and testable. The researcher should also be able to replicate and generalise his/her findings and make predictions upon the basis of observed

regularities. Not surprisingly, therefore, quantification is traditionally seen as the *sine qua non* of scientific method (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

Popper's (1969) hypothetico-deductivism was challenged in the 1960s and 1970s for failing to acknowledge the role of historical, social and cultural factors in knowledge formation. The critique of hypothetico-deductivism includes the following charges:

- Hypothetico-deductivism does not provide sufficient space for theory development. This method's reliance on hypotheses generated by existing theories forecloses the possibility of generating completely new theories.
- Hypothetico-deductivism is elitist. Since hypothetico-deductivism works with existing theories and relies upon deduction from existing systems of thought, it excludes those people who are not familiar with such theories and systems from its practice.
- Hypothetico-deductivism is a myth. Popper (1969) proposed that knowledge generation should grow, slowly but continuously. Individual scientists contribute to this process by testing their hypotheses to identify those theories which could be discarded. Thomas Kuhn (1970, in Willig, 2001) disagrees. He argues that science does not progress in an evolutionary way, but develops in leaps, through scientific revolutions leading to paradigm shifts. Here, a paradigm is stretched to accommodate all kinds of evidence. Anomalies and inconsistencies accumulate until wider socio-economic and historical processes allow a new paradigm to emerge and to provide a legitimate alternative to the previous one. Once the new paradigm has gained the upper hand, it in turn will resist change for some time to come (Haslam & McGarty, 2003; Willig, 2001).

The alternative epistemological position is expressed in the naturalistic or interpretive paradigm. It is the result of a long history of critique of the positivist scientific method as the sole basis of understanding human activity. The naturalistic paradigm, as characterised today, is described by a number of characteristics. These include a commitment to constructivist epistemologies, with:

- an emphasis on description rather than explanation,
- the representation of reality through the eyes of the participants,

- the importance of viewing the meaning of experience and behaviour in context and its full complexity,
- a view of the scientific process as generating working hypotheses rather than immutable empirical facts,
- an attitude towards theorising which emphasises the emergence of concepts from data rather than their imposition in terms of an existing theory, and
- the use of qualitative methodologies of research (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

Qualitative methods are privileged within the naturalistic approach because they are thought to meet a number of reservations about the uncritical use of quantification in social science practice, namely:

- the problem of inappropriately fixing meanings where these are variable and renegotiable in relation to their context of use,
- the neglect of the uniqueness and particularity of human experience, and
- the overwriting of internally structured subjectivities by externally imposed 'objective' systems of meaning (Haslam & McGarty, 2003; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

Qualitative research methods can be, and are, used by researchers with different epistemological positions. However, they also share a number of concerns (Willig, 2001). Firstly, qualitative researchers tend to be concerned with meaning. That is, they are interested in how people make sense of the world and how they experience events. They aim to understand 'what it is like' to experience particular conditions (for example, how it feels to underachieve in school) and how people manage certain situations (for example, how learners negotiate relations with teachers). Qualitative researchers tend, therefore, to be concerned with the quality and texture of experience, rather than with the identification of cause-effect relationships. Secondly, they tend not to work with 'variables' that are defined by the researcher before the research process begins. This is because qualitative researchers are usually interested in the meanings attributed to events by the research participants themselves. The objective of qualitative research is to describe and possibly explain events and experiences, but never to predict. Thirdly, qualitative researchers study people in their own territory, within naturally occurring settings (such as the home, school and workplace). These are 'open systems,' where

conditions continuously develop and interact with one another to give rise to a process of ongoing change. Participants' (and researchers') interpretation of events itself contributes to this process.

Alan Bryman (1988, in Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992) suggests that the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is really a technical matter whereby the choice between them depends upon their suitability in answering particular research questions, an approach commonly known as situational (Sciarra, 1999). Therefore, the researcher should always bear in mind that methods are not so much valid in themselves, but rather will be more or less useful for particular research purposes. One should avoid viewing qualitative and quantitative methods as deriving from incommensurable paradigms. In practical terms this would deny the possibility of strengthening research through the use of a principled mixture of methods.

However, according to Sciarra (1999), the choice between quantitative and qualitative research is more than simple appropriateness for the task at hand. It is more about philosophy of knowledge and how one understands reality. In other words, epistemological rather than technical criteria will determine the role of the qualitative investigator and the consequential development of the research paradigm. For example, learners faced with the daunting challenge of writing dissertations sometimes opt for the qualitative design, on the one hand, because of their dislike or lack of competency of statistics. On the other hand, the option of quantitative research is sometimes made because of the institution's refusal to recognise qualitative research as 'scientific'. Neither choice is a philosophically informed one. The choice of one methodology over the other implies an understanding of oneself and one's role regarding the research participants.

It is clear that the issue of what constitutes qualitative methodology is not a simple one. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990, in Sciarra, 1999, 17), qualitative methods incorporate "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification".

However, qualitative research is defined differently by different schools of researchers. The discussion has been animated, and in some cases heated, and in the final analysis there is still little agreement. Spruijt-Metz (1999) attempts to sort the different kinds of

research that can be termed ‘qualitative’ into two schools, depending upon how the data are approached.

The first school believes that categorical variables (measured on the nominal or ordinal level) are “qualitative – distinct levels differ in quality, not in quantity” (Agresti, 1990, 4, in Spruijt-Metz, 1999). Categorical variables use measuring scales that are made up of categories, like religious affiliation. Religious affiliation is an example of a nominal variable, because it does not have ordered levels. Ordinal variables do have ordered levels, like social class. Researchers from this school use non-parametric techniques to analyse their data. They consider counting responses and testing hypotheses indispensable aspects of data analysis. Researchers typically use questionnaires, medical dossiers or data ‘made’ from interviews, visual or observational data, or field notes.

Ethnographic researchers represent the second school. Here are some points of agreement among the various factions in this school:

- Qualitative data consists of text rather than numbers.
- Qualitative research is usually conducted using an intense or prolonged contact with a ‘field’ or ‘life’ situation.
- The situations studied are usually ‘naturalistic’.
- Every effort is made to get an overview of the context in which the subjects function.
- To various conceptual degrees, qualitative researchers emphasise getting to know the ‘other’, capturing data on the perceptions of the subjects ‘from the inside’.
- An important aim of the research is to study people in their own settings.
- Little standard instrumentation is used, especially in the early phases of research.

Research is conducted through interviews, observations, field notes, videos, texts, etcetera.

Within this second school, the disagreement about how to analyse the data persists. Some consider counting responses and other ‘quantitatively related’ practices to be useful components of the analytical arsenal, and will ‘borrow’ from quantitative techniques if it suits their needs (for example, Krippendorff, 1980, in Spruijt-Metz, 1999). Others feel very strongly that reducing text to numbers is anathema for the qualitative tradition and should be reserved for quantitative methods (for example, Silverman, 1993, in Spruijt-

Metz, 1999). How one envisions the process of data analysis has far-reaching consequences for all steps of the research as well as for the epistemological point of departure.

5.3 Qualitative research design

Qualitative data collection techniques should allow participant-generated meanings to be heard. They need to be open-ended and flexible enough to facilitate the emergence of new, and unanticipated, categories of meaning and experience. There are, therefore, a number of general principles associated with qualitative research design (Willig, 2001).

- The type of data we collect for a qualitative study need to be naturalistic. This means that data must not be coded, summarised, categorised or otherwise 'reduced' at the point of collection. Strictly speaking, this is impossible because any process of collecting data requires some form of translation from one medium to another, for example, a verbatim transcript from a speech. However, qualitative data collection methods are designed to minimise data reduction. As a result, qualitative data tend to be voluminous and hard to manage.
- Such considerations raise the issue of validity. Validity can be defined as the extent to which our research describes, measures or explains what it aims to describe, measure or explain. As a result of their flexibility and open-endedness, qualitative research methods provide the space for validity issues to be addressed. Unlike quantitative research, which relies on pre-coded data collection techniques such as multiple-choice questionnaires or structured interviews, qualitative data collection allows participants to challenge the researcher's assumptions about the meaning and relevance of concepts and categories. Even though validity can be a problematic concept for qualitative researchers, qualitative methodologies engage with concerns about validity in a number of ways. First, qualitative data collection techniques aim to ensure that participants are free to challenge and, if necessary, correct the researcher's assumptions about the meanings investigated by the research. Second, much qualitative data collection takes place in real-life settings, such as classrooms and workplaces. As a result, there is no need to extrapolate from an artificial setting to the real world. This means that such studies have

higher ecological validity. Third, reflexivity ensures that the research process as a whole is scrutinised throughout and that the researcher continuously reviews his/her own role in the research. This discourages impositions of meaning by the researcher and thus promotes validity.

- An important aspect of quantitative data collection is reliability. A measurement is reliable if it yields the same answer on different occasions. Qualitative research is less concerned with reliability because it explores a particular, possibly unique, phenomenon or experience in great detail. It does not aim to measure a particular attribute in large numbers of people. However, qualitative research methods, when applied appropriately and rigorously, ought to generate reliable results.
- Finally, data collection needs to confront the issue of representativeness. Qualitative research tends to work with relatively small numbers of participants. This is due to the time-consuming and labour-intensive nature of qualitative data collection and analysis. As a result, qualitative researchers do not work with representative samples. If the study is a case study (of an individual, a group or an organisation), representativeness is not an issue. However, if the study aims to explore a phenomenon that is relevant to more people than are actually involved in the study, representativeness can be an issue. However, even though we cannot generalise from small-scale qualitative research of this type, it could be argued that, if a given experience is possible, it is also subject to 'universalisation' (Haug, 1987, in Willig, 2001). Thus, even though we do not know who or how many people share a particular experience, once we have identified it through qualitative research, we do know that it is available within a society or social group.

Several authors have attempted to identify criteria for judging the quality of qualitative research in psychology (Willig, 2001). For example, Henwood and Pidgeon (1992, in Willig, 2001) proposed seven attributes that characterise good qualitative research. These guidelines are concerned with ensuring rigor while acknowledging idiosyncrasy and creativity in the research process.

- The importance of fit: Analytic categories generated by the researcher should fit the data well.

- Integration of theory: Relationships between units of analysis should be clearly explicated and their integration at different levels of generality should be readily apparent.
- Reflexivity: Since the research process inevitably shapes the object of inquiry, the role of the researcher needs to be acknowledged in the documentation of the research.
- Documentation: The researcher should provide as inclusive and comprehensive account of what was done and why throughout the research process.
- Theoretical sampling and negative case analysis: The researcher should continuously seek to extend and modify emerging theory. To do this, he/she should explore cases that do not fit as well as those that are likely to generate new insights.
- Sensitivity to negotiated realities: The researcher needs to attend to the ways in which the participants, who generated the data in the first place, interpret the research. The researcher should be aware of participants' reactions and attempt to explain differences between his/her own interpretation and those of the participants.
- Transferability: To allow readers to explore the extent to which the study may, or may not, have applicability beyond the specific context within which the data were generated, the researcher should report the contextual features of the study in full.

A review of the literature in this area suggests an ongoing conversation about issues of quality in qualitative research (Merrick, 1999). Until relatively recently, scholars of qualitative research aimed to establish the method's merits and to defend its means. Greater acknowledgment of the benefits of qualitative methods, however, has led to less defensive and more creative positions. Although qualitative researchers exhibit wide variation in their definition of, and position on, criteria for assessing quality, they do exhibit consensus about concerns encompassed by trustworthiness and reflexivity. In addition, recent attention has been given to the importance of representation in qualitative work. However, these terms are insufficient to cover the multitude of complex issues involved in discussing evaluations of quality. The fact that conversations about these issues are ongoing, suggests exiting directions for the future.

5.4 Grounded Theory

There is a simplistic view of qualitative methods as local descriptions anchored around single case studies, ignoring theoretical concerns. An example is certain traditional ethnography, where the purpose of research is the detailed description of patterns of cultural life through the eyes of participants in that culture. Its value lies in the role it plays in debunking ethnocentric myths that researcher and their audience may hold. However, this idea is not fully representative of core ideas in contemporary ethnography and in qualitative research generally. It is recognised here that any intellectual analysis entails some degree of abstraction away from the purely phenomenological approach. In this respect, both qualitative and traditional quantitative approaches share a common concern with theory as the goal of research. Nevertheless, the relationship between theory and the research process is a different one in qualitative and quantitative research. Implicit in the discussion so far has been the distinction between the use of empirical research for the testing of prior theory and the goal of generating theory from data. In the hypothetico-deductive mode the emphasis is on the former: an established theory assumed to direct the process of collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. In the naturalistic paradigm the emphasis is on the latter: researchers may be unwilling or unable to fully specify their theoretical concerns in advance of the study. (Dusek, 1989; Haslam & McGarty, 2003).

Grounded Theory was originally developed by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967, in Willig, 2001). They were concerned about the way in which existing theories dominated sociological research. They argued that researchers needed a method that would allow them to move from data to theory so that new theories could emerge. Such theories would be specific to the context in which they had been developed. They would be 'grounded' in the data from which they had emerged rather than rely on analytical constructs, categories or variables from pre-existing theories. Grounded Theory, therefore, was designed to open up a space for the development of new context-specific theories. In addition, some research is conducted simply to satisfy the curiosity of the investigator while others are conducted in order to answer questions of immediate concern (Dusek, 1989; Haslam & McGarty, 2003).

Most developmental psychologists, including those who are interested in adolescent development, primarily conduct theory-oriented research. However, much of the research on classroom behaviour and teaching environments has been atheoretical (Dusek, 1987).

When talking about the Grounded Theory, qualitative researchers make explicit what tends to be only implicit in much scientific practice. In the past, the methodology of science itself has focused almost exclusively upon techniques for justification, either as verification or criticism, and neglected those of discovery. Discovery must play a fundamental role in the scientific process, with psychology being no exception. Discovery involves more than the creativity and cognitive resources of the individual researcher. For this reason the notion of theory generation is preferable to discovery because discovery assumes a model where the researcher dispassionately uncovers pre-existing objectively defined facts. The notion of theory generation, however, highlights the process of inserting new discourses into old systems of meaning – the active, constitutive process of representation and re-presentation in science (Latour, 1987, in Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

In approaching research without any strong prior theory, qualitative researchers are inevitably faced with the problem of making sense of a vast amount of unstructured data. Grounded Theory involves the progressive identification and integration of categories of meaning from data. Grounded Theory is both the process of category identification and integration (as method) and its product (as theory). Grounded Theory as method provides us with guidelines on how to identify categories, how to make links between categories and how to establish relationships between them. Grounded theory as theory is the end-product of this process; it provides us with an explanatory framework with which to understand the phenomenon under investigation. To identify, refine and integrate categories, and ultimately to develop theory, Grounded Theory researchers use a number of key strategies (Charmaz, 2003; Willig, 2001).

- Categories: These designate the grouping together in instances (of events, of processes, of occurrences) that share central features or characteristics with one another. Success in generating good Grounded Theory which is faithful to the data depends upon maintaining a balance between full use of the researcher's own intellect and this requirement of fit.

- Coding: This is the process by which categories are identified. Because Grounded Theory aims to develop new, context-specific theories, category labels should not be derived from existing theoretical formulations, but should be grounded in the data instead.
- Constant comparative analysis: This ensures that the coding process maintains its momentum by moving back and forth between the identification of similarities among and differences between emerging categories, thereby identifying emerging sub-categories.
- Negative case analysis: This ensures that the researcher continues to develop the emerging theory in the light of the evidence. Having identified a category, or a linkage between categories, Grounded Theory researchers need to look for ‘negative cases’ – that is, instances that do not fit.
- Theoretical sensitivity: This is what moves the researcher from a descriptive to an analytic level. In Grounded Theory, the researcher interacts with the data. The researcher engages with the data by asking questions, making comparisons and looking for opposites.
- Theoretical sampling: This involves collecting further data in the light of categories that have emerged from earlier stages of data analysis. Theoretical sampling means checking emerging theory against reality by sampling incidents that may challenge or elaborate its developing claims.
- Theoretical saturation: Ideally, the process of data collection and data analysis in Grounded Theory continues until theoretical saturation has been achieved. The researcher continues to sample and code data until no new categories can be identified, and until new instances of variation for existing categories have ceased to emerge.

When generation of theory is the aim, however, one is constantly alert to emergent perspectives that will change and help develop theory. These perspectives can easily occur on the final day of study or when the manuscript is reviewed in page proof: thus, the published word is not the final one, but only a pause in the never-ending process of generation of theory (Dey, 1999, in Willig, 2001).

- Memo writing: This is an important task of Grounded Theory method. Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, the researcher maintains a written record of theory development. This means writing definitions of categories and justifying labels chosen for them, tracing their emergent relationships with one another, and keeping a record of the progressive integration of higher- and lower-level categories.

A number of interrelated features shape this interplay and mark out the differences between Grounded Theory and the hypothetico-deductive method. These include:

- the assumption that the relationship between theory and data will first be ill-defined;
- acceptance of the need to be tolerant of, and indeed to seek out and explore;
- ambiguity and uncertainty in this relationship when constructing a category system that is both relevant to the problem and fits the data; and
- the exhortation to researchers to avoid premature closure of fixing of theory wherever new insights might arise.

In practice, the researcher at first perceives only unstructured chaos in the data, as if looking through unfocused conceptual lenses. However, as analyses proceeds, and order is generated, the lenses become more sharply focused (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

The outcomes of research will be evaluated in terms of their persuasiveness and power to inspire an audience. A characteristic strongly in favour of qualitative research is that its results are usually inherently attractive to the reader. The researcher can add to this advantage by striving for vivid descriptions, or to use Glaser and Strauss' (1967, in Wertz & van Zuuren, 1987) term, by searching for concepts that are 'sensitising'.

Theory that are psychologically relevant, understandable, and presented at diverse levels of abstraction, and which fits the data well, should be challenging, stimulating, and yet highly plausible in the sense of clearly reflecting substantive aspects of the problem domain. Marshall (1985, p. 370, in Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992) describes the process of conducting research in this way as 'productive, fun and appropriate', leading to the 'aha' experience of discovery.

Grounded Theory is unlike most other research methods in that it merges the processes of data collection and analysis. The researcher moves back and forth between the two in

an attempt to ‘ground’ the analysis in the data. The aim of this movement is theoretical saturation. As a result, Grounded Theory does not provide the researcher with a series of steps, which, if followed correctly, will take him/her from the formulation of the research question through data collection to analysis and, finally, to the written research report. Instead, Grounded Theory encourages the researcher to continuously review earlier stages of the research and, if necessary, to change direction. Even the research question is no permanent fixture. Simply serving to identify the phenomenon we wish to study at the outset, the research question becomes progressively focused throughout the research process. Alternatively, it can change altogether in the light of emerging categories (Charmaz, 2003; Willig, 2001).

5.4.1 The research question

What kinds of research questions can Grounded Theory methods address? Glaser and Strauss (1967, in Charmaz, 2003) might answer, ‘every kind’. They contend that researchers can adopt Grounded Theory to study diverse processes. Psychologists can use Grounded Theory methods to study individual processes, interpersonal relations, and the reciprocal effects between individuals and larger social processes.

Grounded Theory researchers need an initial research question to focus their attention upon the particular phenomenon they wish to investigate. It should serve to identify, but not make assumptions about, the phenomenon of interest. This is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. The process of labeling itself imports assumptions about the phenomenon (Willig, 2001).

The initial research question in Grounded Theory should be open-ended and should not be compatible with simple ‘yes/no’ answers. It should identify the phenomenon of interest without making (too many) assumptions about it. It should never employ constructs derived from existing theories. It is also recommended that the question orientate the researcher towards action and process, rather than states and conditions. As the research progresses, the researcher is able to focus the research question more narrowly. Theoretical sampling and theoretical sensitivity facilitate this process. By the time theoretical saturation has been achieved, the initial research question can have changed almost beyond recognition.

5.4.2 Data collection

Grounded Theory is compatible with a wide range of data collection techniques. Semi-structured interviewing, participant observation, focus groups, and even diaries can generate data for Grounded Theory. In addition, existing texts and documents can also be subject to Grounded Theory analysis. However, it is important to differentiate between full implementation of the method, which requires the researcher to move back and forth between data collection and analysis, and an abbreviated version that involves the coding of the data only (Charmaz, 2003; Willig, 2001).

In the full version, the researcher collects some data, explores the data through initial open coding, establishes tentative linkages between categories, and then returns to the field to collect further data. Data collection is progressively focused and informed by the emerging theory. The full version of Grounded Theory allows the researcher to push outwards until category development is dense, detailed and differentiated. This gives the researcher confidence that theoretical saturation is being approached.

The abbreviated version of Grounded Theory, by contrast, works with the original data only. Here interview transcripts or other documents are analysed following the principles of Grounded Theory. Theoretical sensitivity, theoretical saturation and negative case analysis can only be implemented within the texts that are being analysed. The researcher does not have the opportunity to leave the confines of the original data set to broaden and refine the analysis. Consequently, the abbreviated version should never be the first choice; it should only be used where time or resource restraints prevent the implementation of the full version of Grounded Theory.

5.4.3 Data analysis

Coding constitutes the most basic, as well as the most fundamental, process in Grounded Theory. Coding can be carried out line-by-line, sentence-by-sentence, paragraph-by-paragraph, and so on. The smaller the unit of analysis, (for example, one line of text), the more numerous the descriptive categories that initially emerge. Later stages of analysis will integrate a lot of these into higher-level analytic categories. Line-by-line analysis ensures that our analysis is truly grounded and that the higher-level

categories, and later on theoretical formulations, actually emerge from the data, rather than being imposed upon it. If we code larger chunks of text, such as a whole page, our attention may be captured by one particularly striking occurrence. As a result, less obvious but perhaps equally important instances of categories, whose true significance has yet to emerge, can be missed. If there is sufficient time available, line-by-line coding should always be carried out (Charmaz, 2003; Willig, 2001).

For most Grounded Theorists, initial open coding involves the generation of large descriptive labels for occurrences or phenomena. Such labels give rise to low-level categories. To establish linkages between such categories and to integrate them into higher-order analytic categories, we can use a coding paradigm. A coding paradigm sensitises the researcher to particular ways in which categories may be linked with one another. It helps us to arrange our categories in a meaningful and hierarchical way, with some categories constituting ‘core’ and others the ‘periphery’.

5.4.4 The research report

Qualitative research can be written up in a variety of ways; qualitative researchers are much less constrained by convention than quantitative researchers when it comes to the presentation of their work. A qualitative research report should contain information about the rationale of the study (including references to relevant literature), about how it was carried out (including both data collection and analysis), what was found and what these findings may mean (including their implications for theory and practice). As long as the report contains this information, it does not matter precisely how, and in what format, it is presented. The author of a qualitative research report should strive for clarity first and foremost.

5.4.5 Suitability for psychological research

Originally, Grounded Theory was designed to study social processes ‘from the bottom up’ (Willig, 2001, 46). That is, the method allowed researchers to trace how actions had consequences and how patterns of social interaction combined to give rise to particular, identifiable social processes. The theories generated by Grounded Theory research helped

to explicate basic social processes. It is clear that Grounded Theory was designed with sociological research questions in mind.

In recent years, Grounded Theory has been adopted as a qualitative research method for psychological research and it now features as a key method in psychology methods textbooks (Willig, 2001). However, its suitability as a qualitative research method for psychological research may be questioned. It could be argued that, when applied to questions about the nature of experience, as opposed to the unfolding of social processes, the Grounded Theory method is reduced to a technique for systematic categorisation. That is, studies concerned with capturing the meanings that a particular experience holds for an individual tend to use one-off interviews with participants, transcribe them and code the transcript, using the principles of the Grounded Theory method. The result is a systematic map of concepts and categories used by the respondents to make sense of their experience. Such mapping of experiences is a descriptive rather than an explanatory exercise and, as such, is not geared towards the development of a theory. It could be argued that research questions about the nature of experience are more suitable addressed using phenomenological research methods. Grounded Theory methods could then be reserved for the study of social psychological concerns.

5.5 Research method for this study

The choice between qualitative and quantitative research is twofold. First, the choice is a technical matter that depends upon their suitability in answering a particular research question. I believe the qualitative method is the most suitable one for answering the question of adolescent identity development in a school context because this approach emphasises the importance of viewing the meaning of experience in context.

Second, to quote Sciarra (1999), the choice between implementing the quantitative or qualitative method of research should be a philosophically informed one. The choice of one methodology over the other implies an understanding of oneself and one's role regarding research participants. I have always found statistical data and cause-effect findings dull and uninspiring. However, ever since I started my psychological studies, I have been interested in the ways people make sense of their worlds and how they experience certain situations and events. When I chose to research adolescent identity

formation in a school context, I knew that I wanted the adolescents to tell me in their own words about their thoughts, feelings and aspirations. This cannot be reduced to mere numbers but has to be verbalised, analysed and explained. According to Jessor, Colby, and Shewder (1996, in Spruijt-Metz, 1999), qualitative research methods offer an excellent opportunity to get to know your target group. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, I have chosen the qualitative method of research.

Finally, the research question of this thesis is ideally suited to be investigated through the Grounded Theory method. The research question is open-ended and is aimed at identifying the phenomena of interest, namely identity formation and school context. The full version will be implemented because it will allow me to push outwards until category development is complete and theoretical saturation is achieved.

Three common approaches to studying classroom environment involve systematic observation, case studies, and assessing learner and teacher perceptions. I have decided to conduct this research with the perceptual approach, for the following reasons:

- Paper-and-pencil perceptual measures are less time-consuming than classroom observation techniques when a single researcher conducts the research.
- Perceptual measures are based on learners' experience over many lessons, while observational data usually are restricted to a very small number of lessons.
- Perceptual measures involve the pooled judgments of all learners in a class, whereas observation techniques typically involve only a single observer.
- Learners' perceptions are the determinants of learner behaviour more than the real situation. Therefore they can be more important than observed behaviours.
- Perceptual measures of classroom environment typically have been found to account for considerably more variance in learner learning outcomes than have directly observed variables (Fraser, 1991).
- Due to teacher trade union restrictions, I was not allowed to do observations inside the classrooms.

5.5.1 Sample

The school where I conducted this study is an Afrikaans medium high school. Presently this school teaches about 1000 pupils of whom the majority is white.

With regard to academic achievement, it is the policy of the school to provide each learner with the opportunity to achieve in accordance with the talents that he/she received. Therefore the school provides opportunities to excel academically, culturally and in sport. It provides well-equipped facilities for the academically inclined learners, such as a Computer Centre. Furthermore, the school caters for learners who are interested in the arts, such as a Music Academy with about 250 learners. Every year it organises an 'Afriweek' to promote the Afrikaans language. Every second year the learners stage a revue and goes on tour to perform it in different provinces. It also boasts with a Sport Academy that contributes not only to physical enhancement, but also to spiritual enrichment by providing an outlet for stress.

For the completion of the questionnaires, I engaged the help of 63 learners in Grade 11. I conducted the interviews with 5 Grade 11 learners who previously completed the questionnaires.

5.5.2 Questionnaire

I asked 63 learners in Grade 11 to each answer the following questions in paragraph format:

- (1) What I like most about teachers...
- (2) What I like least about teachers...
- (3) My school should make the following change/s...
- (4) My school encourages/discourages independent thinking...
- (5) My teachers accept/ do not accept me the way I am...
- (6) What I find important right now and often think about...
- (7) I am...

I asked the first two questions to explore classroom environments and the third question to explore the school environment. It is useful to distinguish classroom environment from school environment, which involves psychosocial aspects of the climate of whole schools. Despite their simultaneous development and logical linkages, the fields of classroom and school environment have remained remarkably independent (Fraser, 1991). Although space stringency demands that the focus of this thesis is restricted to classroom environment, it is acknowledged that it would be desirable to

break away from the existing tradition of independence of the two fields of school and classroom environment and for there to be a confluence of the two areas.

School climate research owes much in theory, instrumentation, and methodology to earlier work on organisational climate in business contexts. Consequently, one feature of school environment work, which distinguishes it from classroom environment research, is that the former has tended to be associated with the field of educational administration and to rest on the assumption that schools can be viewed as formal organisations. Another distinguishing feature is that, whereas classroom research has been concentrated on secondary and elementary schools rather than in higher education, a sizable proportion of school environment research has involved the climate of higher education institutions. Questions four and five were included to ascertain whether the teachers in these learners' lives promote or hinder the development of identity. Questions six and seven were aimed at the phenomenological questions they grapple with and establishing the identity statuses that these learners have reached.

The counselling teacher presented the questionnaires to the learners in their usual tutorial groups. A standard set of instructions was provided for the teacher. It was emphasised that the pupils should work independently and be given enough time to answer the questionnaire completely. The teacher was asked to reiterate that this was not a test and there was no right or wrong answer. In order to reassure learners of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, they were asked to write their names on the last page of the questionnaire. This was done voluntarily. I used pseudonyms when I quoted their responses.

One important advantage of questionnaire research is that a great deal of information can be obtained from a large population, with much less expense of money and time. In this study, existing educational facilities and personnel were used to reduce the cost in time. However, questionnaire research does not usually penetrate very deeply below the surface. The scope of the information sought is usually emphasised at the expense of depth. Questionnaires are better adapted to extensive than intensive research.

5.5.3 Interviews

Grounded Theory encourages the researcher to review earlier stages of the research continuously. This might involve collecting further data until theoretical saturation has been achieved. In view of the limitations of any one method, many researchers use multiple research methods in order to further explore the research question.

After documenting the results of the questionnaires, my promoter and I came to the conclusion that the data that was thus obtained, did not yield enough information to answer the research question. Therefore, it was decided that I would conduct interviews with five grade eleven learners in order to obtain in-depth data relating to the research objectives as stated in Chapter 1.3. There is a dearth of evidence suggesting that interview and self-report assessment techniques actually result in identical categorical classifications of individuals regarding identity formation (Craig-Bray & Adams, 1986).

Using the responses on the questionnaires as the point of departure, I formulated questions with the research objectives in mind. I conducted two semi-structured interviews of 1½ hour each with five grade eleven learners. The respondents were two boys and three girls. The interviews were conducted in a group context.

Prior to the interviews, I attempted to minimize the interviewees' inhibitions and apprehension by establishing a good rapport with them. I then explained the purpose of my study in order to provide the interviewees with the appropriate frame of reference. I conducted the interview by utilizing communication skills such as clarification, paraphrasing, summarizing, probing, and minimal verbal and non-verbal responses. Interviews were conducted until the data was saturated. I recorded the responses by writing it down in telegram-style and transcribed it immediately afterwards.

The five learners volunteered to be interviewed. I told them that individual information would not be available to the Principal or teachers - their responses would be kept confidential. I obtained the consent of their parents to interview their children.

5.6 Method of analysis

5.6.1 Questionnaire

Learners' responses were grouped together into categories according to the guidelines set out in section 5.3. A content analysis was conducted according to the guidelines

given in section 5.4.3. Where individual statements are presented these were selected as being representative of their category and have been corrected for spelling errors and grammar only where required for clarity. The responses that were presented in Afrikaans were translated into English.

Murray (1938, in Fraser, 1991) distinguishes between alpha press (the environment as observed by an external observer) and beta press (the environment as perceived by milieu inhabitants). This view is being extended by Stern, Stein, and Bloom (1956, in Fraser, 1991) who distinguish between the idiosyncratic view that each person has of the environment (private beta press) and the shared view that members of a group hold about the environment (consensual beta press). Private and consensual beta press could differ from each other, and both could differ from the detached view of alpha press of a trained non-participant observer. In designing classroom environment studies, researchers must decide whether their analyses will use the perception scores obtained from individual learners (private press) or whether these will be combined to obtain the average of the environment scores of all learners within the same class (consensual press). Because the calculation of scores is not involved in this thesis, and this is essentially a descriptive study, the level of analysis will be a combination of private and consensual press.

In order to identify the different categories in each question, I proceeded to group together statements that shared certain words or feelings, for example in Questions one and two, 'caring' and 'understanding' and 'do not care' and 'do not understand'. The category labels were then grounded in the data itself, for example, "Classroom environment" and "Teacher characteristics". Coding was done line-by-line.

5.6.2 Interviews

The results are not recorded in chronological order as the interview progressed. When appropriate, I grouped responses to different questions together in order to present the data in a meaningful way.

The results of completed questionnaires and the interviews will be presented in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS

6.1 Questionnaires

6.1.1 Classroom environment

Forty-four positive responses and forty-three negative responses were recorded in this category. The positive responses include the measures of understanding that teachers show toward their learners, friendliness, and trust.

“They are like friends – you can talk to them about anything and they will give you honest and sincere advice.” (Bart)

“You can trust them and ask for help when you are in a tight situation.” (Tersia)

Natalie writes this touching paragraph about her teacher “I am crazy about my one female teacher. She helps me without thinking that I am stupid or not good enough for her class. It is easy to talk to her about anything. She is like a friend to me. She doesn’t have ‘favourites’. She sees my point of view.”

The negative responses relate to the degree that learners feel that their teachers do not understand them, are unfair towards them, and favouritism. Unfortunately, certain learners in this school have to deal with a perceived emphasis by certain teachers on relative ability and negative comparison to high achievers.

“ Teachers can’t understand it when I don’t do as well in a test as I did previously. Many times you just don’t feel well or you experienced something terrible and you don’t share it with them, but then they must understand that you still did your best.” (Ella)

“Some of them have no sympathy with you, like when you do badly in a test some of them will say ‘your problem, not mine.’ And sometimes it’s depressing.” (Desiree)

“Some teachers are not always fair – there is only one way and it is their way, but I am not always right but neither are they.” (Danie)

“They have favourites, sometimes without realising it. They talk to children as if they are stupid while to others (whom they know will do everything well) with respect. It is unfair.” (Mandy)

6.1.2 Teacher characteristics

Thirty-one positive responses and forty-six negative responses were recorded in this category. The positive responses relate to different characteristics, such as friendliness and motivational behaviour, which leads to a positive learning environment.

“They are friendly towards us when we talk to them.” (Chris)

“They try to help you with your subjects. When you do poorly, they will only tell you to try harder.” (Monica)

“Teachers who do not insult you when you do poorly in a test but motivate you to do better in the next test.” (Anna)

“Some teachers make their classes enjoyable because they tell jokes and in the end you understand better! They know when to joke around and when it is time to work.” (Hendrik)

Unfortunately, some learners experience a negative classroom environment due to certain negative teacher characteristics, such as shouting, rudeness and being insulting.

“I don’t like teachers who damage children’s inner character by shouting at them and calling them names just to make a joke. That is unacceptable.” (Lena)

“They verbally abuse you and call you names. I spoke to the Principal about this without any results and now I don’t know what to do about it. This problem affects me greatly and it makes me very unhappy.” (Bonnie)

“I don’t like it when they insult your schoolwork, like my Afrikaans teacher who breaks me down all the time in my tests because I do poorly. She writes POOR!! on my tests. In my opinion a person shouldn’t do that because it breaks me down and I even cried because of it. In this way they break you down and treat you badly!!” (Martie)

Judging by the answers in this category, there are certain learners who experience negative feedback from certain teachers.

“Some teachers humiliate you in front of other learners or teachers like when you received poor marks, they read it aloud in front of the other children and comment upon it. They should try to talk to us after school.” (Sandra)

6.1.3 Academic instruction

This category elicited thirty-seven positive responses regarding the quality of instruction in this school. Teaching is a determinant of learning because it affects the educational environment, but is also affected by it.

“They explain the work and ask if you understand, and are willing to explain again.” (Elsa)

“They explain the work properly and are willing to help you when you find the work difficult.” (Anna)

“I like teachers who have a passion for their subject because enthusiasm is catching! They present their subject absolutely wonderfully and it shows in the marks of the pupils!” (Tinus)

Judging by twenty-four negative responses, there are teachers in this school who do not provide their learners with an environment that enhances meaningful interaction. Certain learners do not feel at liberty to ask questions because it is not answered in a respectful and knowledge-enhancing way.

“I am a learner who doesn’t always understand the first time, but in more than half of my classes it is left there. They just hurry everything and it is unfair. They have been teaching for years and then they expect that you must understand it in one period, but they hurry because they are afraid that they will not have time to hand out homework.” (Elsa)

“Some of the teachers simply can’t wrap their minds around the fact that all learners aren’t the same in all subjects. They judge you because you don’t do well in their subject, but they don’t see how well you do in a subject you understand more. Sometimes they become angry when you ask them a question and they think it’s supposed to be common knowledge, but you don’t know the answer.” (Susan)

“When they don’t explain the work and get mad when you don’t understand.” (Clinton)

“When you ask a question, they sometimes imply that you are stupid.” (Sarah)

“They don’t give attention to those who need it most and see the pupils as stupid.” (Frans)

6.1.4 Discipline

Fifteen positive responses and twenty-four negative responses fall into this category. The following quotes mirror the positive responses.

“Showing discipline, showing me how to respect others and helping me to understand others.” (Willie)

“I like it when a teacher is strict, because it disciplines us as well because my work is always done when I get class at a teacher who is strict.” (Thea)

“I am a boy who cannot sit still in class and keep quiet, but there are certain teachers who know how to treat me so that I can actually sit still and keep quiet.” (Bart)

Jan admires teachers for “handling so many teenagers. I would call us teenagers. Teenagers are in that time when arrogance is mainly in control. No one is stronger, better, smarter, than a teenager. Teachers deal with these situations every day, for a number of years even. They especially target the older ones. Some teachers know how to deal with teenagers and that I like about teachers.”

According to some learners, not all the teachers at this school are capable of balancing the personal freedom of learners against a framework of recognised rules and procedures. Therefore, the classroom environments of some teachers are disorderly.

“I would say the younger teachers of today don’t know how or what to do to help learners along in school. They seem more concerned in being the learners’ friend than teaching them respect and discipline.” (Debbie)

“I don’t like it when a teacher doesn’t do anything when a child ‘back chats’.” (Marie)

“My one teacher doesn’t have control over our class, and therefore we never work or do homework and we never pass her exams. I don’t like people who can’t take control over things because I don’t like not to have control.” (Deborah)

“... Don't care if the children play every day instead of working.” (Ann)

6.1.5 Homework

Eleven negative responses fall into this category.

“When they don’t give you loads of homework.” (Maria)

“Its all right to work hard but I like it when a teacher gives a person one period a week off.” (Hannes)

I find the following response particularly amusing. It is clear that this learner did not understand the purpose of this questionnaire.

“The English teacher gave us this period off to write this test for which I didn’t learn.” (Francois)

“Unnecessary homework or work that we are never going to use in our lives, like some maths.” (Sean)

“Gives us a lot of homework. Sometimes when we write tests, we also get homework. It interferes with my studies. It makes me tired because we get so much.” (Wynand)

“They give you homework when you’re writing exams the next day. That’s a lot of pressure on us.” (Desiree)

6.1.6 Independent thinking

Thirty-two learners believe that their school encourages independent thinking. Here are some of their responses.

“Yes, what is the point of going to school if the school doesn’t teach you the basic way of deciding for yourself? Every school should prepare you for your decision making as an adult.”(Debbie)

“They encourage us to think creatively. Encourage us up to a point, we are not allowed to break school rules and to become totally undisciplined.” (Ella)

“Give you opportunities to be creative and different. Give us the opportunity to see if we can think on our own and not just in groups.” (Desiree)

“They don’t want to spoon-feed us any more.”(Wessel)

“They want us to figure it out for ourselves before they show us” (Tersia)

Nineteen learners do not feel that their school encourages independent thinking.

“My school doesn’t encourage independent thinking because they try and force everyone to think in the same way they do and try and make us narrow-minded.” (Manie)

“They don’t really give you the time of day when you have an opinion about something that’s not right. Although they tell us that we are allowed to voice our opinions, they don’t really listen to you unless you are one of the ‘elite’ people in school.” (Susan)

“If someone was to give their honest opinion, they will most definitely be going to the Principal’s office.” (Willie)

“At school we are the property of education. We are not supposed to think, just to take in.” (Jan)

“We must be good and obedient children who say yes and amen to everything that the teachers say.” (Bart)

“If you don’t act, talk, work like everyone else does, you are regarded as a rebel.” (Olga)

6.1.7 Acceptance

The majority of learners who answered this question (thirty-four) feel that their teachers accept them as they are. The following quotes are some of their responses.

“...but would like me to do better and be a better person so that I can be a better person in future and achieve all I possibly can.” (Manie)

“Yes, they do, although they try to change me to study harder but I will not just change and if they don’t like it, I don’t care.” (Anton)

“...because I am obedient and good! And I think they know they can’t change me because God made us and we must accept ourselves.” (Martie)

“...just the way I accept them. We are forced by circumstances to spend time together. Therefore a teacher-learner relationship is necessary. I try my best to make it work and feel very positive about my relationships with the teachers.” (Ella)

“I think that teachers don’t accept pupils that never even bother to study for a test, that always get demerits and always end up in the Principal’s office. They do accept the pupils for who they are, but doesn’t accept the way they act.” (Thea)

Ten learners feel that their teachers do not accept them the way they are and for them the lack of acceptance and feelings of rejection are very distressing. Here are some of their responses.

“...because they compare me with the [other better children]. I do my best, but it is never good enough. If your parents don't buy everything or give money, you are nothing, and become nothing.” (Elsa)

“They constantly want to change you as a person because they think you are on a different path than what you are supposed to be on. They think just because you do stuff differently that you are a bad person.” (Susan)

“They are for ever telling me that I am stupid, trying to change me and my fellow learners into something we are not, but into something they long for us to be.” (Willie)

“They often compare the way you look to your marks in school and sometimes they just don't like you. How can they like or dislike me if they don't even know me?” (Gawie)

“They do not. The problem is so upsetting to me, I can't discuss it.” (Bonnie)

Eleven learners believe that some teachers accept them the way they are, while other teachers don't. One learner does not know, while another learner does not care. The following quotes are some of their responses.

“Some do and some don't. If they like you, you get good marks, but if they don't like you, you get bad marks when they mark tests” (Piet)

“Most of my teachers do accept me, except the maths teacher. She doesn't want me in her class because she says that I waste her time and disrupt the class, but it isn't true.” (Francois)

“Most of my teachers accept me, the others I don’t care about. I’m my own person and no one can change that.” (Monty)

“I have mixed feelings about this. Some teachers accept me for what I am, and I respect them for that. Some discriminate against me. This is just what I feel – maybe I’m just taking stuff too seriously.” (Jan)

“I don’t care if they accept me or if they don’t. I am who I am, so deal with it.” (Frans)

6.1.8 Concerns about the future

The central concerns of adolescents remain those of finding a place in society and a sense of the future by establishing a viable identity for oneself. School contexts that provide opportunities that are sensitive to the developmental tasks confronting adolescents are critical to the facilitation of positive attitudes towards the future. Twenty-nine learners often think about their futures. The following quotes reflect the learners' ambivalence about their futures.

“I am very afraid of what is lying in front of me or what’s waiting to happen. I want to become a fashion designer, but I am often afraid that I am not going to fulfill my dreams. I think about what if I don’t become a designer? What will I do then? I am unsure of my choices and how to fulfill my dreams and go into fashion designing. I’m scared that my subjects that I have now aren’t the right ones and that they won’t support me.” (Marie)

“Where I will be in the next six or seven years. Because of my skin colour, will I be discriminated against?” (Jan)

“Passing Matric, being able to get into a university or college. ‘Will I ever get a job as an accountant?’ I think about myself as a person, what I want to do, wear, say... I think about freedom a lot.” (Susan)

“My future and my figure. My figure bothers me! I know I’m not fat, but nothing is ever good enough. I never stop eating but I always think about...what did I eat, what can I afford to eat, what would be the best to eat and much more. It drives me crazy!” (Anet)

Some learners have to cope with adverse domestic situations while simultaneously managing educational demands.

“I have only one parent and while my mother works, I have to do the homework and see to it that nothing is needed. I also have to do my homework. I think mostly about my mother and worry about her.” (Sandra)

“My future; will today be my last day or do I have many days left to look forward to. What are most important to me now, are my parents and my boyfriend. My parents have many problems and I worry if they will be able to solve them. I also worry about my boyfriend losing his head when someone treats me badly and once he tried to commit suicide, but it was only to get attention.” (Charne)

Some learners struggle with existential and religious questions.

“My friends and family; the origins of earth and man; who is in charge of my body; do other people see things the same as I do...” (Wessel)

"My studies and religion. I really focus on getting my relationship with God strong and honest.” (Verna).

“My future, friendships and love relationships. Sometimes it hurts, but I accept it as part of growing up. Sometimes I wonder if God is real, but deep in my heart I believe in Him and I know it is God who helps me every day.” (Ella)

“My beliefs and moral values are extremely important to me... my goal on earth is to tell people about the gospel and to glorify God. I always extremely aware of my future and think about it.” (Tersia)

6.1.9 Identity formation

Certain learners examine religious values, political ideology, cultural identifications, attitudes and prejudices.

“I am a person who try to live as best I can to glorify God.” (Tersia)

“I am modest, understanding, helpful, feels guilty easily, talkative, also shy and quiet, love being outdoors, love being my own person and having my own space, love school, hate staying at school, stubborn and impatient, love friends, hate people who lie, tease other people and racists, hate violence, love life!” (Marie)

“Tall, green eyes, brown-blond hair, fashionable, loving, caring, hardworking, love comedy, sometimes shy, love friends, keep active, ocean, pasta, red, Afrikaans but try to speak both languages, want to learn Spanish, go to Paris.” (Wynand)

Parental authority, sex-role stereotypes, vocational possibilities and occasional choices are tested.

“I see myself as an independent young woman who wants to show men that we can also work on cars and be good at it at the same time.” (Bettie)

“I am heavy against gays because they make me sick!” (Hendrik)

“I am very confused right now, about a lot of stuff, about a lot of people who don’t understand me, and they treat me differently because of my preferences –

especially my family. They don't always appreciate the choices I made, but I feel this is my life and I will live it the way I want to!!" (Deborah)

Questions related to the meaning and purpose of life are some of the many conflicts and issues requiring resolution or at least meaningful exploration.

"I am different from other people. I believe every person has a special task, but some days I struggle to understand my task and to develop it. I don't see myself as a normal teenager, but luckily I have friends like myself and therefore there is no peer pressure." (Sarah)

"I am lost. I don't know. Things are difficult. There are a lot of things that bother me. The worst is my future. There is so much to do, but I don't know if I will have enough time." (Charne)

"...and looking for answers all the time. I'm often depressed ...I think of rugby all the time...I don't know what I will do, because I'm scared! In short, I'm the usual old 'dweeb'." (Bart)

During this period adolescents establish patterns for their lives around essential questions of who they will be, how they will run their own lives, and how they will interact with others.

"I am a guy who is friendly to everyone but doesn't like everyone. It takes a great deal to know me. I hate to lose. I am a bad loser. Some people think I'm stupid but I just hide it. I take in whatever is around and I try to notice everyone. I am fascinated what other people are thinking at the moment." (Jan)

Although the relative importance of physical characteristics of personal identity has been emphasised, several other types of characteristics may underlie personal identity in some individuals. Young adolescents frequently describe themselves in terms of their

social relationships and their location in a social network. However, older adolescents base their personal identity upon their psychological nature.

“My boyfriend, whom I really love, and I broke up two days ago and I am heartbroken. I gave him my everything and after nine months he threw it back in my face. Now I have doubts about myself and about life and I wonder if things will ever be okay again. I just wonder how many other girls feel exactly the same way, but can’t share it with anyone. I feel sorry for them!” (Ella)

“I am downtrodden in life, I don’t know where I stand. Nobody wants to give me a chance. Teachers expect too much of me. Children, who think they are better than me, upset me a lot and I have lots of problems. The problems become too much!” (Bonnie)

“...a rather shy, quiet at school type of person who battles to handle emotions, especially sadness, anger and fear.” (Sue)

Adolescents develop a social sense of self as well as an individual and autonomous sense of self. In addition they develop socially-construed representations of their peers’ identities, or “crowd” identities as well as public identities for themselves. However, older adolescents tend to feel less need for the security of crowd norms and have the cognitive and self-esteem resources to negotiate for acceptance on a broader scale.

“I am what I am, and everyone that doesn’t accept me the way I am, can just learn to accept me that way. If I keep my faith and my friends and family near me, who cares about them who makes life uneasy.” (Leana)

“I don’t care what people think of me or say of me. I like doing things I want to do and not to be told what to do. I have my own will and way.” (Natalie)

Social identity may also have a self-preserving function, providing stability and certainty in the arena most important to young people – the self in social relations.

"I am me! For a big part of my life I always tried to fit in. I wasn't myself. The truth is I was a fake! (It didn't work). A few months ago I decided to just be myself, and it works! I'm happier and have a lot of friends, and everything is great! So right now I am just focusing on making the switch and being myself. When I successfully 'transferred', I will start working on bigger things." (Anet)

For the adolescent the school is not only a workplace but also a laboratory for experimenting with identity. There is no time in a person's life when social and personal integration demand our full attention as during adolescence (Bergstrom, 1998).

"I am my own person, stubborn and very cold, hard and difficult to express my feelings. I like acting, to do my own thing, to be the boss in every task, I always want to be right and don't accept it easily that I'm wrong. My life isn't perfect, but I'm working on it" (Ann)

6.1.10 Proposed changes

The learners propose various changes in the facilities on the school premises. The following responses indicate their feelings in this regard

"Our school is boring. Everyday the same NOTHING happens. I think it will be better if our school has a cafeteria or something else nice." (Mandy)

"Take away the rule that the toilets should be locked during class time because what if you have a bladder problem and the teacher doesn't want to give you the key." (Susan)

"No soap or something to dry your hands on in the toilets. Floors and walls are dirty." (Dawie)

“Install lockers to ensure the safety of your books and prevent your back from getting sore.” (Sarah)

“Our school have a problem with the space in the hall. The boys sit on the floor, which is very uncomfortable.” (Anton)

Various other suggestions were made.

“Our school never uses the heaters with the result that we are very cold in winter.” (Francois)

“Build a swimming pool, upgrade the tennis courts and shooting range.” (Francois)

“Build a huge skate park on the rugby field and make skateboarding a [sport] at school. Rugby should not be allowed to be played at school level.” (Willem)

“Upgrade some facilities, for example, the Technical Drawing boards.” (Karel)

“I would like less traffic on the stairs.” (Manie)

Various suggestions about changes in the rules about personal appearance are offered. Judging by the number of suggestions about changes in hair-related rules, this learner voices the sentiment of other learners by stating that “hair is also a big issue. They want us to be tidy so leave us alone with our hair.” (Jan)

“Allow boys to wear gel and only be strict when boys come to school with outrageous hairstyles.” (Wynand)

“I understand a school needs discipline, but sometimes they overdo it. I would like to change some of the rules, e.g. to be allowed to wear gel to school.” (Wessel)

“They should change some of the rules because some of them are really lame, e.g. we are not allowed to wear gel. It is not the way you look that will bring you through your academic term.” (Gawie)

“Girls [should] style their hair as they please. It doesn’t have anything to do with schoolwork.” (Ann)

“Girls should be allowed to wear messy buns.” (Louise)

“I like my school the way it is. It is very strict and no one can argue against that...It would be really nice if they will not complain about how the girls do their hair, like a messy bundle or so. They should let the boys wear gel as well, I think it looks a lot neater than no gel.” (Thea)

“I agree one hundred percent with the rule about dyeing hair. School isn’t a fashion parade. Colouring your hair will not help you pass Matric. But the rules about not allowing ‘bubbles’ and hairspray in your hair are unclear.” (Lena)

“Colouring your hair – is that bad if you do?” (Debbie)

“Allowed to wear a base because some girls have bad skins and you feel much better if you cover it.” (Martie)

Eighteen suggestions to change the discipline and rules in the school were made. Some learners believe that the school has too many rules.

“They must take away some of the rules – our rule book is thicker than the Bible!” (Anton)

“Fewer rules, because some of them are quite ridiculous like that no alcohol of any type may be at school but what if someone is ill and using Bioplus and it has alcohol in it?” (Maria)

Some learners feel the school is too strict.

“Not too strict; if you do something wrong, they say ‘bring your homework book’.” (Hannes)

Other learners want more freedom to speak their minds.

“The right to speak your opinion.” (Ann)

“Encourage independent thinking instead of just following rules.” (Sue)

“Encourage us to be ourselves.” (Bart)

Some learners want more freedom and fun.

“ Little bit more freedom.” (Willie)

“Relax and stop trying being better than other schools.” (Natalie)

“Allow us to have some fun, e.g. Matric 40 days.” (Olga)

Two learners want to be allowed to smoke at school while another one does not want to stand in rows after every break. However, some learners encourage stricter discipline.

“Don’t take away too many rules, discipline is good, we don’t want to become like some other schools, really bad.” (Hendrik)

“They should figure something out (I don’t know what) to stop children from swearing. It is so common for them to say something bad, every second word!” (Anet)

“They should do something about some of the children’s attitudes towards the teachers. They have no respect! But then again, some of the teachers don’t deserve it!” (Anet)

“Get rid of the disobedient pupils and those who make a noise and don’t care about school.” (Clinton)

Seventeen learners would like changes in clothes-related rules. Here are some of their suggestions.

“Some of the rules for girls are absurd. Why must they wear a blazer or jacket when they are wearing trousers? Not every day in summer is warm. You get the occasional cold day. Why can’t we just wear jackets on cold days instead of lousy jerseys?’ (Jan)

“Allow us to wear winter and summer uniforms when we choose.” (Marie)

Two learners do not want to wear belts while another does not want to wear specific shoes. One boy wants to be allowed to wear a bracelet. Six learners want to wear casual clothes more often. One learner wants to wear casual clothes every Friday while another proposes wearing school golf-shirts on Fridays like in his previous school.

Some learners suggest more activities at school.

“Do fun-stuff at school so that we can talk about school when we are older.”
(Nellie)

“More fun activities.” (Tersia)

Other learners are more specific.

“ Actually there isn’t anything I would like to change about my school. I am satisfied with it the way it is now. I would however like it if we could go to veld-schools every year. Also provide dances and fetes.” (Naomi)

“Trips or something” (Nellie)

“I would enjoy it a lot if our school had a better ‘spirit’, e.g. fete or competitions between children and teachers.” (Sandra)

Some learners suggest changes in sport activities.

“More sport days so that the pupils can do stuff together, like classes playing games against each other.” (Deborah)

“More sport activities.” (Piet)

“Give more attention to other sport, not only to one. Force those pupils who don’t want to partake in sport, to do sport and take away some of their other privileges, e.g. culture activities.” (Thomas)

“More interesting sport like volleyball and bowls.” (Ann)

Two learners suggest more Christian activities at school. A number of learners will like changes in the curriculum.

“The pass mark for maths must be 30%. I don’t like that subject but I need it.”
(Charne)

“Drop maths as a subject.” (Sean)

“Present more scientific subjects, like science and biology.” (Sarah)

“Teach us to read better by buying reading programs.” (Lena)

“Teach subjects like art.” (Bettie)

“Give classes aimed at teenage life today about things that affect us.” (Sue)

Some learners want changes in the standard of education.

“They should make sure all the teachers know how to give their subjects correctly.” (Susan)

“Take a look at some of the teachers (maths) to see if they are doing their jobs like they are expected to.” (Willie)

“Spend less money on making the school look nice and use the money to educate the teachers properly, especially the math teachers.” (Ronel)

Some learners propose extra classes.

“Give children extra classes if they need it.” (Sue)

“They should have an academic afternoon, for example, one afternoon after school to help the children who struggle in certain subjects.” (Liesl)

Other learners propose more teachers and smaller classes.

“Less pupils in classes so that attention can be given to those who need it.”
(Frans)

“More teachers, resulting in smaller classes.” (Piet)

One learner wants friendlier teachers while another proposes sending them to anger-management classes!

The following time-related changes are suggested.

“Longer breaks.” (Manie, Maria)

“Make periods shorter.” (Susan)

“Periods are too short, we just start working then the bell rings.” (Liesl)

“Change the time we go home on Fridays.” (Marie)

“To go home at one o’ clock on Wednesdays and Fridays.” (Wynand)

“Start at eight o’clock.” (Charne)

Certain learners suggest a change in the way in which teachers express fairness and favouritism. The following suggestions were made.

“Stop favouring children with sweet little faces.” (Monica)

“Treat children equally and don’t favour those whose parents often visit the office.” (Louise)

“Treat people equally and don’t judge people. Everybody should have a chance to take part in things and sometimes win and not always the same people.” (Anna)

“Give everybody a chance and not only those of the ‘in-group’.” (Bonnie)

“I am very proud of my school, but I am not blind to its faults. Children who partake in the revue are favoured, but it is not possible for everyone to partake in the revue because they live far or because of a lack of money.” (Ella)

One learner does not want to change anything about his school while another “ have a nice school and enjoy it a lot, especially the children.” (Sandra) Three learners did not answer the question.

6.2 Interviews with learners

The school serves two primary functions, namely maintenance-actualisation and skills training or cultural transmission (McCandless, 1970, in Dusek, 1987). These two functions can also be described respectively as individual-oriented and community-oriented functions.

6.2.1 The maintenance-actualisation function

In general, the maintenance-actualisation function of the school is aimed at giving the learner an opportunity to grow socially and emotionally. This is true for those learners who are high on measure of these traits as it is for those who, because of personal circumstances, are poorly developed in these areas.

The role of the school in the psychological development of the learner is often regarded with suspicion because of its role as a socialiser of ‘good’ (that is, conforming) citizens. According to Silberman (1970, in Dusek, 1987), schools educate individuals for docility. As McCandless (1970, in Dusek, 1987) describes it, the maintenance-

actualisation function of schools revolves around the notion of enriching the learners' personal, psychological, and emotional development.

In some ways, schools achieve this function, but in other ways they do not. For example, schools generally do relatively little with regard to the quality of the learners' interpersonal experience at school.

I started the interview by asking the learners what opportunities their school provides for social interaction, and their unanimous answer was "Not enough!"

"We do have interaction with other learners at the inter-school athletics championship but not during school time – breaks are too short and we are not allowed to talk in class...we are very busy in the classes. There isn't always time to socialize. The teachers do not want to sacrifice academic time to socialize." (Marietjie, an extrovert who relocated from a private school to this school because there were too few learners in the private school and not enough opportunities to socialise.)

"We have to interact on a social level outside school hours although the school is the only opportunity that we have to forge social relationships." (Anneli)

"The children in the school initiate opportunities for social interaction, not the personnel." (Lisa)

However, there are certain opportunities for learners to interact, but they are functions of academic instruction rather than concerted efforts by teachers to promote socialization.

"We interact with other learners during group-work in the classroom." (Dewald)

"There are different kinds of children in our school, for example different races, rich and poor, and even orphans. Being in the same classes as them, we learn to get on with different kinds of people, which will help us later in life." (Werner)

When I asked them if it was important for them to socialise, they responded positively. The three “high-achievers” in this group indicated that a social life is also important to them, although, according to Dewald, some teachers and learners think they just want to study.

It seems that opportunities to socialize outside school-hours are a definite need for these learners. Although they are willing to organise social events themselves, the objections and reservations of the teachers hamper them.

“When we want to do something, the teachers say it will not work. But the teachers just do not want to give us a opportunity to try, because they do not have faith in our abilities.” (Marietjie)

“They (the teachers) are wearing blinkers. They do not want to provide more opportunities for social events, like foam parties, ‘youthbash’, and barbeques, like in other schools.” (Anneli)

Schools are now among the few places where young people of diverse backgrounds can be found in large numbers on a daily basis. Just by bringing them together, schools give learners a chance to develop their thinking, to practice handling their emotions, to deal with conflicts, and to learn the values of our society (Lantieri & Patti, 1996).

I asked the learners if they thought that the teachers really think their plans will not succeed, or do they just not want more work. Werner responded by saying that the teachers are probably over-worked and did not want to be bothered by the extra responsibilities of a social function.

“The teachers use the Principal as an excuse...they say he will not approve of our plans, but they just do not want to ask him.” (Marietjie)

“The teachers do not have to help us – we can make our own arrangements, they do not have to help us. We are going to leave school eventually and then we have to make our own arrangements, therefore they must give us the opportunities now to organise events.” (Annali)

If a primary function of a school is actualisation of the learner’s potential, it seems as though these learners are not given the opportunities to nurture and express their individual talents and to channel it into social roles. Not only do they not get sufficient opportunities to socialise, but also they are not given opportunities to do something about this deficiency by organising social events. In doing so, they will be able to test and exert their leadership potential. When I asked them if the school provides them with opportunities to nurture and express their individual talents, the following were their responses:

“I can debate well, but get the opportunity to do so only once a year.”(Anneli)

“I have a band and would like to perform at school functions, but the teachers will not give me the opportunity. When I ask a specific teacher about the possibility, he says that he hasn’t got the time now.” (Dewald)

“During ‘Afriweek’ (a week during which the school promotes the Afrikaans language) we get the opportunity to stage a play, which is nice. We don’t have ‘civvy-days’ (days during which learners are allowed to wear civilian clothes instead of school uniforms) anymore. We want to create a jolly atmosphere at school.” (Marietjie)

“We have to raise funds for the Matric farewell function but when we make propositions, the teachers say it wouldn’t work. They want to tell us how to do it...” (Lisa)

When I asked them how all this makes them feel, Dewald said that he did not want to try anymore, and that he could not wait to finish school. Lisa said that she could not wait to go to university. Werner felt the school should provide opportunities for teambuilding.

I asked them how their school prepares them to deal with the changing world that they live in. Their school provides opportunities to talk about topics such as abortion, HIV/AIDS, and premarital sex during special lectures. Overall, they agree with the standpoints of the teachers on these topics and say that it makes sense. Although this is a school where the Christian faith is dominant, the Principal explains the fundamental beliefs of different religions to them during special periods.

Exploring the topic of peer group pressure, these five learners have been friends since they attended primary school and have more or less the same values. However, when they move outside this peer group, they sometimes experience peer group pressure to become sexually active. According to them, many senior learners are sexually active.

“I grew up in a Christian home and I sometimes feel that God tests my faith when I question ‘sleeping together’ ...is it a sin? But then I remember the values that I was taught by my parents. (Marietjie)

According to Annali, she would feel group pressure to become sexually active if she moved into the sexually active group. She feels that those learners aren’t taught the right moral values by their parents, and religious education in their homes is neglected. Those learners think that the teachings of the Christian church are old-fashioned and therefore there is a need for religious clubs at school.

Although many learners smoke cigarettes and abuse drugs, there is no peer pressure to do likewise. Dewald said that learners normally would not say “you are a sissy” if you do not want to participate in activities that are against school rules.

“I just decide what I want to do and what not, and select friends accordingly...”
(Werner)

According to Dewald, learners are sometimes compelled to associate with learners they would rather not associate with, during group work. Sometimes he ends up doing all the work, but they also take credit for it. In these situations, he tries to complete the work as quickly as possible during school time. Thus he does not have to associate with them outside school hours.

The maintenance-actualisation function of the school is also aimed at enriching the learner's intrapersonal development. I asked the learners how the group that they belong to influence the way that they feel about themselves. The consensus among them was that they have been friends for such a long time that they feel comfortable with each other and do not have to pretend to be something that they are not. They accept each other just the way they are.

When I asked them to tell me about the activities and people at school that contribute to their positive and comfortable self-perceptions, Anneli said that, besides her friends, the teachers did not bother to provide such opportunities.

“Everything runs according to a routine...every day is the same...teachers want to make everybody the same and don't treat us as individuals.” (Anneli)

Werner finds pleasure outside school hours by riding his motorbike, Dewald by taking flying lessons and playing in a band and Marietjie by teaching dancing. Lisa loves maths and takes extra maths classes and is overall a solitary person, but satisfies her social needs by playing netball.

The other side of the coin is the impact that these learners think they have on the social world around them. Marietjie is an extrovert who likes people – she describes herself as a “people-person” – and is friendly towards everybody she comes in contact with. She would like to organise more social events at school.

“Sometimes you play a bigger role in somebody's life than you think. Sometimes you might think that you said something insignificant to somebody but then you discover that it meant something to him...it actually made him feel better.”
(Dewald)

I asked the learners to tell me something about the way they make decisions.

“I have the biggest impact on my decision-making. I will listen to the opinion of other people but in the end I will decide what to do. Sometimes my friends will say one thing but then I will do the opposite.” (Anneli)

“I will ask my friends what they think but in the end I will make the decision myself.” (Dewald)

They believe that a person should take responsibility for the decisions that he/she makes, especially when it was the wrong decision. You should acknowledge the wrong decision and not blame somebody else. Sometimes they have to ask their parents’ permission or approval, for example, when they want to go somewhere. Dewald believes that parents should not be overly protective, because children will then become rebellious.

The school environment does not provide them with many opportunities for independent decision-making. They have to follow the rules without question and when they want to organise certain events, some teachers find some excuse to undermine it, for example, that their plans will not work. By doing this, not only do they undermine the learner’s confidence, but also miss the opportunity to teach him/her independent decision making.

I asked the learners to tell me about their understanding of their own behaviour, for example, do they understand why they sometimes behave the way they do, are their behaviour sometimes irrational, and can they control their behaviour.

“Sometimes I wonder why I did something, but not often.” (Dewald)

“I am an impulsive person and like to try new things.” (Marietjie)

“I am very disciplined and hardly ever question my own behaviour. I usually think before I act.” (Lisa)

“I don’t think about my behaviour...I am not the type of person who asks myself why I did something, but then I seldom do something that I feel sorry about.”
(Werner)

When I asked them if they behave different in different situations, this was Anneli’s response:

“When I am with my friends, I can be myself. When I’m among strangers, I’m quieter. I don’t know what to say or what to do. It depends upon the situation. One should be flexible.”

I asked them if their school environment provides them with opportunities to experiment with different forms of behaviour, they responded that teachers expect of them to behave in class.

“We have to behave in class because our classes are big and if everybody just does what he/she likes, the classroom will be very disruptive.” (Lisa)

“In our classrooms we behave differently than on the playgrounds because we can’t be ourselves in class and just talk when we want to.” (Marietjie)

I asked them to tell me about their purpose in life and their dreams for the future.

“I feel very positive about the future of our country. We have many opportunities to be successful. Women can also realise their dreams.” (Marietjie)

Anneli responded to this by saying that the future would be more difficult for men but Dewald did not worry about the future because he was sure that he would be able to find his place in the world. Anneli based her confidence in the future on her religious beliefs.

“I believe our lives follow a plan because God has a plan for us. Every day of our lives is recorded in His Book of Life. I would have felt different if I weren’t a Christian. Because I’m a Christian, I don’t worry because God knows what we need.”

At this point Marietjie told us about a near-drowning that she experienced. While she was struggling in the water, she thought about all the opportunities she had missed because at the time that the opportunities presented themselves, she was too stressed out to pursue them.

Their school does provide career counselling in the classroom, but because it is not an examination subject, teachers neglect it and learners seldom use this period to investigate possible careers. More often than not, they do the homework for other subjects in this period. Some teachers organise field trips relevant to their subjects. For example, Anneli’s Criminology teacher organised a trip to the prison where the learners could experience the running of a prison firsthand. According to her, she and her fellow learners found the trip inspiring and educational.

Following up on this theme, I asked the learners to tell me about their plans for the future. I wanted to know more about the saliency of their identity and if they have made firm commitments to the future.

“I know who I am, what I believe in, and what my values are. It will change when I leave school. I know where I am now, but I don’t know where I will be or what I will become (in terms of a career).” (Anneli)

Dewald, a highly gifted pupil, wants to become a pilot and is already taking flying lessons.

“I want to fly, I don’t care where!”

I asked him if his teachers or parents pressure him to attend university instead of pursuing a career in flying, given his academic giftedness. He responded that he does not discuss

his career plans with his teachers and that his parents want him to pursue a career that will make him happy. Lisa is a gifted maths learner and plans to study it at university level. Werner, Anneli and Marietjie are still unsure of their career plans.

“I don’t know what career I will follow. I want to finish school first, then I will think about a career, but my parents say I must start thinking about my future.”
(Werner)

“I am still not sure about a career. I experience pressure from my parents to decide about a career. I must also choose the right subjects. The greatest stress at the moment concerns my future career. Tertiary studies are expensive and therefore I must make the right choice.” (Anneli)

“I am not sure about my future career. I would like to join a Christian youth group for one year but my parents will not allow it. They want me to become an accountant because I like Accountancy but I also like people and like to work with people.” (Marietjie)

I asked them about their needs and whether their school provides opportunities to meet them.

“Everybody has a need for friendship and to be accepted, and the peer group fills this needs, not the school.” (Dewald)

“We need more opportunities to socialize, but the only time we can socialise at school is during break. We are very busy with schoolwork but would like to socialise during weekends. If we don’t arrange to meet our friends at the movies or at the mall, we will never hang out with them because at school there is not enough opportunities.” (Werner)

To conclude the interview, I asked them about the hopes, fears and feelings that occupy their thoughts at the moment. It seems as though their schoolwork and plans for the future are most important.

“I am interested in many things – cultural activities, choreography, international marketing, becoming an accountant...I stress a lot about schoolwork. It will be easier once I’ve decided what to do with my life.” (Marietjie)

“I stress a lot about university exemption and what I want to study. My biggest worry at the moment is schoolwork because I want to excel so that I will be able to study any course that I choose.” (Anneli)

It is interesting to note that Anneli, who averages seven distinctions, is worried about her marks while Dewald and Lisa, equally successful learners, don’t. One could offer several hypotheses, for example, Dewald and Lisa have already chosen careers and therefore they felt more relaxed about their schoolwork.

“I don’t stress a lot about my schoolwork. The exams are not too difficult. I do not experience pressure to achieve because I study for myself and not so impress somebody else. Also, I know what I want to do with my life.” (Dewald)

“I work very hard and am dedicated to my studies, but I do it because I enjoy it and not because anyone pressurises me. I am looking forward to finish school and start studying maths at university.” (Lisa)

I am a registered psychometrist and conducted a Career Guidance Portfolio for Anneli. I suggested possible careers in accordance with her test results and was left with the impression that she is less anxious about her future.

6.2.2 Skills-training function

This function refers to the school's traditional role of teaching skills and imparting information (McCandless, 1970 in Dusek, 1987). It is this function that has been mostly stressed in the educational system. The school acts as a community organisation that channels people into future educational and vocational areas, and determines to a large degree the future of every single adolescent. A matric certificate certifies that the person who holds it is qualified for entrance into tertiary education or possesses the skills necessary to function in a variety of job categories.

In a similar vein, schools serve to pass on the beliefs, values, and traditions of a culture from one generation to the next. Learners learn various role expectations by the examples that are set in school. They learn to fulfill these roles by the training they receive in school.

There is no doubt that the single most important aspect of the school situation in terms of influencing adolescent attitudes and success in school, is the teacher. Through individual teacher-learner interactions, as well as through curriculum presentation and attitudes about learners, teachers exert a great deal of control over how adolescents view school and how well they will do there. If there is a good match between teacher characteristics, the learner will probably perform better than if there is a poor match. Teacher reaction towards learners and teacher-learner interaction are critical variables in analysing the effect of the teacher on the adolescent's performance and attitudes toward school.

“Learners are sometimes afraid to keep on asking questions in class, because it is the other learners, and not the teachers, who jeer at them and therefore preventing them from asking questions.” (Dewald)

“If you don't understand the work, they will help you, but some teachers become irritated when you keep on asking.” (Anneli)

A teacher plays a valuable role in the development of a positive self-image in learners. Given the amount of time learners spend in classrooms, the potential for support or

damage to the developing self-image is dependent upon a number of factors that are within the teacher's primary control.

“If you are not clever but you work hard, they encourage you.” (Werner)

“Some teachers are always positive and encourage you. They tell you that you know you can do better, or write on the test ‘well done’.” (Lisa)

These learners are aware of the important influence that teachers exert on their learners.

“The role of teachers in the school shouldn't be underestimated. Some learners tend to avoid teachers because they do not live up to their teachers' expectations.” (Lisa)

These learners take the view that teachers, who are not allowed to perform corporal punishment to discipline their learners, resort to verbal abuse.

“The teachers are not allowed to spank us and therefore they have to verbally punish us. There is no discipline in our school...our teachers take their frustration out on us.” (Anneli)

“Teachers make nasty comments (toward particular learners) and the other learners pick up on it and also make nasty comments.” (Werner)

When Deon was the only learner in his Biology class to complete his homework, his teacher, instead of complementing him on his conscientiousness, asked him if he doesn't have a social life because his work is always done. He feels that some teachers discriminate against the top learners as well. Fortunately, Deon is a self-assured young man but this type of ambiguity of expectations on the side of the teacher may unsettle a less self-assured learner.

The results are discussed in Chapter 7 and compared with the corresponding research findings of other researchers that were reported in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

Researchers in developmental and educational psychology have increasingly recognised the importance of individual learners' construction of meaning in school as an important mediator between the actual school context and their school-related feelings, beliefs and actions. It is the functional meaning of the environment *per se* that is the most important aspect of concern in understanding how learners' experience of this environment impacts the course of their development. In the context of this study, this means that the classroom environment might actually not be the way that certain learners perceive it, for example, hostile and unfair. In reality it might be warm and fair. However, it is the learners' perception of the environment that is of importance.

7.1 Classroom environment

According to the learner-centered approach learners have unique differences, for example, emotional states of mind, learning rates, learning styles, stages of development, abilities, talents, and feelings of efficacy that must be taken into account to promote and ensure effective learning (Henson, 2003). The mixed results of my study might be due to these differences. Although the learners attend the same classes, they experience their teachers differently. Some learners feel that their teachers are friendly and understanding.

“I am crazy about my one female teacher. She helps me without thinking that I am stupid or not good enough for her class. It is easy to talk to her about anything. She is like a friend to me. She doesn't have 'favourites'. She sees my point of view.” (Natalie)

Other learners feel that their teachers do not understand them, are unfair towards them, and favour some learners.

“When teachers can't understand it when I don't do as well in a test as I did previously. Many times you just don't feel well or you experienced something

terrible and you don't share it with them but then they must understand that you still did your best." (Ella)

There can be several explanations for these differences. For example, certain teachers may well be unfair and lack understanding for their learners' unique differences. On the other hand, certain learners might not perform according to their abilities.

These differences can also be explained with reference to their individual identity conditions. Foreclosure subjects felt more comfortable in school and held more positive attitudes toward their educational experiences. In contrast, the uncommitted, searching, and experimenting moratorium subjects evaluated their educational experience rather negatively (Waterman & Waterman, 1970, in Muuss, 1996). Apparently, the structure of the school – the curriculum, schedules, attendance and grades – encourage foreclosure rather than efforts directed toward self-finding and self-definition, which lead to questioning and challenging of existing values and rules. Successful identification depends upon whether the conventional classroom group, with the concurrence of the teacher, allows the adolescent enough opportunities for exploration and questioning of existing attitudes and values.

Teachers should employ different forms of assessment that provide learners with many different ways to show that they have learned. In addition to written tests and examinations, learners should be assessed in a variety of ways.

“Some of the teachers simply can't wrap their minds around the fact that all learners aren't the same in all subjects. They judge you because you don't do well in their subject, but they don't see how well you do in a subject you understand more. Sometimes they become angry when you ask them a question and they think it's supposed to be common knowledge, but you don't know the answer.”
(Susan)

Teachers must keep in mind that they are responsible for the success or failure of their learners. They must be aware that they are not only responsible for their learners'

intellectual development, but also for their physical, social, and emotional development (Brown, D. M., 2003).

7.2 Teacher characteristics

Adolescence is a time when adolescents are increasingly self-conscious and have a need for positive support and regard from adults. There is no doubt that the single most important aspect of the school situation in terms of influencing adolescent attitudes as well as academic success is the teacher. Through individual teacher-learner interactions, as well as through curriculum presentation and attitudes about learners, the teacher exerts a great deal of control over how adolescents view school and how well they will perform. If there is a good match between teacher characteristics and learner characteristics, the learner will probably perform better than if there is a poor match. These qualities were considered to be more important than teacher academic competencies (Dusek, 1987).

Positive teacher regard may provide adolescents with social and emotional resources that contribute to their academic and psychological well-being. According to the learner-centered approach, learning occurs best in an environment that contains positive interpersonal relationships and interactions, and in which the learner feels acknowledged and respected (Henson, 2003).

“Teachers who do not insult you when you do poorly in a test but motivate you to do better in the next test.” (Anna)

Environments in which learners need not worry about being compared to others in terms of academic ability are the kinds of school experiences hypothesised to lead to positive adjustment and achievement. On the other hand, public forms of evaluation and competitiveness impacts negatively on some learners’ self-perceptions, motivations and sense of dignity.

“I don’t like teachers who damage children’s inner character by shouting at them and calling them names just to make a joke. That is unacceptable.” (Lena)

My study yielded mixed results in this category. There were more negative responses than positive responses. The positive responses are testimony to the fact that probably the majority of teachers in this school aim to raise their learners' self-esteem by enhancing their feelings of personal worth. Furthermore, they are capable of motivating their learners to work hard by providing an environment that is conducive to learning.

“When they make the class fun so that you enjoy going there and actually want to go there.” (Anna)

The negative responses relate to negative feedback from the teachers in the form of rudeness, shouting and insults in front of the learners' peers. This leads to feelings of humiliation, inadequacy, and helplessness.

“They verbally abuse you and call you names. I spoke to the Principal about this without any results and now I don't know what to do about it. This problem affects me greatly and it makes me very unhappy.” (Bonnie)

Teachers should keep in mind that they possess the power to alter learner perceptions of themselves as learners and their relationship to schooling. The potential for support or damage of a developing self-esteem is dependent upon a number of factors that are within the teacher's primary control.

7.3 Academic instruction

Recent studies (Eccles & Roeser, 1999) on the effect of classroom environment have disentangled factors like teacher personality and warmth from teacher instruction and managerial style. Learner satisfaction, personal development, and achievement are maximised only when teacher supportiveness is accompanied by efficient organisation, stress on academics, and provision of focused goal-oriented lessons.

However, teachers should not focus solely on the number of skills they teach, the number of textbooks they cover, or the number of facts their learners can memorise. They should initially focus on learner-related factors in order to understand which content their

learners will be able to learn and benefit from most. Furthermore, teachers must ensure that their learners are being taught at a level in which they can be successful (Brown, D. M., 2003).

The majority of responses in this category were positive. Most teachers in this school are capable of establishing a helpful ethos where effective communication exists between teacher and learner.

“They explain the work properly and are willing to help you when you find the work difficult.” (Anna)

“I like teachers who don’t act crazy when you don’t understand the subject.” (Clinton)

However, there are teachers who believe that it is possible to standardise learner abilities and expectations. This belief allows them to ignore individual differences, and standardise treatment. They become impatient when all their learners do not understand their instructions at the same tempo. During a time of heightened self-consciousness, these unreasonable expectations and comparisons with more gifted learners may cause some learners to question their academic abilities, to feel their self-esteem being threatened, and possibly feel angry, unhappy and/or helpless. They may also feel reluctant to ask questions and participate in classroom discussions. These learners become marginalized and alienated in the classroom.

“Some teachers humiliate you in front of other learners or teachers like when you received poor marks, they read it aloud in front of the other children and comment upon it. They should try to talk to us after school.” (Sandra)

Teachers must remember that their learners learn in different ways. Therefore, they should employ a wide variety of approaches to teaching concepts, for example, practical examples and field trips.

7.4 Discipline

The responses of this category yielded mixed results. Five classroom order strategies have been identified (Traynor, 2003). The teachers in this school use all five strategies. They are:

(a) Coercive: The coercive strategy is characterised by the use of techniques such as intimidation and learner deprecation to control learner behaviour. Using this strategy has negative effects on learner attributes such as motivation, attitude and behaviour.

Some of the learners reported the use of this strategy by certain teachers in this school, for example:

“They verbally abuse you and call you names. I spoke to the Principal about this without any results and now I don’t know what to do about it. This problem affects me greatly and it makes me very unhappy.” (Bonnie)

(b) Laissez-faire: This strategy is characterised by the use of positive social interactions between teacher and learner. A teacher using this technique presents a low risk of learner defiance. However, the teacher also gives the learners little intellectually challenging material to defy. Hence, the learners will not be challenged to grow intellectually.

Certain teachers use this technique, for example:

“I would say the younger teachers of today don’t know how or what to do to help don’t know how or what to do to help pupils along in school. They seem more concerned in being the pupils’ friend than teaching them respect and discipline.” (Debbie)

(c) Task-oriented: This technique is characterised by the use of material as a device to keep learners under control with little or no regard to its educational value. In using this strategy, a teacher also fails to challenge learners intellectually.

Learners reported the use of this technique by certain teachers, for example:

“ Some teachers don’t know how to discipline the class. Then they punish the whole class with homework, and not just the naughty ones.” (Jan)

(d) Authoritative: This technique is characterised by the use of rules that are reasonable and whose consequences are humane and consistent. The learning environment is positive, firm, and non-hostile. Certain teachers in this school uses this style, for example:

“I like it when a teacher is strict because it disciplines us as well because my work is always done when I get class at a teacher who is strict.” (Thea)

(e) Intrinsic: This strategy was characterised by the use of rewards for desired behaviour. The intention is to enable the learner to control himself/herself properly. Quality, engaging instruction may also be considered to be a positive characteristic of the intrinsic strategy. It may also have the added benefit of positively influencing learner behaviour in general. Some teachers in this school use this style, for example:

“ I admire teachers for handling so many teenagers. I would call us teenagers. Teenagers are in that time when arrogance is mainly in control. No one is stronger, better, smarter, than a teenager. Teachers deal with these situations every day, for a number of years even. They especially target the older ones. Some teachers know how to deal with teenagers and that I like about teachers.”
(Jan)

Teachers should know that teaching includes teaching of proper behaviour as well as academic content. When the roles in the classroom are flawed, one indicant is the lack of classroom discipline. If a teacher has difficulties developing and maintaining his/her authority in the classroom, learners will sense these difficulties and might inappropriately take on too much control. The teacher’s development of a professional identity is essential in assisting learners in developing a healthy identity and what it means to be a learner.

Adolescence represents a significant new phase in the individual's relations with the institutional order. Formal education provides most children with their first direct and extended experience of a formal organisation and institutional authority. It is likely that this experience will be the basis on which children construct a preliminary understanding of formal authority and the principle according to which it operates.

In the Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2002) study, teachers verbalised their frustration because corporal punishment is not legal anymore but viewed as a criminal offence. This clashes with teachers and parents' views that corporal punishment is necessary for discipline of learners. Teachers think that they are left in the cold with no instrument to apply discipline and have to rely on other strategies to maintain discipline. These strategies, like giving extra homework, seem like an unfair method of punishment for the obedient learners. However, teachers find themselves in a difficult situation because many learners do not recognise formal authority and threaten other learners' chances for proper education by their disruptive behaviour.

7.5 Homework

In the 1980's and 1990's, few issues related to schooling were as universally endorsed as homework. Educators, parents and policymakers of all political and pedagogical stripes insisted homework is good and more is better. Homework has been touted for academic and character-building purposes, and for promoting America's international competitiveness. It has been viewed as a key symbol, method, and yardstick of serious commitment to educational reform (Gill & Schlossman, 2003; Lacina-Gifford & Gifford, 2004).

Indeed, recent news reports suggest that the pro-homework consensus is in danger of becoming a victim of its own success. Descriptions of the woes of children and parents who are losing sleep, burning out, and entering therapy as a result of heavy doses of homework, abound. This has been based almost entirely on anecdote because researchers have shown little interest in seriously examining the amount of time learners spent on homework (Gill & Schlossman, 2003).

Homework engages the learner-family-school interface on a daily basis and is therefore an important phenomenon that merits research. Opponents argue that excessive

homework takes away valuable bonding time of families (Lacina-Gifford & Gifford, 2004).

Furthermore, homework is a barometer of the success – or the limits – of the movements to raise academic standards. To succeed, academic excellence movements ultimately require learners to invest effort in their studies.

Homework can and should serve a variety of important purposes in the educational process, especially when it is thoughtfully designed and implemented. Homework can promote academic achievement, it can inculcate habits of self-discipline and independent study, and help inform parents about and excite their interest in the educational agenda of the school. Homework should therefore be relevant, varied, and take place outside the classroom (Gill & Schlossman, 2003).

Although it is general knowledge that certain learners are lazy to do any amount of homework, large or small, the results of this study show that certain teachers prescribe homework without considering other scholastic factors, for example, an impending sports event that involve all the learners.

“Gives us a lot of homework. Sometimes when we write tests, we also get homework. It interferes with my studies. It makes me tired because we get so much.” (Wynand)

Teachers should aim at giving homework that their learners can realistically complete with good results. Furthermore, they should not give homework as a form of punishment, but as part of the curriculum enhancement. This involves material that is contextually relevant and meaningful to the learner (Brown, D. M., 2003).

7.6 Independent thinking

During the adolescent process, the support of schools to develop challenging activities is necessary to create many stable, unique and healthy adolescent identities. If adolescents do not accept new roles and assume challenging responsibilities, they may never face their conflicts to develop their unique individuation process. Adolescents need opportunities to face challenges or responsibilities and to experience becoming a

completely developed individual. It is important for adolescents to have adequate opportunities to build their self-esteem and confidence. Schools need to provide a supportive, interactive and pro-active learning environment for adolescents to flourish (Powell, 2004). Successful identity development depends upon whether the classroom environment, with the concurrence of the teacher, allows the learner enough breathing space to explore his/her identity.

“Everything runs according to a routine...every day is the same...teachers want to make everybody the same and don’t treat us as individuals.” (Anneli)

“Yes, what is the point of going to school if the school doesn’t teach you the basic way of deciding for yourself? Every school should prepare you for your decision making as an adult.”(Debbie)

According to the learner-centered approach, learners must be actively involved in acting on their environments and constructing their own knowledge. They should be provided with choices regarding their assignments and how to perform them. Because learners possess many different types of intelligence and learning styles, they should not be expected to do the same assignments in the same ways. Instead, teachers should provide a variety of ways for learners to study concepts and to work with them.

“They encourage us to think creatively. Encourage us up to a point, we are not allowed to break school rules and to become totally undisciplined.” (Ella)

Although the majority learners feel that their teachers encourage independent thinking, certain learners feel that their school environment suppresses their creativity, individuality, and identity exploration. It demands conformity to the *status quo* and submission to authority rather than aiding its learners in the development of a personal identity. Furthermore, it denies learners opportunities to organise events that will simultaneously develop their organising skills and provide opportunities for social interaction.

“They don’t really give you the time of day when you have an opinion about something that’s not right. Although they tell us that we are allowed to voice our opinions, they don’t really listen to you unless you are one of the ‘elite’ people in school.” (Susan)

“We have to raise funds for the Matric farewell function but when we make propositions, the teachers say it wouldn’t work. They want to tell us how to do it...” (Lisa)

Although teachers should encourage independent thinking, they should establish a balance and avoid isolating learners by requiring them to work alone. Instead, learners should work together in pairs or in small groups where they can share information and support each other’s learning.

“We do have interaction with other learners at the inter-school athletics championship but not during school time – breaks are too short and we are not allowed to talk in class...we are very busy in the classes. There isn’t always time to socialize. The teachers do not want to sacrifice academic time to socialize.” (Marietjie)

“There are different kinds of children in our school, for example different races, rich and poor, and even orphans. Being in the same classes as them, we learn to get on with different kinds of people, which will help us later in life. (Werner)

7.7 Acceptance

An identity-enhancing curriculum promotes self-acceptance and positive feedback from teachers. Teachers should be aware of personal preferences that might preclude their acceptance of differences in learners’ learning and behaviour patterns. The majority

respondents feel that their teachers accept them the way they are but some feel that certain teachers accept them while others do not.

“I think that teachers don’t accept pupils that never even bother to study for a test, that always get demerits and always end up in the principle’s office. They do accept the pupils for who they are, but doesn’t accept the way they act.” (Thea)

“Most of my teachers do accept me, except the maths teacher. She doesn’t want me in her class because she says that I waste her time and disrupt the class, but it isn’t true.” (Francois)

Learners have distinctive perspectives or frames of reference, contributed to by their history, their social and physical environment, their interests and goals, beliefs, and cognitive patterns that teachers have to consider and respect.

The social status system of the high school requires that learners learn to identify existing school groups and their defining features, such as the group’s reputation and what kinds of activities group members are likely to engage in. When learners feel that they lack the desired attributes to join a certain group, for example, enough money or being good at sport, their self-esteem are threatened. Exclusion from a certain group can lead to feelings of humiliation and rejection. These negative feelings might lead to a number of negative outcomes, for example, depression and deviant behaviour. Certain learners in this school feel that they are not members of the “in-group”

“...because they compare me with the [other better children]. I do my best but it is never good enough. If your parents don’t buy everything or give money, you are nothing, and become nothing.” (Elsa)

7.8 Concerns about the future

Adolescents establish patterns for their lives around essential questions of who they will be, how they will run their own lives, and how they will interact with others. When we focus on the difficulties individual adolescents encounter in resolving uncertainty

about the future, it becomes clear that motivational processes are stalled without a perspective on the future. In older learners it is characterised by a lack of purpose, difficulties in forming a career identity, and a reluctance to make commitments to future plans. Judging by the responses, many learners in this school feel unsure about their futures.

“I am very afraid of what is lying in front of me or what’s waiting to happen. I want to become fashion designer, but I am often afraid that I am not going to fulfill my dreams. I think about what if I don’t become a designer? What will I do then? I am unsure of my choices and how to fulfill my dreams and go into fashion designing. I’m scared that my subjects that I have now aren’t the right ones and that they won’t support me.” (Marie)

“I think a lot about the choices I have to make. I have to decide about life after Matric, what I want to do and how I’m going to achieve my goals. My schoolwork is very important right now. My family, friends, and social life.” (Wynand)

“Hope in the future” motivates learners to stay in school, work hard, and prepare for their futures. It seems as though the teachers in this school fail to install in their learners a sense of optimism about their futures by providing career counselling and social support.

Teachers must plan instruction by considering their learners’ prior knowledge. Teachers must then present concepts by starting with what learners already know and then moving toward new, unknown concepts. Information should have practical use in everyday life and prepare learners for their futures. Teachers should provide activities that enable learners to work with new concepts in meaningful ways. Along with this approach, teachers should require learners to solve problems related to unique contexts, for example, those encountered in school, home or community situations. In addition, teachers should provide opportunities for learners to work with the problems in different physical contexts, for example, in laboratories and on field trips.

7.9 Identity formation

Identity formation during adolescence differs from identity formation during previous developmental periods, mainly because the adolescent is experiencing a growing awareness of his/her own identity (Hoyle, *et. al.*, 1999). Identity formation requires re-evaluating and synthesising identifications from one's childhood. The adolescent creates a sense of future by establishing a viable identity. This requires the integration of a social and a personal identity. Areas of previously unquestioned commitment are revisited for extensive re-examination.

"I am me! For a big part of my life I always tried to fit in. I wasn't myself. The truth is I was a fake! (It didn't work). A few months ago I decided to just be myself, and it works! I'm happier and have a lot of friends, and everything is great! So right now I am just focusing on making the switch and being myself. When I successfully 'transferred', I will start working on bigger things." (Anet)

An identity-enhancing school curriculum promotes exploration, responsible choice, and self-determination by learners. Learners must be able to understand the alternatives, evaluate each one systematically, and feel a sense of personal control over the decisions he/she makes. Judging by some of the responses, certain learners still have diffused identities. It is a cause of concern when identity diffusion persists into late adolescence (Heaven, 1994)

"...I am lazy and I think life is a 'jol'." (Francois)

Identity foreclosure exists when adolescents have made a personal commitment to certain values, beliefs, acceptable behaviour and an occupational course of study. They hold inflexible beliefs and are resistant to changing their identity standards. An adolescent with a foreclosed standard may avoid disturbances or challenges to this identity and will resist any encountered disturbance by disbelieving or discounting the inconsistent feedback or its source (Kerpelman, *et. al.*, 1997). Judging by certain

responses, some learners are in the foreclosed phase and teachers and significant others might find it difficult to introduce them to alternatives, for example, career possibilities.

“I am my own person, stubborn and very cold, hard and difficult to express my feelings. I like acting, to do my own thing, to be the boss in every task, I always want to be right and don’t accept it easily that I’m wrong. My life isn’t perfect, but I’m working on it” (Ann)

“I don’t care what people think of me or say of me. I like doing things I want to do and not to be told what to do. I have my own will and way.” (Natalie)

“I have the biggest impact on my decision-making. I will listen to the opinion of other people but in the end I will decide what to do. Sometimes my friends will say one thing but then I will do the opposite.” (Anneli)

Adolescents in moratorium phase may be experiencing a crisis, but have not yet made choices or a personal commitment. During this stage, adolescents are engaged in a personal struggle and are busily evaluating alternatives. They are open to new information and may offer less resistance to conflicting types of feedback. In some instances, learners in this school require guidance from teachers and trustworthy significant others to offer them opportunities for exploration and the making of responsible choices.

“I am still not sure about a career. I experience pressure from my parents to decide about a career. I must also choose the right subjects. The greatest stress at the moment concerns my future career. Tertiary studies are expensive and therefore I must make the right choice.” (Anneli)

“I am very confused right now, about a lot of stuff, about a lot of people who doesn’t understand me, and they treat me differently because of my preferences –

especially my family. They don't always appreciate the choices I made, but I feel this is my life and I will live it the way I want to!!" (Deborah)

This stage is synonymous with maturity and, ultimately, identity formation. This adolescent has seriously considered occupational choices and with respect to ideology, he/she seems to have re-evaluated beliefs and achieved a resolution. Adolescents in this phase tend to be more self-reflective and capable of greater cognitive integrative complexity than adolescents with foreclosed identities. The integration and consolidation of varying discrepant experiences via exploration make an achieved standard more multidimensional.

"I have the biggest impact on my decision-making. I will listen to the opinion of other people but in the end I will decide what to do. Sometimes my friends will say one thing but then I will do the opposite." (Anneli)

"I work very hard and am dedicated to my studies, but I do it because I enjoy it and not because anyone pressurises me. I am looking forward to finish school and start studying maths at university." (Lisa)

Not all adolescents who move into early adulthood will have accomplished complete identity achievement. One would expect development shifts throughout adolescence. For example, it is possible to be in the moratorium phase for most adolescents before seriously making commitments. Therefore, the school should take positive and determined steps to ensure that all its learners are provided with the necessary guidance to make the right choices by providing opportunities for exploration and facilities for experimentation, for example, clubs, laboratories and field trips.

When reading the responses, it is obvious that many learners in this school experience emotional problems, such as depression and low self-esteem that can endanger successful identity achievement.

“...and looking for answers all the time. I’m often depressed ...I think of rugby all the time...I don’t know what I will do because I’m scared! In short, I’m the usual old ‘dweeb’.” (Bart)

“I am downtrodden in life, I don’t know where I stand. Nobody wants to give me a chance. Teachers expect too much of me. Children, who think they are better than me, upset me a lot and I have lots of problems. The problems become too much!” (Bonnie)

“My future and my figure. My figure bothers me! I know I’m not fat, but nothing is ever good enough. I never stop eating but I always think about...what did I eat, what can I afford to eat, what would be the best to eat and much more. It drives me crazy!” (Anet)

Some learners experience social problems, for example, with family and friends.

“My boyfriend whom I really love and myself broke up two days ago and I am heartbroken. I gave him my everything and after nine months he threw it back in my face. Now I have doubts about myself and about life and I wonder if things will ever be okay again. I just wonder how many other girls feel exactly the same way, but can’t share it with anyone. I feel sorry for them!” (Ella)

“I have only one parent and while my mother works, I have to do the homework and see to it that nothing is needed. I also have to do my homework. I think mostly about my mother and worry about her.” (Sandra)

Because the school plays such a critical role in development, it is also the context in which many problems originate or express themselves, for example, social rejection and negative self-concept. The school also represents a useful venue for introducing interventions designed to address these problems.

Schools should be responsive to diverse societal factors such as poverty, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and family disintegration (McKnight-Taylor, 1997). Teachers in this school may need to change their assessment techniques to include portfolios and autobiographical writing. They should also be well informed about the learner's life situation outside the scholastic area (family, peer group), and be willing and capable to intervene when necessary.

Teachers should aim at curriculum integration of the twin concepts of personal and social integration. Personal integration requires the teacher to help learners engage in real-life learning experiences so that they can incorporate them into their own understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Social integration necessitates that we help learners participate responsibly in the experiences of a democratic community. When developed simultaneously, these dispositions help learners to realise the mutually influential interplay of individuality and community and to successfully negotiate the responsibilities of life in a democracy (Bergstrom, 1998).

7.10 Proposed changes

The high school also affords learners opportunities to participate in a variety of school-sponsored extracurricular activities. Research evidence underscores the value of extracurricular activities in promoting social-emotional competence (Poulou, 2005). The support of schools to develop challenging activities is necessary to create stable, unique and healthy adolescent identities (Powell, 2004). There are many areas in which learners might achieve, including schoolwork, sport, hobbies and domestic skills and forming friendships. A learner's ability to actualise his/her potential is dependent to a certain degree upon the school's willingness to provide opportunities for achievement.

Learners who are still uncommitted to identity-related goals, values or beliefs, should be exposed to a wide the range of alternatives in order to increase the likelihood that they will find something to engage their interest, which could become a basis for commitment. Alternatively, an educational environment which supports open exploration of occupational and ideological alternatives rather than rewarding premature commitment, could do much to foster identity formation for the foreclosed adolescent (Kroger, 1989; Waterman, 1989).

Successful performance in extracurricular activities affords status and non-academic achievement opportunities for learners who are not academic achievers. This success is instrumental to positive identity development because it enhances a sense of purpose and achievement.

Although this school does provide opportunities for extracurricular activities, it should consult the learners on their needs to participate in a variety of other activities other than the traditional rugby and netball.

“Our school is boring. Everyday the same NOTHING happens. I think it will be better if our school has a cafeteria or something else nice.” (Mandy)

“More interesting sport like volleyball and bowls.” (Ann)

The school management should also review the rules related to appearance and ascertain whether all the rules are still relevant.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the school as a social system, consisting of a variety of subsystems, is of practical as well as theoretical value. It provides a context to understand learners within the ecological context of the larger systems of which they are members. Initially, the primary subsystem of the developing child is the family. As children mature, their social subsystems play an increasingly important role in their social and emotional development. Due to circumstances such as a breakdown in family relationships and the long hours that some parents have to work, adolescents sometimes spend more time at school with their teachers and peer group than with their family members.

It is within this social matrix that the adolescent is presented with opportunities to develop his/her identity, abilities, talents, and dreams for the future. However, the interactions that the adolescent have with significant others in this developmental stage are sometimes fraught with risks to his/her developing identity and sense of self-worth.

An integrated systems perspective can broaden our approach to contextual factors and help to examine the quality and impact of educational environments. A systems framework considers both physical and social aspects of the educational context and their determinants and effects. Although schools are similar in administrative and personnel structure, in practice, there are considerable differences in how they function. Members of the school 'family' comprise the most diverse personalities, complete with interdisciplinary education, experience, goals and objectives. Schools' formal goals, informal norms, staff relationships, and procedures can have a differential impact on the behaviour of teachers and learners. The educational policy, learner-teacher ratio, and teacher competency should be considered in conjunction with social aspects, such as teacher warmth and understanding and peer group pressure.

Furthermore, the social environment doesn't only impact on the adolescent – the adolescent also impacts on his/her social environment through his/her behaviour and underlying individual characteristics, for example, family history, health status, and temperament.

The comprehensive evidence presented by a number of researchers clearly establishes that the nature of the classroom environment has a potent influence on learners' academic, social and psychological development (Fraser & Walberg, 1991).

Taxonomy of the necessary and sufficient social conditions for adolescent identity development has hardly been explored. Furthermore, few studies have investigated the relationship between classroom environment and adolescent identity. Thus the logical next step would be to specify what kinds of environments are conducive to identity development.

While each young person is unique in personal history, talents and attributes, there appear to be certain underlying and predictable structural elements that comprise the identity formation process. Once they have been recognized, the opportunity exists for the facilitation of identity development. The purpose of this thesis was to provide an examination of the elements in the school systems that are conducive to the identity development of the learners. The following themes were explored:

- Processes at work in order to obtain identity formation.
- The impact of these processes in relation to identity formation.
- The optimization of the process of identity formation.

It was established that the single most important aspect of the school situation in terms of influencing adolescent socio-emotional development as well as academic success, is the teacher. Through individual teacher-learner interactions, as well as through academic presentation, the teacher exerts a great deal of control over how adolescents experience school and how well they will perform. Processes at work in the classroom environment that are conducive or harmful to identity development were identified and discussed in Chapter 4. The presence or absence of these processes in the school where my research was conducted, were investigated and discussed in chapter 7. Generally speaking, I found that a positive attitude towards teaching, and towards each learner, irrespective of his/her abilities and unique qualities, leads to a teaching environment that sets the adolescent on a path towards positive identity formation.

Adolescence is a developmental period during which humans are increasingly self-conscious and have a need for positive support and regard from significant others. Positive teacher regard, for example, by treating them with respect and affording them a

measure of independence, may provide adolescents with social and emotional resources that will contribute to their psychological well-being and academic success. Environments in which adolescents feel safe within boundaries of acceptable behaviour to be themselves and explore alternatives without the threat of being humiliated by teachers and peers, are likely to contribute to healthy identity formation and a sense of personal worth.

Traditionally teachers decided what learners would learn, and how they would learn it. Approaches are needed that will transform the school environment from one that focuses on the processing of information, to one that focuses on invention, exploration, and accountability. The learner must feel that it is involved in helping to shape his/her destiny.

Teachers should recognize the growing maturity of adolescents as well as the diversity among them. Not all learners need the same degree of structure, but effective academic performance and identity formation can only be achieved in a well-managed classroom. Learners should be included in the establishment of rules, and the validity thereof. Furthermore, they should be taught that negative actions have negative consequences and that they should take responsibility for their actions. Discipline will thus be approached as part of learning responsibility, and will lead to a sense of personal control.

Teachers should keep in mind that they possess the power to alter learner perceptions of themselves as learners and their relationships to schooling. The potential for support or damage of a developing self-esteem is dependent upon a number of factors that are within the teacher's primary control.

It is within the power of the teachers to take a stand to apply teaching principles that will lead to the healthy social, physical, emotional and behavioural development of the learners in their care. It will not be an easy endeavour, but the payoff in terms of professional job satisfaction will be worth their efforts. Although the majority of teachers seem to be dedicated to their learners, there are certain instances where they lack the necessary skills to optimize their classroom's efficacy.

Although the purpose of this study was not to study the education system, I believe that the findings generated by this study underscore the value of taking a broad ecological approach to the education system in order to understand the development of adolescents

and the genesis of delinquency, substance abuse, health complaints and dropout behaviour.

Using a systems approach to understand problems within schools contributes to a learner's healthy identity development. When the position is taken that the problem is one of systems incongruence, rather than the fault of one member, it suggests that a learner's reactions may, to a large degree, be a reflection of some systemic or intersystemic imbalance. The key to healthy identity development does not only lie in issues of personal identity, but also in the environments in which the learner lives. Identity is typically communicated through functional, observable characteristics. One can evaluate these variables from a behavioural, psychoanalytic, or social perspective. However, regardless of orientation, it is difficult to ignore the impact of systems, of which the school is a very important one in the life of a child from approximately six years of age to adolescence.

Schools are now among the few places where young people of diverse backgrounds can be found in large numbers on a daily basis. Just by bringing them together, schools give students a chance to develop their thinking, to practice handling their emotions, to deal with conflicts, and to learn the values of our society. Teachers should help learners to engage in real-life situations in order to incorporate them into their understanding of themselves and their place in the world. They should simultaneously help learners to participate responsibly in their social environment. When developed simultaneously, the mutually influential interplay between individuality and responsibility of life in a democratic society will be established.

While teachers have not explicitly taken up the responsibility to impact upon identity formation, they should employ existing practices and curricula that encourage learners to reflect upon a variety of alternative identity possibilities, promote the gathering of information necessary for the successful resolution of identity crises, and establish identity commitments.

This ideal can be achieved by providing the learners with new, unknown concepts that have practical use in everyday life, and which will prepare them for their futures. These new concepts should also have meaning in their unique contexts, for example, their family or community situations.

The support of schools to develop challenging activities is necessary to create stable, unique, and healthy adolescent identities. There are many areas, other than academic work, in which students might achieve, for example, sport and art. Successful performance in extracurricular activities affords status and non-academic achievement for learners who are not academic achievers. This success is instrumental to positive identity formation because it enhances a sense of purpose and achievement.

Learners who are still uncommitted to identity-related goals, values or beliefs, should be exposed to a wide range of alternatives in order to increase the likelihood that they will find something to engage their interest, which could become a basis for commitment. An educational environment, which supports open exploration of occupational and ideological alternatives, could do much to foster identity formation.

In this study the focus was upon the learners' global experience of their classroom environment. Future research could focus on the teachers' experience of the classroom environment and elements in it that make it difficult for them to promote positive identity development in their learners.

Although every possible step has been taken to ensure that this study adhere to contemporary scientific principles, I am aware of its limitations:

- By representing only one high school setting, the results cannot be generalised to all the high schools in South Africa. However, I do not apologise, as this was a qualitative, explorative and descriptive study that was aimed at identifying elements in the school environment that promote or impede identity development. These aspects could be taken into account in future research.
- This study did not aim to measure a particular attribute, thus representativeness is not an issue here. Qualitative research is aimed at discovery, rather than justification and verification.
- Non-experimental interpretation lacks the power to randomize. Again, qualitative research is aimed at discovery, and the question of randomization is dealt with by using a relatively large sample to complete the questionnaires.
- Participants' general perceptions were reflected, instead of probing for in-depth formulations. This limitation was dealt with through conducting interviews with

some of the participants. This determination reflected my desire to establish preliminary information that might set the stage for future studies.

- This study lacks control, which can lead to improper interpretations. However, the guidelines for conducting grounded theory was strictly adhered to. The completed questionnaires and transcripts of the interviews are available for scientific scrutiny.

Questionnaire research ordinarily does not penetrate very deeply below the surface. The scope of the information sought is usually emphasised at the expense of depth. It is better adapted to extensive rather than intensive research. Selective interviewing in this study rectified this limitation.

The strength of interview assessment lies in the capturing and conveyance of the diversity of human growth and experience, while self-report instruments, such as the questionnaire, that was used in this study, can be easily and quickly administered. Together, these two techniques represent a unique, original and interesting approach to an important psychological and educational problem. It is characterised by an imaginative, yet objective, approach to classroom environment research.

Furthermore, the format of writing paragraphs allowed for every learner's comments to be heard by providing anonymity. The responses can be viewed as true reflections of their feelings, needs, hopes and fears.

With regard to the interviews, I initially had reservations about the participants' willingness to participate in extensive interviews about their school. However, my reservations were unfounded because the learners were more than willing to cooperate.

Finally, the Principal gave me his cooperation by providing the opportunity for the learners to complete the questionnaires during school time and requesting the counseling teacher to assist me.

Science is always a profoundly *human* enterprise. In spite of attempts to represent science as utterly impartial and objective, it is always shaped by the world in which it takes place – a world of politics, economics, ideology and history. I sincerely hope that the *human factor* was present in this study as part of a contextualist approach that attempted to combine the scientific method with sensitivity to human and environmental factors that bear upon the process of data collection and interpretation.

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