

**GRADE 10 MALE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF
SCHOOL DISENGAGEMENT**

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**Submitted to the School of Education
University of KwaZulu-Natal
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Magister Educationis**

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January 2015
Durban**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to the following individuals without whom the completion of this dissertation would not have been possible:

- To God, the creator of our universe, who has given me strength, courage, determination, the willpower to succeed and the gift of life.
- My supervisor, Nyna Amin for her wise guidance, enduring patience and motivation throughout the duration of this study.
- To my participants who were accommodating and undemanding during the entire process.
- To my mother, Linda Knox, and my step-father, Gordon Knox, for their consistent support and motivation throughout my studies.
- And finally, to Liza van Deventer, whose love, patience and encouragement supported me throughout my dissertation and whose light will always illuminate my path.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work, and does not contain material which has been previously submitted for the purposes of any degree or diploma at any university or institution of higher learning. Where use has been made of the work of authors and researchers, it has duly been acknowledged and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of grade 10 boys towards school and, in particular, towards the phenomenon of school disengagement. The reason for pursuing research of this nature was due to the scarcity of literature available on the phenomenon of disengagement, particularly from the context of privileged, private schools.

Disengagement permeates schools both in South Africa, as well as internationally and, therefore, it is important to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, the researcher wants to add to the existing body of knowledge and divulge a deeper understanding of disengagement, especially with regard to the specific context of the research site. This will allow for remedial action to be implemented in the future. The ecosystemic theory provided a suitable theoretical framework of reference, due to the multidimensional nature of both the phenomenon and the participants.

The research study was conducted within the qualitative paradigm and focussed on the use of case studies and open-ended questions in order to extract the meaning-rich experiences from the participants. Three, in-depth, one-on-one interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were analysed and the common themes were identified, presented and examined against the existing literature.

The findings revealed that predominately emotional, personal, family, school, and peer influences affect boys' experiences of school disengagement. It also revealed the highly integrated nature of the subsystems affecting the boys; the importance of analysing each participant from their unique context; the multidimensionality of the phenomenon of disengagement; and that inspirational instruction is lacking in the lives of students who empathetically seek recognition for their scholastic efforts.

Finally, the researcher concludes by stating some implications that the study has, with regard to formulating a remedial response to disengagement, as well as to future recommendations for research that may shed further light on the phenomenon of disengagement.

LIST OF ACRONYMS USED

| | | |
|------|---|---|
| VCAA | - | Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority |
| NSC | - | National Senior Certificate |
| FETC | - | Further Education and Training Certificate |
| GETC | - | General Education and Training Certificate |
| LGBT | - | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students |

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GENERAL ORIENTATION, PROBLEM STATEMENT, AIM, RESEARCH DESIGN AND COURSE OF STUDY

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CHAPTER ONE

“Listening to their voices: A narrative exploration into grade 10 male students” experiences of school disengagement”

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Rationale:

This study focuses on students’ experiences of school disengagement. The students are male, in grade 10 and attend a privately owned school in KwaZulu-Natal that prides and markets itself on academic excellence. As private school students, one can assume that they come from privileged backgrounds. The school they attend is located in an aesthetically pleasant environment and offers education supported by advanced technology, highly skilled educators, low teacher student ratios and many extra-curricular programmes. Despite these advantages, there are still some students who disengage themselves from school. This results in poor academic performance and a general apathy to school, the schooling system and educational progress as a whole. Over the years, there have been instances where disengaged students have opted to drop out of the school in favour of attending home schools or an alternate academic institution, both of which pose problems to the educators and management of the school.

It is important to conceptualise the background context of the research site. On the one hand, due to the school being privately owned, it is run as a commercial enterprise and relies on the school fees that it accrues through student enrolment. Therefore, it is financially undesirable for students to drop out in favour of an alternate institution or context. On the other hand, the school markets itself on academic performance and its laurels rest firmly on the number of distinctions that it produces annually by its grade 12 students in both the VCAA examinations and the NSC Final examinations. Thus, any disengagement experienced by students that would negatively impact on academic progress is of importance to the research study. To this end, having a deeper understanding of disengagement at the beginning of the FETC phase (grade 10) will hopefully have the dual significance of decreasing the number of students

who may opt to leave the school and improving academic performance by fostering engagement in the schooling process in the formative years of the FETC phase.

Therefore, the overarching intention of the study is that it intends to fathom the collective schooling experiences of disengaged male students in order to gain insight into why boys who have access to a successful school environment still experience disengagement with school and the learning process.

1.1.2 Background to the study

The phenomenon of school disengagement is of particular interest at present as it forms one of the issues highlighting the crisis of the South African education system. Any research that reveals information that is relevant and that illuminates the concept of disengagement from different perspectives will add value and shed new insight into this complex, multidimensional phenomenon on various levels.

Firstly, on a macro level, it is important to note that there appears to be a gap in body of knowledge pertaining to school disengagement as the research done internationally and in South Africa tends to be from the perspective of mainly state-funded schools, as is evident in the literature review. Whilst this has, nevertheless, expounded many issues and contributed significantly to the understanding of disengagement, it has also left a stone unturned in attaining a holistic view on the phenomenon. It is hoped that by expanding our understanding of disengagement to the context of the advantaged private schools, containing students who have benefitted from the accumulation of cultural capital pertaining to education, that we may both reaffirm the findings of the literature and add new life to the body of knowledge surrounding disengagement.

Secondly, on a micro level, the experiences of disengaged male students have particular relevance to the researcher as in recent years, the school has seen the exit of male students at the end of the GETC phase (grade 9) and the beginning of the FETC phase (grade 10). These male students were disengaged from the schooling process on offer and opted for what could be considered a less structured „home schooling“ alternative. This is a point of concern for the institution as it draws its finances primarily from student enrollment.

Furthermore, the general increase in school disengagement experienced by male students at this stage of schooling results in students that perform poorly academically. This pattern of poor academic performance in many instances continues to grade 12 and the danger is that it often creates a „tail“ in terms of the lower results attained in the grade 12 NSC final examination. Poor results can impact greatly on the school’s marketability in terms of the percentage of passes, the percentage of university entrants as well as the average number of distinctions achieved per matric candidate. The school greatly values these results as they are used in media campaigns to market the school as the preferred choice for the attainment of a high school qualification. Thus, having insight into the experiences of grade 10 boys, the researcher is hoping to expose some possible causes for their disengagement from school and ultimately identify aspects of their schooling and personal lives that can be adjusted in order to foster some levels of resilience to disengagement.

Thus, to conclude, while private schools are widely viewed from people outside as being immune to students dropping out, there is still an undeniable existence of the phenomenon of disengagement. One can suppose and make hypothetical statements that it could, perhaps be that boys at this age are not comfortable with highly structured environments or that the psychological and emotional development of male students in this age set makes them susceptible to disengagement. Alternatively, that the breakdown of the family unit in certain households is a cause or that schooling lacks relevancy for these boys, or that the curriculum is disconnected from their lives or that the medium of instruction is not engaging, or even that teaching pedagogy is failing to engage these boys. However, the truth is we need to explore the issue in a systematic manner to move beyond assumption.

At the conclusion of the research, a deeper understanding will be reached on how the students experience their socially constructed worlds, how they interact with them, how they experience school and this will delineate greater meaning for the term „disengagement“. Ultimately, this information would benefit the literature available on the subject and could be used to modify or to implement strategies to negate the influence of school disengagement in the context in which the study will be carried out.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The research question can be stated as follows:

1.2.1 Primary research question:

What are grade 10 male boys' experiences of school disengagement?

1.2.2 Secondary Research question:

What factors can be identified from the experiences of grade 10 boys, in order to implement strategies aimed at increasing their engagement towards school and the schooling system.

1.3 RESEARCH AIMS

The aim of this research is essentially twofold. First and foremost it serves to explore the experiences that grade 10 boys have of school and to delve into the unique contextual factors that each one of them experiences and, secondly, to attempt to generate some recommendations that can be used to facilitate a better understanding of disengagement within the context of the research site.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research will explore the experiences that grade 10 boys have of school, especially with regard to understanding the phenomenon of disengagement, from an Educational Psychology perspective. From the outset it must be stated that due to the multidimensional nature of disengagement, a number of different theories and the works of multiple theorists were used in order to examine and understand the true nature of the phenomenon of disengagement. Thus, the researcher will be drawing extensively from a number of different theorists during the course of this research study to add meaning to the phenomenon and to provide coherency in study. To best illustrate this multidimensional nature and the need for diverse and varied theoretical viewpoints to

delineate significant meaning to the study, one merely needs to examine the complex thread of an emotional factor that leads to disengagement. For instance, a student may be told at home by a parent that they are an inferior student to a sibling. In this case, using the ecosystemic perspective or ecological systems theory as a basis to understand the interaction between the individual and the subsystem of his family is essential as a starting point. However, it is limited as it contextualises the issue from the perspective of the microsystem and despite offering valuable insight, it does not focus specifically on emotional factors on a micro scale. In order to unlock any meaning on emotional issues the researcher is able to turn to the perspectives of both early psychologist like Erikson and to even more contemporary research models like that espoused by Daniel Goleman pertaining to emotional intelligence and how it impacts of the lives of the learner. Thus, the researcher has decided to draw on a number of different viewpoints and perspectives with regard to the theoretical background of the study.

However, it must be stated that for the purpose of this research study, the ecosystemic perspective forms the overarching theoretical framework and it is of central importance to understanding and interpreting the research question and any other possible findings that may emanate from the research study. Therefore, at this point it becomes important to have a clear understanding of what the ecosystemic perspective entails.

The main concern of the ecosystemic approach is to show how individual people and groups at different levels of the social context are linked in dynamic, interdependent, and interacting relationships (Donald & Lolwana 1997: 34).

Thus, the ecosystemic perspective highlights the influence of social context, including culture and peers and, therefore, it is a very useful theoretical framework on which to base and interpret the study. The ecosystemic perspective can be seen as a synthesis of the ecological and the systems theory approach. Different levels of systems in the social context are seen to influence and be influenced by one another in a continual process of dynamic balance, tension and interplay (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 2002). This theoretical perspective also helps in understanding the development of the youth in more holistically and contextually interactive terms (Tyler, 1992 in Donald *et al.*, 2002). This perspective is also deeply involved in how a person's behaviour can be affected by a

particular type of situation or environment. It is important to note that social contexts shape nearly everything that we do, how we perceive the world and even how we in turn behave and react, and ultimately modify our behavior.

Linked to the ecosystemic perspective is the systems theory. It was also greatly beneficial to the study to use the ideas and central concepts as espoused in the systems theory as a backdrop to a broader discussion on disengagement. Systems theory is also a very useful framework in which to contextualise and interpret the research question. One description of the systems theory is given in Donald and Lolwana (1997),

In essence, this theory sees different levels of groupings of the social context as systems where the functioning of the whole is dependent on the interaction between all the parts. A school, for instance, is a system, which has different parts, consisting of its staff, its learners, its curriculum, and its administration. To understand the whole system we must examine the relationship between the different parts of the system. As in the example of the spider's web, the dynamic interdependence between parts of the system forms the whole - so that whatever happens in one part will affect all other parts. ... In addition, systems characteristically have subsystems within them which interact with the whole (Donald and Lolwana, 1997: 36).

Thus, from the above statement one conceives the learner as constantly interacting in a socially constructed world. Therefore, the crux of the issue is to conduct research that enriches the researcher with a deeper understanding of the experiences that surround the disengaged student, by coming to terms with the some of the other factors and the various „subsystems“ that may impact on the participants“ lives.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory has also provided the researcher with an enriched understanding of the phenomenon of disengagement as it has entrenched cultural values at its core. For Bronfenbrenner, a person's development is affected by everything in his/ her environment and he perceives that for most people the environment consists of five levels, namely: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem. Understanding how the various levels of the system interact is also of tremendous importance for the researcher. The majority of the research domain of this particular study is concerned with the interaction that can be found

occurring in the microsystem of the individual. Namely, that of the family, the context of the school and teachers, as well as the peer set of the participant. The microsystems refer to those facets of the participant's life that have an immediate and direct influence on the participant. They can be thought of as being the system closest to the person and one in which there is direct contact with the individual. The synergistic interaction between the components of the microsystem constitutes what the ecological perspective refers to as the mesosystem. An example of an interaction on this level would be parents meeting and communicating with teachers. For the purposes of identifying the findings and the conclusions of this research study, Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective will also provide an overarching theoretical backdrop of analysis. At this point it must be stated that Uri Bronfenbrenner did adapt his ecological systems theory to incorporate other dimensions of development and he referred to this adapted version as the bio-ecological systems theory. One of the factors that he included in the later theory was that of time as an important component in the way that people and environments change. Although Bronfenbrenner identified limitations to the original model that I have used here, the reasons for the choice of this particular theoretical perspective lies in the fact that it is more in line with the aims of the study at hand. Time, as a factor of change and development in the individual, is not of relevance to this particular study as it is not longitudinal in nature.

Thus, the complex and multidimensional nature of disengagement encapsulates a wide range of variables and factors and warrants a very broad theoretical background, in an attempt to analyse and interpret the data with any meaning. Even the works of psychologists like Erikson have been used extensively as a tool to decipher meaning from the data and to provide the basis for offering meaningful findings in the final chapter.

Erikson's insight into the developmental stages that a child goes through during adolescence is of particular significance to the researcher and the nature of disengagement. The breakdown or inefficiency in the progression from one developmental stage into the next can cause areas of key conflicts that exist in the individual. It is essential that these key conflicts get resolved in order to get to the next level. Thus, as adolescent children attempt to find their own identity and forge a path through life, they may encounter obstacles that then hinder their developmental growth.

These key conflict areas often have their roots in psychological factors, and thus any meritorious study cannot understate the need to include the work from early theorists and pioneers in the school of psychology. More recent models introduced by contemporary theorists will be included as frameworks for reference especially when the researcher embarks on the findings of the study. The works of Daniel Goleman on Emotional Intelligence will also be used as a basis for discussion in the data analysis stage and in particular, in the findings of the research study.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 Research design

It is proposed for a multitude of reasons that the study be conducted from the qualitative paradigm. This research design is classified by De Vos (1998) as exploratory, descriptive, and contextual as it seeks to describe a particular phenomenon thoroughly (Merriam, 1988). There must be coherency in the study or what can best be described as fitness of purpose between the research designs and the data collection methods. It can be said that one of the major distinguishing traits of qualitative research is the fact that researchers attempt to understand people in terms of their own definition of their world. In terms of Becker's distinction (1992) the focus is in an insider-perspective rather than the outside perspective. Therefore, it can be said that the qualitative process has the potential to enable the researcher to explore grade 10 boys' experiences of school disengagement very effectively and efficiently. Thus the qualitative research paradigm was used as it is best suited to the research question and its specific context.

1.5.2 Research methodology

1.5.2.1 The sample

A sample of grade 10 boys was purposively selected from the student body. Boys who exhibited signs of disengagement were purposefully selected as their account of their experiences towards school and the schooling system was of special significance. As stated earlier, the grade 10 year is important to the research context as it appears to be that grade in

which the school experiences the most cases of school disengagement, especially amongst the male gender. Another reason why this age group was selected was that the students were accessible to me as the researcher. The literature has also reinforced the researcher's viewpoint that generally in South Africa and internationally, this grade 10 level of schooling poses the most problems to educators and institutions, thus, it was decided that the research sample was to consist specifically of males in their grade 10 year of schooling.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001) purposeful sampling is performed to increase the utility of the information obtained from the particular sample. Thus, information-rich participants are more likely to be knowledgeable and informative of school disengagement. This was definitely the case for the researcher and, therefore, a purposeful sample was selected.

Furthermore, the researcher purposively took a demographically representative sample in terms of choosing a White, Indian and Black male as the participants in this research study so as to increase the cultural scope of the study. The researcher used the experiences of other teachers as well as his own observations for selecting the specific research participants. All three of the in-depth case studies are students who are exhibiting disengagement from school and the schooling process and are in need of assistance in reengaging with school.

1.5.3 Data Collection:

The use of the following data collection technique was implemented:

1.5.3.1 The case study

The use of case studies has been favoured as a research strategy for this particular study as the researcher wanted to be able to get a detailed, information-rich account of each boy's contextual experiences of school and the schooling process. Not only does the case study ensure in-depth, meaning-rich data, it also offers the continuity for future research as it lends itself to the possibility of a subsequent longitudinal research study to further our understanding into the phenomenon of disengagement, particularly from the context of the research site.

1.5.3.2 The one-on-one interview

The one-on-one interview was seen as the preferred method of data collection and the researcher was able to use a series of open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview schedule in order to collect the data. The interview schedule consisted of grouping questions into various categories as identified prior to the data collection stage during the literature review phase. A more detailed account of the construction of the categories of questioning that were used in the interview schedule and exactly how the interview process was conducted will be discussed in Chapter Three – Research Design and Methodology. It should be noted that whilst the participants shared their experiences, the researcher also recorded the interview by using a system of detailed note taking as well as making audio recordings of the interview on an electronic device. The audio recordings of the one-on-one interviews were then transcribed. The transcriptions of the audio recordings and the notes taken during the interview process enabled the researcher to put forward a narrative account of each of the participants' individual experiences and contexts. This data is presented in the Appendices under the title: Chapter of Narratives – Transcriptions of the interviews.

1.5.4 Data analysis

The narratives of each of the participants will serve as the first level of analysis by the researcher. According to the writings of Connelly and Clandinin (1990), the study of the narrative, is the study of the ways that humans experience the world. Bruner (1996), who was a psychologist, suggests that the narrative is in fact the way that people make sense of their lives and experiences. The researcher will identify units of meaning and will categorise these, after which detailed themes will be identified and drawn up. A literature control will be undertaken to attempt to identify both the similarities and the differences, as well as the unique contributions made by each of the respondents. The final results will then be presented in the data analysis under the central theme headings that emerge. Guba's methods to ensure trustworthiness will be also applied to ensure the validity and the credibility of the study (Guba, 1981).

1.6 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study is deeply rooted in the field of Educational Psychology. It involves understanding the direct experiences that grade 10 male students have of school and more importantly of school disengagement. The study involves three male participants from a private school in KwaZulu-Natal that exhibit symptoms of disengagement from school and the schooling process on offer by the institution. The study involves the microsystem of the participant such as the family, the school and the peer group and not the mesosystem, exosystem or macrosystem. Therefore the findings of this particular study may only be pertinent to the actual participants and their specific context and not all grade 10 male boys in general. This is based on the overarching premise that all behaviour is best understood in a specific social context, paying careful attention to socioeconomic, historical and political factors.

1.7 COURSE OF STUDY

Chapter Two will provide an in depth literature review that explores the concept of disengagement locally in South Africa, as well as internationally from a number of different experiences of schools in the USA, Australia, UK and China. Due to the fact that the literature comes from both the South African and international contexts, the researcher believes that the findings contained herein are of significance when attempting to understand the complex phenomenon of school disengagement.

Chapter Three will focus specifically on the research design and methodology that was employed in the collection and analysing of the data. This study involves the presentation of in depth narratives as a method of data production. In this chapter, the ethical issues and the trustworthiness will be also explained.

Chapter Four will consist of the data analysis, presenting the various themes that have emerged surrounding the participants' individual and collective experiences of school and of the phenomenon of disengagement.

Chapter Five will contain the findings and will conclude with some remarks that could be used to identify strategies aimed at engaging students to school and the schooling process. Possible suggestions for further research will also be made in this chapter.

1.8 CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this research will shed some useful and meaningful information on the experiences of male students towards their school and the schooling process, and with regard to school disengagement specifically. It must be noted once again that there seems to be a particular void in the literature pertaining to the specific context of privileged, private schools in South Africa, therefore, the research will offer deeper insight into an already multi-dimensional understanding of disengagement. It is hoped that this deeper understanding could possibly assist with the formulation of strategies that will seek to engage students at risk of becoming disengaged and dropping out.

The next chapter, namely the literature review, will explore the nature of the phenomenon of school disengagement; starting with a discussion on the actual meaning of the word „disengagement“, followed by an analysis of what kind of problems other schools are experiencing, specifically in South Africa and internationally.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW ON SCHOOL DISENGAGEMENT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this literature review the researcher initiated the process by firstly attempting to clearly understand and unpack the key term „disengagement“. This was done in order to effectively delineate the issue and provide the framework that will allow for a deeper and insightful understanding of this complex issue.

It must be stated from the outset that the literature is able to offer comprehensive explanatory and descriptive definitions of the concept of disengagement, as well as informative explorations into the nature of disengagement especially from the context of state funded, government schools. However, there also seems to be a notable void in the literature pertaining to the voices of students who attend privately owned schools that are well-funded and resourced and, who for the most part, enjoy privileges in terms of their access to high quality education.

The second major step in the literature review is to explore the nature and extent of school disengagement in order to effectively contextualise it and conceptualise the issue, and analyse how it applies to schools both in South Africa and internationally. Careful effort was made to review literature from the contexts being experienced internationally, so as to provide an accurate backdrop for the discussion of the issue as experienced in South Africa. The international sources of data come from research conducted in Australia, the UK, the USA and China. Certain common themes were identified in the literature review process that offer a deeper understanding and insight into the term disengagement and these themes will be discussed individually. During the research process itself, as new light was being shed on the topic of disengagement, so new avenues for research appeared and this too guided the literature review process and exposed more information pertaining to the true nature and extent of disengagement. Simultaneously, this also fed into the process of theoretically locating the study and exposed the dialectical nature of the research process. Thus, by uncovering and exploring the types of problems that schools internationally and locally are facing regarding disengagement, one is better able to frame the issues against a theoretical

background and this will ultimately assist the researcher in identifying the discussions contained in the findings of the study.

Thirdly, the last main crux of the literature review is contained in the conclusion when it is discussed how the rationale for the research and the literature review support each other and create coherence in the study by reinforcing the existing sentiments as well as exposing glaring gaps in the literature.

2.2. THE MEANING OF DISENGAGEMENT – DELINEATING THE CONCEPT OF DISENGAGEMENT

2.2.1 What does it mean to be „disengaged“ from school and the schooling process?

The starting point when consulting the literature was to identify the meaning of the term disengagement. What does the term actually mean? The primary meaning ascribed to disengagement in a simplistic sense referred to those students who had become detached from the learning process. In other words, they had lost interest in schooling and the value attached to learning. A more detailed definition for disengagement that came through in the literature is in the research report conducted by the Centre for Children and Youth of the JDC-Brookdale Institute (2001). It defines „disengaged“ youth as those who still attend some educational framework, but who are often absent, have poor scholastic achievements, feel alienated from their school and the learning process and have behavior and social problems at school. From this definition, it is clear that the true nature behind student“s disengagement will not be clear-cut; rather it is linked to the multidimensional, complex life of the student as a developing individual as well as to the various subsystems that affect each student“s life.

Another definition of school disengagement that is of particular significance in the literature was that offered by Balfanz, Herzog and MacIver (2007). They stated that school disengagement can best be defined as a higher order factor composed of correlating sub factors measuring different aspects of the process of detaching from school, disconnecting from its norms and expectations, reducing effort and involvement at school, and withdrawing from a commitment to school and to school completion. Thus, once again the complex nature of the phenomenon of disengagement becomes evident as it involves a multitude of micro

and mesosystems all synergistically interconnecting and impacting upon each other to shape an individual's experiences of school.

In another description, the term disengagement from school is used primarily to categorise students who do not feel that they belong at school and have withdrawn from school activities in a significant way (Willms, 2003). Other literature describes school disengagement as being closely related to a lack of motivation in learning and poor attitude towards school, since they often co-occur (Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Vitaro et al., 2001).

Some researchers have also found it very useful to further break the concept of disengagement down into „behavioural disengagement“, „cognitive disengagement“ and „emotional disengagement“ (Tam, Zhou and Harel-Fisch, 2012). While this makes for a detailed structural analysis into the factors effecting disengagement, it must be stated that any effective study, whilst identifying specific categories and causes, must not overlook the importance of viewing the issue holistically and seeing the complex, integrated, multi-dimensional nature of school disengagement. This sentiment is perfectly reflected in the following statement,

It (disengagement) has been conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of behavioural, emotional and cognitive domains. Behavioural disengagement refers to students' frequent absences, resistance to rule following, and lack of participation in extracurricular activities, cognitive disengagement refers to student's reluctance to learn beyond the classroom and to take up challenging learning tasks, and emotional disengagement refers to students' affective responses to school, including feeling alienated towards school, disliking school and having a poor perception about personal academic ability (Tam, Zhou and Harel-Fisch, 2012: 89).

In a very informative longitudinal research study on disengagement from the American perspective, Balfanz, Herzog and MacIver define school disengagement as,

A higher order factor composed of correlated subfactors measuring different aspects of the process of detaching from school, disconnecting from its norms and expectations, reducing effort and involvement at school, and withdrawing from a commitment to school and to school completion (Balfanz, Herzog and Mac Iver, 2007: 224)

Once again, the definition of disengagement is comprehensive and focuses on the negative factors that overtly influence a student in his/ her life and can lead to a severe lack of interest in schooling, truancy and even dropping out. Thus, the literature refers mainly to the problems or pathologies that are contained by the students as well as to negative cultural contexts. While these definitions are highly informative and useful it must be pointed out that there was a considerable amount of literature from researchers who chose to study school participation, enjoyment and success from the perspective of what factors „engage“ students at school during the day. This information will be included in the literature review towards the end of this chapter so as to allow a deeper and more thorough study into the factors that could cause grade 10 boys to „like“ coming to school. To make this information more meaningful, the next section will examine the literature pertaining to the two terms „disengagement“ and „engagement“.

2.2.2 Disengagement versus „engagement“ - The positively determined paradoxical viewpoint and its benefits.

It was refreshing to note that in the literature there are researchers who also adopted a stance that is more in line with the Positive Psychology school of thought – namely, that of steering away from negative descriptions and sentiments and focusing more on the term „engagement“ and analysing those factors that pertain to students enjoying school and the schooling process as opposed to focusing on students“ negative experiences of school. This can be seen clearly in the paper entitled School Disengagement: Its Constructions, Investigations and Management by Atweh, Bland, Carrington and Cavanagh, who state,

Often the literature constructs disengagement as the main focus and presents it as a problem to be solved. Research from this perspective tends to identify factors associated with the prevalence of the phenomenon or investigates various interventions for its remedy. This approach tends to pathologise students who are disengaged and deal with them as failures. It does not allow an understanding of students actively resisting engaging in what might appear to them as meaningless and at times oppressive activities and structures in school and society. (Atweh, Bland, Carrington and Cavanagh, 2004, p: 34)

Atweh, Bland, Carrington and Cavanagh focus more on engagement as a desirable yet contested, outcome of schooling by raising the question as to „engagement in what“ rather

than merely „why students *disengage*“, and „what can we do about it“. Thus specific studies have purposively looked for the factors that positively influence a student’s engagement. This more positive stance towards viewing the issue of engagement was particularly relevant for the researcher as the ethos of his particular school involves giving students greater flexibility with regard to decision making and adopting a less autocratic and top-down mentality that usually accompanies traditional pedagogy of education. Thus, the complex and multidimensional nature of disengagement warrants a future, longitudinal study to be performed through the framework of positive psychology.

At this point, the researcher would like to clarify and comment on the multidimensional nature of disengagement because an understanding of this will help in conceptualising the issue, as well as providing clarity for the main theoretical perspective used in this research study, namely the ecosystemic theory, which is a blend of the systems theory and the ecological perspective.

2.2.3 The multidimensional nature of disengagement

One of the most significant themes to come out of the literature was the notion of disengagement as being a multidimensional phenomenon. Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) argue that instead of being a unitary construct, school engagement includes a behavioural component, involving participation in social, academic and extracurricular activities; an emotional component, involving attitudes to school, teachers and subjects and involving ties to the institution; and finally a cognitive component, involving the willingness of students to invest in their education, to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills. Therefore, once again it is clear that understanding disengagement will require the researcher to look at not only the student as an individual, but also to evaluate the student as part of a much wider social group that creates its values and attitudes in a socially constructed world. Nevertheless, although the definition for disengagement can be seen as relatively complex, there were still many themes that came out in the literature that attempted to give reasons for and explain students’ reasons for disengagement. These themes will be discussed in the remainder of this literature review and the researcher will attempt to elicit some of critical factors concerning disengagement and will conclude by making reference to the experiences of the students themselves.

2.3 THE FACTORS INFLUENCING DISENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

2.3.1 Disengagement in school related to social class and other socio-economic factors

The issue of school disengagement is not new, however, in recent years there has been a growing wave of school disengagement, especially in lower socio-economic sectors of society. Students are disengaged from the schooling process and this has led students to dropping out of traditional schools and even school in general. Socio-economic stratification or social class really refers to the hierarchical nature of society based along lines of income, educational levels and occupation (Foley, 2004). A student's particular context, in terms of social class, has a tremendous impact on his or her attitudes to school and to his/ her feelings towards academic achievement and school disengagement.

In a study on marginalized youth in South Africa, Prinsloo (2003) unearthed some interesting findings. His research focused on youth from lower socio-economic backgrounds and it revealed that the general mood and attitude of the youth was a negative one in which they did not have an optimistic outlook of the future. This apathy for the future was a source of demotivation and in turn it led them to see little relevancy in academic achievement. He states,

They have lost interest in academic achievement and most of them express fear for the future because they think they will not find employment. In discussion with the latter groups (both white and black groups from lower socio-economic backgrounds), there were undeniable signs of a loss of hope and energy that resulted in apathy and even in cases of aggression in others (Prinsloo, 2003: 288).

What was even more striking was the fact that their expectations of a future in South Africa were highlighted by the following: They expressed deep fears of crime, violence and there was a strong response that the future is dark because of poverty, unemployment and the conviction that South Africa would always remain a third world country. This was especially true of the response of black students in the lower socio-economic strata (Prinsloo, 2003). Thus, as is evident from this study, their experiences of their socially constructed world, is primarily a negative one. This has influenced their experiences of school too. They are becoming disengaged, as they cannot see the importance or relevancy of schooling. It is

understandable as one could conclude that they do not have the benefit of cultural capital needed to succeed in school, and, therefore, do not ascribe much value to the attainment of a high level of education. Thus, in the face of the hardships and the realities of life in South Africa, the learners are, ironically, becoming even more and more disassociated from schooling as they see little relevancy in the schooling system in terms of it being able to provide them with real solutions to their problems. A similar situation exists in Australia as recounted by Walsh & Black,

From an international perspective there is also an increasing body of evidence to show that educational achievement in Australia is significantly determined by individual socioeconomic status or social background (Walsh & Black, 2009: 2).

They go on to say that,

Compared to their more affluent peers, Australian students from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to underperform in literacy and numeracy, to have negative attitudes towards school, to truant, to be suspended, or expelled and to leave school early" (Walsh & Black, 2009: 2).

Thus, not surprisingly, internationally there is also correlation between socio-economic status and level of school disengagement. This is evident when looking at the comparison between advantaged and disadvantaged schools also from the context of Australia,

In the same study, namely, „Overcoming barriers to engagement and equity for all students" Walsh & Black state that,

All the effects of disengagement – flattened growth in literacy and numeracy, passivity, or cessation of effort, underachievement or lowered achievement, disruptive behaviour, poor attendance or leaving (Cole, 2006) – tend to be more pronounced in schools with many disadvantaged students (Walsh & Black, 2009: 3).

Therefore, as is evident from an analysis of the reviewed literature, social class and the associated effects of socio-economic status and its characteristics have a tremendous influence on students" experiences of school and the schooling process. It can also be

concluded that this influence reflects that, the lower the social class, the greater the possibility for a negative influence on experiences of school and thus the greater the possibility for school disengagement.

2.3.2 Disengagement in school due to the effect of cultural attitudes

The issue of minority social class and culture, and the possible effects that they can have on school disengagement also come to the fore in the extensive work of John Ogbu. Ogbu's research focused mainly on minority education in the American context. More specifically, his research in 2003 focused on black African-American students and the impact that their perceptions of themselves and their attitudes have on their level of academic disengagement. For John Ogbu, one of his primary conclusions was that black students' cultural attitudes actually hindered their own academic achievement, and not only this, but that these attitudes are also too often neglected by parents, teachers and policymakers in the American context (Ogbu, 2003). In fact, Ogbu saw African-American culture as being dysfunctional and that this influenced the attitude of the youth away from the attainment of educational success and upward social mobility. Ogbu's chastisement of the class system in America was so strong that he likened it to a „caste-like“ system. This is evident when he argues that most class societies also contain „caste-like“ cultural practices that are rooted in racial origins. Ogbu says,

Where caste and class systems coexist, as in the United States, the basic principal of social structure is the caste system. Class is secondary to the named black and white castes (Ogbu, 1978: 103).

For Ogbu, the caste like system places limitations on itself by creating and perpetuating negative attitudes and having low perceptions of personal ability, especially when the subjugated community imposing their limitations is a minority that bears resentment to the dominant hegemony. These social forces that the caste system creates have a strongly negative effect on the African-American youth. He sees them as having a negative model of folk success and a predominantly pessimistic view of the labour market. African-Americans see themselves as facing a racially stratified job ceiling which prevents them from attaining a higher level of upward social mobility. Moreover, these negative defeatist attitudes are passed on to the new generations who in turn develop an oppositional culture of secondary cultural

practices. For Ogbu, these secondary cultural practices that the youth develop are deeply rooted in the urban street or hip hop culture. Ogbu sees this as a major problem due to the fact that for the most part he views street and hip hop culture as an unproductive, negative model of achievement for the African-American youth. In his perspective, the African-American youth adopt a zero sum logic of success. In fact, they equate achieving school success with „acting white“ and, therefore, selling out one’s own racial and cultural heritage.

2.3.3 The influence of family structure and family characteristics

The unit of the family is one of the most vital factors that influences a student’s experiences of school and the schooling system. This is due the fact that the family is without doubt one of the biggest subsystems that impact on the immediate life of the individual (Donald and Lolwana, 1997). With reference to Uri Bronfenbrenner’s view of the ecological systems theory, the family is one of the vital subsystems to be found in the microsystem of the individual. The importance and significance of the family context towards shaping student’s experiences of school, is a common theme that comes up in the literature surrounding the phenomenon of disengagement and it is one which deserves attention.

Students’ family background greatly affects their educational outcomes and is commonly viewed as the most important predictor of schooling achievement. Among the strongest family domain dropout predictors are parental education, occupation, and income – in other words socio-economic status (Tyler and Loftstrom, 2009).

Essentially the lower the socio-economic status of the family the more likely the chances of the students having negative experiences of school and the schooling system. This is due to a number of reasons that will be discussed herein.

Some other factors that have been contributing to the high levels of school disengagement, in both South Africa and other African countries, are the social structures, or the lack thereof. Prinsloo has made some interesting comments in this regard. He states,

Social structures in the country (South Africa) are becoming increasingly dysfunctional. The large-scale disruption of the family life has brought an unstable network of social relationships. Fragmented care in the growing number of female-headed and child-headed

households causes a lack of control, supervision, attention, and guidance and the lack of a male identification figure. The result is a breakdown of authority and discipline. Adolescents actively adopt an identity that allows them to cope in this confusing order, but this simultaneously marginalises them and alienates them from the authority figures in the school and community structures as well as from their own social realities (Prinsloo, 2003: 289).

Thus, the ability of students who come from broken homes to cope with school is severely decreased. The students who come from families where there is inadequate parental guidance and supervision will not have the necessary support mechanisms at home to remain engaged in the schooling and learning process. They will find it difficult to cope and adjust to what they may perceive as the harsh or „unfair“ demands of school and, therefore, will rebel, lose interest and become disengaged.

2.3.4 The influence of the school and the schooling system

2.3.4.1 The teacher

Generally, the context of the school and more importantly, the influence of the teacher is also a significant factor that impacts on the life of the student and directly affects his/ her outlook. Once again as Bronfenbrenner points out, the school context, like that of the family is one of the biggest subsystems that impact directly on the lives of the individuals. It forms an important component of the microsystem of the individual and is instrumental in fostering positive or negative experiences of school. Testimony to this is found in the following statement below.

Russell Rumberger and Scott Thomas find that pupil-teacher ratio, the quality of teachers, and the school size all influence the dropout probability of students in the expected direction (Tyler and Loftstrom, 2009).

In another study in Lancashire on pupil disengagement, the researchers revealed that frustration and mistrust existed between the disengaged students and their teachers, and between the parents of those pupils and teachers (Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002). In this case, students saw themselves as inferior because teachers labeled them as „thick“ and

„stupid“ and they, therefore, felt unwanted in school. Once they had got into a downward spiral of bad behaviour, exclusion and non-attendance, they thought they had little chance of improving their prospects. They were dissatisfied with the physical environment of their school, as well as the teaching and learning, and their disengagement with the perceived curriculum became aggravated by frustration with traditional styles and methods of teaching. (Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002).

Working across Lancashire with 45 pupils in panels, they drew pictures of powerful imagery suggesting, „I am very sad“, „stressed out“, „lonely“, „depressed“, „on my own“. For many, school was a profoundly sad and depressing experience. Few pupils regarded school as a place for growing, learning new information, or expanding their future options. They could acknowledge the ways in which their behaviour contributed to the buildup of tensions in the classroom and the demands on their teachers (whom they described as „stressed out by teaching“) and knew they had to change but did not know how (Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002).

Furthermore, the study by Riley & Rustique-Forrester in Lancashire also showed that parents experienced communication with schools as being closed and unfriendly and saw the attitudes of teachers and the punitive practices of many schools as being the biggest barriers to re-engaging their children in learning.

We learned many lessons from our work in Lancashire – about relationships, about teaching and learning and about the school and policy climate. We concluded that the balance needed to shift away from behaviour and management to teaching and learning in ways that recognized the diverse ways in which children learn, as well as the fragmented nature of schooling for so many (Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002).

Thus, if students as well as their parents are disengaged from educators and the schooling process, then this will lead to a lack of respect, mistrust and ultimately school disaffection.

Most of the learners claimed that there was little correlation between their ability and their achievements in the classroom. They are not happy at school and think that school does not prepare them adequately for adult life. They claim to get on well with members of

their households and their friends but are reluctant to react when asked about their relationship with their teachers (Prinsloo, 2003: 284).

Therefore, it is clearly evident that the subsystem of the school, especially with regard to the context of the teacher, may create widespread negative influences on school to the point where it can cause disengagement to school and the entire schooling process.

2.3.4.2 Poor academic performance

The inability of the individual to perform well academically is a very strong indicator of school disengagement and is a major factor that leads to negative experiences of school. As Tyler and Loftstrom (2009) indicate, poor school performance is a strong predictor of dropping out of school. For example, low test scores, course failure and grade retention have all been found to be strongly associated with leaving school. As noted, weak student engagement, often measured by absenteeism and indiscipline problems in survey data, is also strongly linked with a high dropout probability (Tyler and Loftstrom, 2009)

The inability to perform well academically leads to feelings of frustration in the students and this results in negative emotions towards school and the schooling process. The negative experiences that the student has of school then serve to reinforce a pattern of disengagement from school. This negative reinforcement loop also presents itself in the words of Cole (2001), when he comments on education from an Australian perspective.

Most studies infer that disengagement from school causes poor achievement. Others suggest that low achievement causes students to withdraw from school or that engagement and achievement go hand in hand. Whatever its causative relationship, disengagement is particularly linked to lack of success in the crucial middle years (Cole, 2001: 43)

2.3.4.3 The influence of curriculum and pedagogy

Students who are disengaged in school to the point of dropping out often report that the overall schooling process is not very engaging. This is particularly evident in Australia.

The commonality of these responses is often cited as the reason that schools must become more “relevant” and that teachers must learn to structure curriculum and pedagogy so that it is more “interesting” and “engaging” to students at risk of dropping out (Tyler and Loftstrom, 2009).

An ever-increasing number of students are unable to engage with the curriculum and they fail to see the relevance of the curriculum and how it impacts on their lives. They are simply not engaged at school. Coupled with this, is the fact that students simply do not find the curriculum particularly relevant and, as discussed already see no relevance to school and what they intend to be in the future. The manner in which teaching takes place today and the entire pedagogy of teaching needs to be reformed to engage the contemporary learner.

2.3.5 Personal factors influencing disengagement

Personal factors that shape the perceptions individuals have of themselves and the subsequent way in which it influences their behaviour is of tremendous significance to the issue of school disengagement. Personal factors that result in low self-esteem and self-belief are a major factor in fostering negative experiences of school. As Wigfield and Eccles indicate,

On the individual level, it is also important to consider children’s beliefs in their own competence and motivation to succeed academically. Research seems to indicate that children’s beliefs in their abilities tend to become increasingly negative as they grow older, at least through early adolescence. When children believe they are less competent in certain academic activities, they tend to value them less which has negative implications for the effort they will put into school work (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000: 72).

Thus, in essence if a student’s opinion of their own ability is a negative one, then this negative outlook will create a certain amount of disengagement towards school.

2.3.6 The influence of peers on disengagement

Peers can have a tremendous influence on the level of disengagement (or engagement) that a student experiences. In some cases the influence can be a positive one, in which the peers offer emotional support and even support on academic matters, whilst in other situations

peers can have a hugely negative impact by virtue of the fact that they can detract from responsible behaviour and be a subversive influence on the student.

Peer associations also have an important effect on academic outcomes. Peer relationships can create a set of norms and values that either promote or undermine academic achievement. Meaningful (or positive) relationships with peers that promote psychological and life skills may promote academic achievement and motivation, however, negative peer pressure or social disapproval towards school work might lead to some students dropping out of school. (Stewart, 2008; Nicholas & White 2001).

The abovementioned statement successfully and succinctly describes the dual edged influence that the peer set can have on experiences at school. The literature indicates that peers are able to both negatively and positively influence a student's behaviour towards school.

2.3.7 The influence of extra-curricular activities on disengagement

For the most part, extra-curricular activities were seen as being highly beneficial to student's experiences of school and the schooling process. Those students who are actively involved in extracurricular activities either within the school context or outside of the school context exhibited a reduced risk of disengagement.

Making sports facilities available for young people outside of lessons, and providing school clubs and societies may actually reduce the risk of disengagement. Young people who used school sports facilities at least once a week were a little less likely to be disengaged. Those who participated in a school club or society at least once a week were half as likely to be disengaged (Ross, 2009).

Thus, extra-curricular involvement actually has a positive correlation on school engagement.

2.3.8 Other factors influencing disengagement

2.3.8.1 The interaction of sexual orientation with regard to school disengagement

No true contemporary discussion of disengagement would be complete without paying careful attention to the influence that sexual orientation has on school disengagement. It must firstly be noted that precise statistics on dropout rates amongst lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students (LGBT) are difficult to find, although some have estimated that almost a third of LGBT students drop out of high school, more than triple the national rate (Bart, 1998)

These individuals do not enjoy the schooling environment which often creates a hostile setting in which the student has to endure ridicule, harassment and bullying due to their particular sexual orientation. Some interesting literature in this regard came from quantitative studies in which,

Nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT students (86.2%) experienced harassment at school in the past year, three-fifths (60.8%) felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and about a third (32.7%) skipped a day of school in the past month due to feeling unsafe (Kosciw, Diaz & Greytak, 2008: 14).

Therefore, for these students, the theory of social inclusion is very hard to put into practice as they are continually ostracised from society and thus experience school disengagement due to their sexual orientation

2.3.8.2 Emotional factors that influence disengagement

The researcher was very surprised to find a relative lack of information pertaining to emotional factors that influence disengagement, especially when emotional factors were compared to the bountiful literature available on the other causes of negative experiences of school and school disengagement. This may be owing to the fact that students are less likely to report emotional reasons and causes for school disengagement or it is testimony to the fact that emotional reasons are highly complex issues and not easily identifiable because they are intrinsically interwoven with other factors and subsystems.

Bullying

It must be stated that in some sources there was a clear association between being bullied in the last 12 months and disengaging from school. Schools need to ensure that they have good policies for identifying and treating instances of bullying, as it can have such detrimental effects to a child's wellbeing, their engagement and ultimately their qualifications and future prospects (Ross, 2009).

Social isolation and victimisation

A very important piece of literature that did discuss potential emotional causes for school disengagement was conducted by Frank Tam, Huazhen Zhou & Yossi Harel-Fisch entitled, *Hidden School Disengagement and Its Relationship to Youth Risk Behaviors – A Cross-section Study in China* (2012). This was also one of the more recent pieces of literature that was reviewed for the purposes of this research and indicates that perhaps emotional causes for school disengagement have been relatively absent from the research literature available on the subject of school disengagement.

Other Chinese researchers state that within the relationship domain are social isolation and victimisation. Hence students who suffer from hidden school disengagement are those who feel that they are alienated from the schooling process and they are isolated from the social network of the school. Chinese students are experiencing high levels of stress in the school environment and are exposed to a high frequency of victimisation because of competition within the education system (Hesketh et al., 2010; Tam & Takai, 2007).

Also it has been suggested that study stress and high-stake examinations are the main reasons behind the low self-concept and high psychological distress among Asian students (Lee, 2009; Liu & Lu, 2011). This can account for some emotional causes of school disengagement, as the Chinese students are declaring that they are experiencing high stress levels due to what one can consider personal and emotional reasons.

2.4 CONCLUSION

To conclude, the literature review process revealed many very interesting results on the phenomena of school disengagement. Firstly, it discussed the various descriptions and definitions of the term „disengagement“ and came to the conclusion that disengagement included any negatives experiences that lead to students not enjoying school and the schooling process and withdrawing from a positive approach to teaching and learning. This withdrawal leads to general school apathy, a decrease in academic performance and instances of truancy to the point where some students opt to deregister from a particular school or even drop out of the schooling process altogether. It was also noted that disengagement is a very complex phenomenon and has a behavioural, cognitive, as well as an emotional component. What was interesting to note was the fact that there are glaring silences in the literature pertaining to the voices of students from privileged backgrounds, especially with regard to the context of South Africa.

Also, both domestically and internationally, there was a major void in the literature pertaining to emotional causes and influences of school disengagement. In the next chapter, the researcher will detail the research design that was used to hopefully shed some light on the perspective of students at privileged, private schools in South Africa.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the researcher will make a presentation of the methodology and of the procedures that were followed in this study. Firstly, in order to ascertain what is meant by the term „methodology“ the researcher ascribed to the description of methodology as given by McMillan and Schumacher (2001) in which they state that „the methodology describes the design of the study, including the selection and decision of the site, the role of the researcher, initial entry for observation, the time and length of the study, the number of participants and how they were selected, and data collection and analysis strategies“.

It is in the view of the researcher that the methodology used in this study is applicable to understanding and gaining a deeper insight in grade 10 boys“ experiences of school disengagement.

3.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The primary research question can be stated as follows:

- What are the experiences of grade 10 boys towards school and disengagement in particular?

The secondary research question can be stated as follows:

- What factors can be identified from the experiences of grade 10 boys, in order to implement strategies aimed at increasing their engagement to school and the schooling system.

3.3 RESEARCH AIMS

Firstly, the crux of the research will be to holistically explore the experiences of these grade 10 boys towards school and more importantly towards the concept of disengagement. Secondly, it aims to interpret these findings against a backdrop of contemporary theorists in order to identify a series of factors that can be used as a starting point for the analysis of the concept of disengagement, particularly from the specific context of the research site.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.4.1 Introduction

As Thyer in De Vos (1998:77) so eloquently articulates, “a research design refers to a detailed plan or a blueprint for how a research study is to be conducted”. For De Vos, the research design seeks to explore and describe a particular phenomenon thoroughly, the purpose being to develop ideas and theoretical generalisations. The qualitative approach to research has been espoused as the most suitable approach to this particular study as it allows for an exploration into the experiences of grade 10 boys towards school and to disengagement in particular.

3.4.2 Qualitative research

Owing to the highly complex and multidimensional aspect of the phenomenon of disengagement it became imperative to use a qualitative approach reflecting a phenomenological strategy. Qualitative research is best defined as an enquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of enquiry that explore a social or human problem (De Vos, 1998). Another viewpoint that best encapsulates the nature and the need for qualitative research is given by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) where they state that qualitative research is relevant where the purpose of the research is to study the phenomena as they unfold in the real world situations without manipulation. It can be said that this approach allows the researcher to capture what really goes on in the subjective world of the participants’ everyday lives by incorporating the context in which the participants operate, as well as their frame of reference (Francis 2004). Thus, the primary goal of research studies that utilise this approach is defined as describing and understanding human behavior

rather than explaining it (Babbie and Mouton, 1998). The researcher has, therefore used this qualitative approach in order to try and understand and study the particular phenomenon, namely that of disengagement, as it is perceived by the participants.

3.4.3 The interpretive paradigm

This research will be conducted from the interpretivist paradigm, as the researcher is interested in the subjective worlds of the research participants, particularly their own meanings, thoughts and experiences of school and school disengagement. The interpretive approach will allow the researcher to understand their circumstances affecting them by interpreting the meaning of what they said (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999: 7).

Ultimately the researcher would like to interpret the unique behaviour of the students, so as to ascertain why they are reacting in such a manner. In other words, what are the common experiences of the students, concerning their own feelings and, more importantly, from the point of view of their own socially constructed realities. Thus, this viewpoint will constitute the crux of this research project. As Neuman (2000) points out, “The researcher must take into account the social actor’s reasons and the social context of action.” (Neuman, 2000, p.71). Thus, doing so allows for a deeper and more meaningful exploration into the phenomenon of disengagement.

To reiterate, research from an interpretative paradigm endeavors to uncover and learn what is meaningful or relevant to the people being studied, or how individuals experience daily life. By asking the learners to share their own particular views surrounding their experiences at school on a daily basis, it is hoped that perhaps we will be able to uncover the demotivating factors behind their general apathy to school and the schooling process. In essence, the interpretive paradigm views the world as a process that is created by the individuals concerned. Once again, it can be said that interpretivists focus on generating understandings, that try to understand human beings, their minds, their feelings and the manner in which these manifest in their outward actions (Collins, Du Plooy, Grobbelaar, Puttergill, Terre Blanche, Van Eeden, Rensberg and Wigton 2000).

3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.5.1 The case study

The research strategy that has been adopted is the 'case study'. As is pointed out in De Vos (2003),

The exploration and description of the case takes place through detailed, in-depth data collection methods, involving multiple sources of information that are rich in context. These can include interviews, documents, observations or archival records. As such, the researcher needs access to and the confidence of the participants. The product of this research is the in-depth description of the case or cases (De Vos, 2003: 297).

Thus, the case study as a research strategy presents the researcher with the best way of delving deep into the consciousness minds of the participants in order to understand their complex, subjective worlds as well as to explore the true nature of the phenomenon of disengagement. A case study presupposes a relatively bounded phenomenon. An appropriate description of the case study method that appeared in the literature, was offered by Geering back in 2004, in which he states the following,

The case study is an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units. The sample is comprised of several „units“ and each unit is observed at discrete points in time, comprising cases. A case is comprised of several relevant dimensions („variables“), each of which is built upon an „observation“ or „observations“ (Geering, 2004: 342)

Based on this description of the case study one is able to see the benefits of using it as a research strategy for the collection and analysing of qualitative data in the social sciences. Hence it will suit the purpose of this study which is essentially to gain as much information on the experiences of grade 10 boys towards school and particularly towards disengagement. Not only does the case study allow for the phenomenon to be adequately explored, but it has the added benefit of also providing a framework of analysis for later in the research study by drawing on the advantages of cross-unit analysis.

In order to delve one step further into the case study as a preferred method of research design, one needs to understand the advantage of the comparative-historical method of research design in particular. The comparative-historical study may be looked upon as a series of case studies, combined with explicit cross-unit analysis (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003).

The case study can be thought of as the closest form to cross-unit research design where levels of analysis move up and down, more or less simultaneously and where a small number of units are subjected to intensive study (Geering, 2004: 343).

Thus, the case study is useful when the researcher is requiring a detailed, in depth analysis of a phenomenon from a particular perspective. Geering goes on to say that,

The case study is also more useful when forming descriptive inferences between units in a sample thus this qualitative research study is perfectly tailored towards using the case-study as the preferred method of research design. Case studies if properly constructed also allow one to peer into the box of causality to the intermediate causes lying between some cause and its purported effect (Geering, 2004: 349).

Thus it can be clearly seen that case studies will enjoy an intrinsic advantage in research of an exploratory nature. In conclusion, the case study research design constructs cases from a single unit, while remaining attentive to inferences that span similar units outside the formal scope of investigation. It is also interdependent with cross-unit analysis and they are complementary in nature as their strengths compensate for each other's weaknesses in terms of research design and analysis. The greatest benefit of this to the researcher will present itself in the data analysis and in drawing up the findings of the research.

3.5.2 The semi-structured interview schedule

The researcher will use the semi-structured, one-to-one interview (in-depth interview) in order to extract the information from the participants. This is due to the fact that an entirely „unstructured“ interview, whilst eliciting the open-ended responses from the respondents, may fail to reach any conclusive information on the concept of school disengagement. On the other hand, a highly „structured“ interview is more useful for collecting data that is

comparable across people and sites and that is more quantitative in nature (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011: 412).

Thus, because the research question needs to evoke a qualitative, meaning-rich response, yet at the same time be targeted on the understanding and perceptions of grade 10 boys regarding the issue of school disengagement, the interview will consist of open-ended questions that will be guided and structured to some degree by the interviewer. This will require a great deal of skill on the behalf of the interviewer. As pointed out in Cohen, Manion and Morrison,

Exploratory interviews are designed to be essentially heuristic and seek to develop hypotheses rather than to collect facts and numbers. He notes that these frequently cover emotionally loaded topics and, hence require skill on the part of the interviewer to handle the interview situation, enabling respondents to talk freely and emotionally and to have candour, richness, depth, authenticity and honesty about their experiences (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011: 413).

By using the open-ended questions in the context of meaning-rich case studies, it is hoped that the data will reveal interpretive commentary, add life and convey the stories of the participants in a more narrative nature rather than the structured, closed responses that present themselves if the research methodologies were more quantitative in nature.

Therefore, a series of open-ended questions were grouped into themes and categories as defined by the information that came to the fore during the literature review process. Each category of questioning pertaining to students' experiences of school and school disengagement were specifically articulated and grouped. The grouping into broad categories reflected the themes that were uncovered in the literature review process. These themes regarding school disengagement centered on personal factors, emotional factors, family factors, school factors, peers, extra-curricular, technological and even pedagogical factors that could influence the students' experiences at school especially with regard to disengagement. In each of the categories, certain key words and specific questions were used to probe, redirect and prompt responses from the participants so as to gather as much data as possible during the interview phase. The detailed, semi-structured interview schedule is contained as Appendix [F] – Research Instrument, and it was an important part of the research process in that it allowed the researcher to systematically go through the full scope

of the existing body of knowledge on disengagement and at the same time it allowed for the participant to freely and openly express their experiences of school and the schooling process.

Conclusion

It is important to note that each of the interviews took place after school, in my classroom in a period of about 45 minutes that was allocated specifically for the collection of data through the use of the semi-structured interview process as detailed in Table 2/ Appendix [F]. The interviews were also recorded with the use of a computer and audio recording software. After the interviews were conducted, narratives were constructed from the detailed information contained in the direct transcriptions. For detailed information on how the narratives were constructed please refer to Appendix [A] – Data: Chapter of Narratives.

3.5.3 The participants

The sample in terms of its applicability to the field of Educational Psychology research refers to the collection of all individuals, families, groups, organisations, communities and the events that one is interested in finding out more about (Marcus, 2002). It can be said that the sample is in fact also the element of the population considered for the actual inclusion of the study. What this means, is that one studies the sample in order to foster a better understanding of the population from which it is derived. For the purposes of this particular research the sample was taken exclusively from male students in grade 10 who were disengaged from school and the schooling process on offer.

To reiterate what was said in Chapter One, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2001) purposeful sampling is performed to increase the utility of the information obtained from the particular sample. Thus, information-rich participants are more likely to be knowledgeable and informative of school disengagement. This was definitely the case for the researcher and, therefore, a purposeful sample was selected.

Furthermore, the researcher purposively took a demographically representative sample in terms of choosing a White, Indian and Black male as the participants in this research study so as to increase the cultural scope of the study. The students were identified as disengaged due to their poor academic performance, general apathy to school and truant behaviour. All three

of the in-depth case studies are students who are exhibiting disengagement to school and the schooling process and are in need of assistance in re-engaging with school. Participants were given pseudonyms and guaranteed anonymity as well as access to the data and the opportunity to withdraw from the research study if they felt it was necessary.

TABLE 2: BIOGRAPHICAL AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

| PSEUDONYM | BACKGROUND INFORMATION |
|------------------|--|
| JORDY | Jordy is a 16 year old white boy in grade 10 that has been disengaged in the classroom since grade 8. In his grade 9 year (last year) he had numerous run-ins with both male and female educators. He was often late for class and enjoyed testing the teacher’s patience with inappropriate comments during the lesson. He does not seem interested in the content of the lessons and it is evident that he does not put in a great deal of preparation for assessments and tests as his academic performances are below class average. Since starting his grade 10 year he has changed his subject choice citing an inability to enjoy the lessons and to get along with the (male) educator whom he perceives as a bad teacher. He comes from a dysfunctional family as he has never seen his father and he lives with his mother at his grandparents’ house. |
| KENYON | Kenyon is a 15 year old Indian boy and has been selected for this interview due to the fact that he is exhibiting signs of disengagement from school, leading to general apathy and an inability to work to his potential. Kenyon has had a disjointed and unstable early high school experience because his parents’ careers have resulted in them moving between different locations. Every time they move he has to restart at a new school and readjust to the new context. In the latest move he has had to adjust from a private, American based schooling system and curriculum to the South African education system. Although he is presently attending a private high school in South Africa, he is of the view that the American School had more to offer in terms of co-curricular activities as well as sporting infrastructure. He admits that he has a strong passion for sports especially soccer and cricket that at times overwhelms his ability to focus on matters of an academic nature. His family background seems to be quite stable with a tight family unit consisting of a father, mother and younger sister. |
| SABELO | Sabelo is a 16 year old, black, African male, who like the other respondents has changed high schools since his first enrolment. Sabelo is originally from Pretoria, however, he chose to attend boarding school in Durban due to the fact that it offered him a chance to get away from his home life and become more independent. His first year at the school was in grade 9 (last year) and he started off with a very abrasive nature and was quiet and withdrawn during lessons. The majority of the teachers perceived him as being disengaged and he was described as a student „to keep an eye on“ by the school’s management. His academic performance was exceptionally weak at first and he is still way below grade average. By observing him outside of the classroom it was also evident that he was generally jaded and uninterested in the schooling and learning process. Sabelo is a perfect candidate for this research study as his apathetic stance to school, especially academic performance is worrying for staff and is an impediment in his academic development and progress. |

1.5.3 Data analysis strategy

A detailed data analysis of each participant's narrative will be presented in the next chapter. However, in order to make sense of and understand the data analysis chapter, it is firstly necessary to identify and examine the particular method that the researcher employed in order to extract the meaning from the data. As De Vos articulates, that analysis is a reasoning strategy with the objective of taking a complex whole and resolving it into parts (De Vos, 1998). The first level of analysis was done manually, directly by the researcher and the process of open coding was utilised. This involved close examination of the transcribed narratives, whereby specific units of meaning were identified and categorised, after which themes that emerged from the data were constructed. Due to the fact that this particular research study is qualitative in nature and involves case studies, its main aim is not to generalise its findings, but rather it seeks to reach a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding the phenomenon of school disengagement within its specific context.

The second level of analysis was also performed by the researcher and this entailed a detailed cross-theme analysis of the various participants' data in which the common ideas and sentiments were expressed. It must be noted that the results of this second level of analysis will be found primarily in the final Chapter of this research study entitled „Chapter Five – Findings and Implications“

3.6 ETHICAL ISSUES

Permission to conduct the interviews was applied for and granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Participants, their parents (due to the fact that they are minors) as well as the school were contacted and informed about the study and invited to volunteer their involvement in the study.

This permission was requested by the researcher with the use of gatekeeper permission letters (See Appendices C and D respectively) to both the parents of the minors as well as the headmaster of the school, that was to form the research site. The signed copies of these gatekeeper permission letters that were addressed to the school principal and the parents are included in the appendices

Over and above this, an informed consent document was given to and signed by each of the participants (See Appendix E), in which their rights as well as responsibilities as participants in the research process were articulated. Before and after the interviews care was taken to ensure that the participants were not compelled, coerced or forced to answer questions with which they felt uncomfortable.

The one-on-one interviews were, under the acceptance of the participants, recorded with a computer and then were transcribed verbatim. Thereafter, the data was presented as a collection of individual narratives whereby the anonymity of the respondents was preserved by giving them fictitious names. The narrative approach to the presentation of the data has been preferred, due to the fact that it captures chronological events and enables the researcher to infer causality as it allows for interpretive commentary. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011: 552).

3.7 VALIDITY: TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY

3.7.1 Trustworthiness

For qualitative studies, it is incumbent on the researcher to build a relationship of trust with the participants. In order to build this trust, students were not able to be identified, each student was given a pseudonym, and all transcripts were given to the students to add, delete or adapt their inputs. As these are personal experiences, the findings will not be instantly generalizable, but will provide insight into why boys attending a privileged, well-resourced, private school become disengaged. The participants spoke freely and at no stage did they seem pensive or reluctant to offer information. They were able to view the transcriptions afterwards and none of the participants made any changes to their responses nor were they uncomfortable with the researcher using the data.

As stated in Chapter One of this research study, Guba's model for trustworthiness of qualitative research was employed in order to establish the credibility of the data, and the research process as a whole. The primary purpose of this section of the dissertation is to explain what the main criteria of Guba's model are and how they have impacted on the research study and allowed for the data that has been extracted to be viewed as credible and,

thus, trustworthy. Guba identifies four criteria of trustworthiness that need to be met before the research is deemed as credible as a whole. These criteria are namely, truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality (Guba, 1981)

Truth Value

According to Guba, truth value asks whether the researcher has conducted research that is obtained from the discovery of human experiences, as they are lived and perceived by the informants (Guba, 1981). If this has been achieved then the research can be deemed as credible. Owing to the to the fact that the researcher had spent a few years and many hours engaging with the participants on an informal and formal basis, their confidence had been gained and they were appreciative of the fact that they were being able to express their own views and opinions on school and the schooling process without being identified in any way. This anonymity allowed the participants to express their experiences freely and openly with the researcher.

Applicability and consistency

Applicability really refers to the degree to which the findings can be applied to the other contexts and settings or with other groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was stated by Guba (1981) that research will meet the criteria of applicability when the findings fit into contexts outside the study situation that are determined by the degree of goodness of fit between the two contexts. Lincoln & Guba argued that as long as the researcher presents sufficient descriptive data to allow a comparison then the researcher has successfully addressed the issue of applicability. For the purposes of this research study, the sample purposefully selected grade 10 boys who were exhibiting signs of disengagement to school and the schooling system on offer. The research design then included the method of the case study and used a semi-structured interview schedule to obtain context rich data from each of the participants. Thus, the researcher is of the opinion that the findings can be applied to the context of this school and to other contexts and settings with similar groups. This would thus also ensure that the research would reveal consistency, as it was considered that the findings would be consistent if the inquiry was replicated with the same participants or in a similar context (Guba, 1981).

3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher was of the opinion that there were no limitations of the study that adversely affected the results of the study or negatively affected the research process. It must be noted though that the context of the study does provide some limitations in that the study only can be applied to grade 10 boys at a private high school. Thus, research of boys at lower socio-economic government schools could have different findings and obviously research into female students' experiences of school and school disengagement could provide different data altogether.

3.9 CONCLUSION

The focus of this chapter was to accurately articulate the research design process, as well as the procedures followed in the acquisition of the data. These included such aspects as: sample selection, research design, data collection methods, data presentation methods as well as data analysis procedures. The next chapter, namely Chapter Four, will consist of the presentation of the data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus on a detailed analysis of the data gathered in the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews by extracting the themes that presented themselves in the data. From the outset of this chapter, an analysis of the narratives presented many common categories across the three participants, however, each participant did indeed exhibit individual peculiarities, and as such, the analysis has to examine the meanings from the context of each of the individual interviewees in order to enrich the understanding of each participant. It is also of tremendous importance to note that while there were certain distinct categories that can be identified, many of the categories are interwoven with each other as they do not occur as isolated subsystems impacting on the participant, but rather have holistically shaped the students' experiences of school. Analysis of the data, therefore, will be done on a case-by-case basis and the aim is to look at each story from its particular context of peculiarities. It is incredibly important to understand each individual's context, background and subjective world in order to derive effective meaning from the data. Thus, the central premise of this data analysis is not to reduce the understanding to generic categories, but rather to understand each individual in his historical, cultural, social, emotional and family life circumstances. In so doing, it is hoped that the research will deliver a deeper and enriched understanding of how the different subsystems of the participant's life, interact and impact on each other in a continuous process that creates the unique perception that leads to the participant's experiences of school and the schooling system. Therefore, the data analysis will focus on a case by case analysis of the narratives and will categorise the main themes of each analysis.

Lastly, the data analysis chapter will end with a conclusion, which briefly summarises the salient points of the chapter, as an understanding of this will pave the way for the discussions contained in the final chapter.

At this point, before the researcher delves into a case-by-case analysis, some clarification on each of the broad categories that were identified is made, to aid in the overall understanding of the analysis. These common themes that were identified between the participants will be briefly listed below and a description will be given next to each one

4.2 THE THEMES IDENTIFIED IN THE ANALYSIS

4.2.1 The emotional factors that influence experiences of school

This refers to any factors that are governed by the participant's emotions. Thus, the way in which the participant's feelings and emotions that evoke fear, frustration and even anger influence their experiences of school will be discussed under the theme of „emotional factors“. This includes the feelings that are evoked through the perception that others have of the participant.

4.2.2 The personal factors that influence experiences of school

The personal factors include the perceptions that the participant has of his own abilities. Thus, this refers to the participants' views of their own intelligence, their ability to communicate in public forums, and their academic prowess. Therefore, personal factors refer mainly to the way in which the participant views his own abilities and especially how these abilities are then compared against the abilities of their peers in the context of the school, and finally, how this comparison of personal abilities then influences the participant's experiences of school.

4.2.2 The school factors that influence experiences of school

The school factors concern any of those factors that the specific context of the participants' school may pose that influence their experience of school. Under the factors of the school there were three main common subthemes that came up that directly influenced the participants' experiences of school, namely; the teacher; the subject; the influence of extra-curricular (in some cases there were other categories associated with school that came up –

these will be discussed when they arise). The three main subthemes are briefly discussed below.

4.2.3.1 The teacher

This refers to the way in which specific teachers influenced the participant's experiences of school through direct contact with the participant within the realm of the subject.

4.2.3.2 The subject

This refers not specifically to the manner in which the content of the subject was conveyed to the participant but rather to the actual content itself. However, the teacher will have a massive influence on the subject and this will be made apparent where it arises in the analysis.

4.2.3.3 The influence of extra-curricular activities

This refers to the influence that sports, hobbies and interests outside of the realm of the academic sphere of schooling can have on the participant's overall experiences of school and the schooling system.

4.2.4 Family factors that influence experiences of school

The family factors refer directly to the way in which the microsystem of the family can impact on the way in which the participants experience school. In other words, family characteristics like family structure – namely, does the participant have both biological parents and if not, how can this influence the participant's experience of school. Does the participant come from a single-parent family? Is the family context a normal one or has the family been split up and experienced turmoil through death or divorce? Thus family factors refer to the actual structure that the specific family has and how this structure may influence the participant's experiences of school, especially with regard to school disengagement.

4.2.5 The influence of peers on experiences of school

The influence of peers concerns the manner in which friends both in the school context and outside of the school context can influence the way in which the participants experience school.

4.3 JORDY'S EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL

Introduction

As stated in the background and biographical description that accompanied the data collection methodology, Jordy does not come from what one would consider as the ideal home environment. Jordy comes from a dysfunctional family, as he has never known his real father. He lives with his mother at his grandparent's house and seems to be lacking the guidance and direction of a patriarchal figure. He does not exhibit signs of engagement with the schooling process and has been reprimanded for truancy in the past. This is his second high school in three years and he cited his reasons for leaving the previous one as an inability to enjoy school and that he felt that he didn't belong there. His current relationships with his educators are not good, as he has had issues with specific teachers. He is not an academically orientated student, and by his own admittance he does not generally enjoy the schooling process pertaining to academics and assessment but does enjoy the extra-curricular aspect of school. He seems to take refuge in the sporting sphere of school life and most of his friendships with peers have been formed on the sporting field. The subsystem of his peers and the connections that he has made through sports seem to matter the most to Jordy.

Emotional factors that influence Jordy's experiences of school.

Since an early age, Jordy has experienced an emotional disengagement from school especially on specific days in the calendar such as father-son sports days. By his own admittance, not having a father at home led to frustration and envy of other boys especially on these days and a dislike of school. He claims that this did indeed have an effect on him as a younger child but that the effect has declined as he became older.

Having no father did have an effect on me as a younger child but not so much anymore. Especially in pre-primary and senior-primary school when they had father-son sports days. I wondered why I was the only boy who had no dad to accompany me and I was envious of the boys who had fathers to play sports with. Often an uncle or family member would accompany me. This made me not like school especially on those days as I felt different to the other boys. It no longer bothers me as much now that I have become older. [J2]

As is evident from this statement above, Jordy has experienced emotional difficulties relating to socialisation as he does not come from a normally structured family unit consisting of a married father and mother. From a young age the difference between his family structure and that of the other boys became apparent to him and he then started to perceive himself as being „different“ to the other students which resulted in him not liking school and becoming disengaged. Thus, the emotional stress experienced by Jordy’s perceived difference has negatively affected his perception of schooling.

In the case of Jordy, emotional stress is a major contributing factor to a dislike of school and subsequent disengagement to the schooling process. Another example of this is found when he spoke of the fears that he experiences on a daily basis at school. In some instances this fear becomes so great that it severely impacts on his attitude towards school.

I have a fear of talking in public as well and being embarrassed if I forget what to say in front of the class. Any subject where I have to do orals, I do not like. It makes me very nervous and I start to panic. I often want to stay away from school if I know that these lessons are coming up. Things that embarrass me in class make me hate school. [J10]

Thus, as is evident from this statement, Jordy experiences severe emotional stress at times which manifests itself as acute anxiety to the point where he suffers panic attacks. This is a rather severe emotional factor that causes him to not want to attend school at all, in order to avoid the stress and fear of speaking in public. This is in fact a psychological condition called glossophobia which many adolescents suffer from. In the instance of Jordy, it causes disengagement from school to the point where he is so withdrawn that he often chooses not to attend school at all on certain days.

This emotional fear is further mirrored by the negative effect that the remarks of teachers can have on the psyche of this particular learner.

When I teacher calls me lazy or makes me feel stupid is another time when I get very embarrassed. This can also make me angry and I then want to say something back to that teacher to make me feel better inside. [J10]

Once again, as a result of the actions of the educator (perhaps unwittingly) a trigger is activated that causes a direct, deeply emotional response from the student. In this case the response is one of embarrassment and fear that results in the secondary emotion of anger. By the students own admittance, this gives him the desire to make a retaliatory statement towards the teacher in order to defend himself. A feedback loop of negative experiences is created in the interaction between Jordy and the teacher which ultimately further fuels his dislike of school and the schooling process.

This emotional response towards the teacher's comment cannot, however, be seen in isolation from the other factors that influence the life of the student and his subsequent experience of school and the schooling system. The multi-dimensional nature of disengagement, once again becomes very evident when we look at the theme of emotional factors that causes disengagement in grade 10 boys.

Jordy, like many boys his age (and children in general) are highly emotionally charged individuals who react both positively and negatively to external stimuli. In the case of Jordy, the external stimuli, namely the context of the classroom and public exposure to his fellow classmates, as well as the words of ridicule by the teacher cause direct fear and anxiety and the inclination to make a retaliatory statement. Furthermore, in evoking the negative response from Jordy, a cycle of disengagement is perpetuated and his experience of school will automatically become a negative one and this will lead to further disengagement from school and the schooling process.

Thus, it is becoming more and more evident that the issue of school disengagement has to be seen from a holistic perspective, with the individual viewed as the centre component of the system which has many subsystems interacting on each other as well as collectively on the

individual. Therefore, any meanings that are drawn in this data analysis are best understood in their individual context. Although there may be similar themes and categories between respondents, each one has to be fully understood in terms of their own individual peculiarities.

Personal factors that influence Jordy's experiences of school

The personal factors that influence Jordy's experiences of school are most often intrinsically interwoven with the emotional factors, as well as with other factors yet to be discussed in this data analysis (such as the factor of the school, the particular educator and even the specific subject). Evidence of this is found where Jordy states that he is not of the same ability of other learners and that he is in fact a less academically orientated individual.

He saw me as trouble maker. That is what he actually said to me... and that I was not able to understand things because I didn't listen in class. Meanwhile it was because I am not a fast learner and some things in [subject] are very difficult to understand the first time. [J9]

Clearly, Jordy perceived his personal ability as being lower than that of the rest of the student body. This perceived weakness would have fed directly into the anxiety that was manifested by the emotional factors, thus, highlighting the complex interactions between the individual and the various subsystems that create his experiences of school.

The situation was even further exasperated as the student started to dislike the teacher as well as the subject which created an even more hostile environment and further alienation from the schooling process. This occurred to the point where the student lost all interest in the subject and wanted to detach himself from it.

School factors that influence Jordy's experiences of school.

The teacher

Differences between individual teachers have also had a huge impact on Jordy's experience of school and his subsequent engagement or disengagement to the entire process. Jordy does

not allude to this fact but rather is direct when he says that he finds certain teachers unstimulating and boring and as result he loses interest and becomes disengaged.

Some subjects I find very boring because of the teachers. They just are not that good at making lessons interesting. This gives me mixed feelings about school. I really and truly don't like certain teachers and subjects as some teachers are unnecessarily strict and that they look for the smallest things to pick on during a lesson. [J7]

Jordy goes on to say that, as a result of the teachers, some lessons are so boring that this negatively influences his experience of school to the point that he doubts the relevancy of the entire process altogether.

I really dislike lessons that are too boring and full of talking and when the teacher makes no effort to engage with the class. Certain teachers are very boring and this leads to me becoming frustrated and no longer interested in the lesson. It is at this point when I will often prefer to talk about something else. [J8]

Not only do boring teachers cause major disengagement for Jordy but so do impatient teachers. This negative response from Jordy is apparent when he states that some teachers have an inability to understand him and are angered too quickly by his inability to comprehend a task.

Certain teachers have no patience when I am unable to grasp a new section and they get angry if I do not know how to do something after being taught it once. [J9]

Once again the interwoven nature of the various factors that influence Jordy's experience of school are clearly evident by the three abovementioned statements. The high degree of boredom experienced by Jordy as a direct result of the inability of the teacher to deliver an engaging lesson, is a common sentiment that is expressed by Jordy throughout his interview.

Some teachers just like to sit and teach as well. These are also the boring ones. They don't do anything out of the ordinary to make the lesson interesting. They just read from the book in the same voice, which makes me uninterested. I see these teachers as lazy and I don't like their subjects. [J9]

This meaning contained in the abovementioned statement is best extracted when it is viewed against some of the positive experiences that Jordy has of school. It must be said that not all Jordy's experiences of school and the influences of teachers are negative. On the contrary he also talks about many positive experiences that he has during the day at school. One of these is the influence that a certain female teacher has on his perception of school.

I think that my new subjects will make school much better for me as I won't be scared to ask a question. [Teachers name] is much better than [teacher's name]. She doesn't get so cross and she explains things much better. She seems less cross and angry and is much more chilled and relaxed. This makes the lesson not so intimidating and way more fun. She also does exciting things in class and does not just sit and read out the book. She also takes the time to get to know us individually and I know that I am taken more seriously as a person in her lessons. I now enjoy coming to these lessons [J9]

Thus, to summarise, the specific teacher has a massive impact on Jordy's experience and perception of school, so much so that it can either cause Jordy to enjoy the subject and coming to school or can conversely create such a negative experience that Jordy does not want to attend school at all and becomes totally disengaged. As can be seen by analysing the narrative of Jordy, in terms of his particular context, the emotional and personal factors that affect his experiences of school are tightly intermeshed with the characteristics of the specific teacher and the interpersonal dynamics between the teacher and the student.

The subject

Some subjects also lack relevancy to the life of the respondent and often it is subsequently deemed as unimportant and unnecessary in the greater scheme of things. This results in the student losing interest and becoming disengaged from school. Jordy is quite clear about this when he states that some subjects are not important as they have no value to his life.

Some subjects like [subject] I see no importance in because I will never use it outside of school. Why must I then waste the time studying it so hard if it has no direct use to my life. [J9]

Jordy goes on to say,

Also some subjects like [subject] just repeat the same things over and over again, they are so boring as there never is anything new and exciting. We always have the same discussions in class. Who wouldn't find that boring?! [J9]

Thus, the subject and the curriculum together, in this case, lack relevancy to the life and the needs of the student, therefore, there is a conflict of interests and the result is a negative experience on the part of the student and the perception is created that much of school is unimportant. This leads directly to Jordy's disengagement from school and the schooling process in general.

The influence of extra-curricular activities

Even the influence of extra-curricular activities has a massive impact on the school life of Jordy and the way that he experiences the schooling process. This influence (like that of the teacher), can be seen in both a positive and a negative light. The analysis of the influence of extra-curricular activities will firstly begin by examining the following statement as it illustrates to what degree he enjoys sport and the direct influence that it has on his life and how he feels about it as opposed to academics.

I must be honest I am mainly at school for sport. I love being on the sports field and I do not enjoy lessons nearly as much as playing sports. I know I need an education but sport is way more interesting than most lessons, even if it is just talking about the sport. [J5]

Thus, it becomes evident that Jordy prefers the sporting sphere of the schooling process to that of the academic sphere. Although this can be seen in a positive light as it attracts him to school, it can also present itself as a negative factor due to the fact that when he becomes uninterested in certain subjects or when the teacher delivering the lesson becomes unengaging, boredom can creep in and he often finds himself becoming disengaged to the point where he would rather talk to a friend about sport or discuss the forthcoming match.

This sentiment is further mirrored when Jordy describes his passion and interest in extra-curricular activities.

I also have a new passion and that is gym as I want to become stronger and more developed to make me better at sports, especially soccer and rugby. I admit that during the school day I can often get rather excited and distracted when talking to friends about gym, rugby and sport. This is especially bad on the day before a match or selection for teams. I admit that this often lands me in trouble with teachers as I am often unable to control myself. This is definitely worse for certain teachers and subjects. [J6]

By examining the statement above it becomes clear that Jordy's interest in school lies more in the sporting sphere of schooling life. While this must be seen as a positive influence, a deeper critical analysis of the narrative proves that it also leads to negative experiences at school due to the fact that it gets him into trouble with certain teachers as they do not enjoy it when he talks to friends in class about extra-curricular events and occasions. Thus, at times, extra-curricular activities prove to be a distraction to this particular student. However, this distraction cannot be seen in isolation to the broader context of the teacher-student interpersonal dynamics.

Family factors that influence Jordy's experiences of school

Firstly, it must be stated that once again the influence of the family on Jordy's experiences of school are also interwoven with the other factors that have been discussed so far in this data analysis. Proof of this is found in the first category of the data analysis, namely, the emotional factors. Here it became evident that because Jordy comes from a dysfunctional family, in that he has never known his father or had a father present in his life to accompany him to schooling events and functions, he perceived himself as different from other boys and this caused a deeply emotional response in Jordy which in turn manifested itself as a dislike for specific days at school and a general belief that he was not like other students at school.

Having no father did have an effect on me as a younger child but not so much anymore. Especially in pre-primary and senior-primary school when they had father-son sports days. I wondered why I was the only boy who had no dad to accompany me and I was envious of the boys who had fathers to play sports with. Often an uncle or family member would

accompany me. This made me not like school especially on those days as I felt different to the other boys. It no longer bothers me as much now that I have become older. [J2]

While Jordy stated that this emotional response and fear was more prevalent at junior and senior primary school, as opposed to high school, he did not totally dismiss the fact that it still has an effect on him. Thus, from this statement we are able to see that not having a father and coming from a dysfunctional family has had a psychological effect on him that has influenced his perception and experience of school.

There is further evidence in the narrative that the absence of a patriarchal figure from the family structure has indeed had a negative influence on Jordy's experiences of school due to the fact that his mother often allows him to miss school if he so chooses. This fact is verified in the statement by Jordy below.

Even these days if I really don't want to go to school I don't always have to. My mom understands me. She always takes my side and has my back. I am very lucky because she stands by me no matter what. [J4]

In most households that consist of a functional family context, the father and mother together would not support truancy and together would form a cohesive unit that would guide and urge the student to attend school so as to not miss out on work. This would negate the chances of the student falling behind and thus lead to a more pleasant experience of school. However, this is not the case in Jordy's context. Jordy states that if he doesn't want to attend school, that his mom will support him in this regard. Thus, the lack of a patriarchal figure in this regard creates the platform for Jordy to have a diminished sense of responsibility towards school and the schooling process. This will have detrimental consequences as Jordy will fall behind on work on those days that he misses school and this will lead to greater stress in the future as he will not understand those sections missed. If one couples this with his negative reaction to teachers that get frustrated with students who need to be retaught concepts, then one becomes aware of the complex, multidimensional nature of Jordy's particular context and his unique experiences of school and the schooling process.

There is further evidence in the narrative that Jordy's family structure is creating a platform that creates diminished responsibility in the student as he does not have any duties or chores to perform at home.

I am given no responsibilities at home and I am also lucky because I have absolutely no chores or household duties to do. [J4]

In most functional families consisting of a father and mother and children, there will be different tasks to perform by the various family members that foster a level of responsibility in the children. This high level of responsibility that is created in a normal, functional family, in turn, creates a solid platform for which the student engages in school life. In the case of Jordy, his particular family structure has resulted in a situation where he has no father, only a mother. By his own admittance, he has no responsibilities and this does not bode well for his character or his attitude to work, especially academic work.

Thus to conclude, it is evident that a dysfunctional family structure as experienced by Jordy influenced his experiences of school both directly and indirectly. This influence cannot be ignored in a comprehensive analysis of the information contained in his narrative.

The influence of peers on Jordy's experiences of school

As can be expected after examining the literature, the subsystem regarding peers has a major influence on a student's perception of school and the subsequent experiences of school and the schooling system. This was also evident right from the beginning of the interview with Jordy when he stated that his friends at his previous school caused him to become more rebellious and put him on a path that led to widespread school disengagement.

This is not my first high school as I attended another rather large all boys' school for grade eight. It was here where I started to become influenced by friends and became more rebellious. I started to not like school that much and my school work became less important to me. All I wanted to do was spend time with my friends doing the things that we liked to do like playing soccer and bunking school. My marks at school started to get very bad. [J3]

Thus, it very clear from the statement above that in the case of Jordy his peer subsystem has had a direct influence on his experience of school. In fact, the influence that his friends had on him was so severe that this was one of the reasons that Jordy left his previous school. A deeper analysis of his peers at his old school also reveals that they themselves came from dysfunctional families and as a result lacked the guiding influence that a normal family unit

has. In a normal family one of the main functions of the parents is to act as role models and to prevent irresponsible actions on the part of their children. Both with Jordy and his peers this guiding influence was lacking as the statement below indicates.

These friends at my old school were involved with alcohol and drugs and were not at all interested in school. They would often bunk school to go to the beach to drink and smoke. A lot of these boys themselves came from broken homes and abusive parents who were alcoholics. Some of their parents didn't even care if we bunked school. [J3]

Thus the family unit that exists in a normal functioning household has a tremendous effect on the actions of the children especially with regard to setting good examples and fostering behaviour that leads to responsible decision making. In turn this responsibility leads to the correct behaviour that the student needs to be engaged and successful at school. Conversely, if the family unit is dysfunctional and the correct behaviour is not learnt at home, the chances are much greater that the child will not be successfully equipped to deal with some of the institutional demands that the schooling system requires.

Although the information in the above two quotes from Jordy's story reflect his past life at his previous high school, which was a former model C school, it is nevertheless a prestigious boys' school situated in an upmarket suburb with a good ethos and a rich history of academic and sporting achievement. Even now that Jordy has changed schools to a smaller, private school the influence of the peer subsystem on his experiences of school cannot be ignored. In fact now more than ever, by his own admittance, his peers are a distraction in class and that this often leads to disengagement, especially if the lessons are not engaging or stimulating.

At this school my friends are not as bad as my old school. However, some of my friends here are a distraction in class as we like to talk about things that interest us, especially if the lesson becomes very boring. This often gets me into trouble with teachers. Some of things that we like to talk about are sports! Especially if we have a rugby match coming up! [J5]

Once again, the peer subsystem cannot be looked at in isolation of the other subsystems that impact on Jordy's life and, thus, his experiences of school. If one analyses the statement above very closely, one can in fact see that three of the factors that influence Jordy's

experiences of school are all evident in the same statement, namely: the influence of peers; the influence of teachers and the influence of extra-curricular activities.

4.4 KENYON’S EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL

Introduction

Kenyon is a 16 year old Indian boy and although originating from a very different cultural and social context than that of Jordy, he is also disengaged from school and the schooling system, thus, has been included in this qualitative study. Outwardly, Kenyon’s family structure reflects that of a normal functioning and stable family which consists of a married, biological mother and father, as well as a younger sister. Kenyon’s family has experienced a few geographical moves of residence over the past five years due to his parents’ work commitments and this has had an effect on him as he keeps on having to readjust to the new context in which he finds himself. In general, Kenyon is apathetic towards school and is not fully engaged in the schooling system. He is not working to his full potential and has had numerous disagreements with teachers and exhibits signs of disengagement from the schooling system on offer. Right from the outset of this analysis it must be said that the various factors that have influenced Kenyon’s experiences of school are tightly interwoven. Therefore, although several distinct categories have been identified for the purposes of this data analysis, in reality there is no clear cut defining line that separates the various categories. One of the aims of this data analysis, where possible, will be to demonstrate the links between the various factors that impact on the student’s experience of school.

Emotional factors that influence Kenyon’s experiences of school.

Once again, in the case of Kenyon, the emotional factors that influence his experience of school presented themselves at many points throughout his interview. The complex and intricate web between emotional, personal, family dynamics as well as school factors and their impact on his experiences of school were evident at many points in the interview. The synergistic impact that these factors have on Kenyon’s overall engagement to school and the schooling process is not good. In many instances, it leads to a general apathy in Kenyon and a tendency to shut down and become disengaged. This directly translates into disengagement at

school, especially in those lessons that are not deemed as interesting or where Kenyon has an inability to connect with the teacher. Fear in one form or another seems to be the biggest catalyst in triggering emotional responses that ultimately lead to disengagement between the student and the learning process. Often this fear is not necessarily associated with an inability to understand the subject or having incompetencies exposed, but can even be due to a perceived inability to fulfil expectations and fear of not being adequate on certain levels. This is especially true when one examines the inter-relationship between Kenyon and his family. Directly and indirectly, his parents assert a great deal of pressure on him to perform academically.

My parents always warn me that if I get bad marks then they will be disappointed in me. This makes me very scared as I know they will be angry if they see a bad report. I find this very frustrating and it sticks in the back of my mind all the time. [K5]

Thus, one can see that Kenyon is conscious of not fulfilling his parents' expectations and this manifests as frustration and a resulting feeling of anxiety in the student. When this becomes coupled with the influence of punishment for poor results then it compounds the negativity towards the schooling process experienced by the student and thus increases the level of disengagement.

So yeah, getting bad marks makes me so worried as my parents come down hard on me. I really don't enjoy it when they do that. [K5]

The negative influence that his parents have on his engagement to school does not end with their high expectations and threat of punishment but also with their constant comparison between him and his sister who attains better marks than he does.

They also consider my marks as bad when they compare mine to my sister. She is younger than me and school is way easier for her so it's obvious that she will be doing better than me. My parents always praise her and make a big deal out of her good marks. Then they always compare me to her and say that she's going to be the doctor in the family when she grows up. This makes me really frustrated and sad and makes me feel like giving up. [K6]

Thus, it becomes obvious that Kenyon feels inferior to his sister's abilities and perceives his parents as having a preference for his sister's academic ability over his and this causes him to become despondent, negative and withdrawn as he sees himself as being inferior and lacking in their belief. Further evidence of this presents itself when Kenyon comments,

Are my parents ever going to be happy with me and tell me well done and be really happy?! This makes me a bit upset and when I'm sitting in some lessons I wonder if I'm actually not good enough. Perhaps they are right and that I'm not ever going to be able to get straight A's and get into medicine or a good university. This is quite scary and makes me wonder what is the point of school at all. I would much rather be a sportsman than have to study all the time anyway. [K6]

What the abovementioned statement also indicates is the fact that personal factors are also tightly interwoven with the emotional factors as Kenyon has started to question his own ability as a student and this is resulting in a growing feeling of self-doubt and a general apathy towards school and the schooling process. Thus, within Kenyon, there is a constant interaction between his perception of himself and how he fits into other social contexts like those presented daily at school. At this point in time, the interaction is a negative one as Kenyon is starting to believe that he is not an academic and his self-belief and confidence is starting to decrease. This in turn creates anxiety in the student and he seems to experience emotional difficulties caused by stress reactions. These emotional difficulties then cause the student to disengage from some social contexts, especially those that present themselves at school. This has a massive effect on Kenyon as his personal view of himself is becoming laced with inadequacies. He simply does not perceive himself as adequate and this is translating into anxiety at school that manifests as panic in certain social contexts like standing in front of the class and presenting a piece of work such as an oral.

Doing orals in front of a class is my worst thing at school. I must say I know this may sound stupid but I really and truly hate coming to school on those days. I always try miss them and pretend to be sick. Even the day before its due I am a nervous wreck and I just worry about it all the time. It makes my stomach all knot up inside. It puts me into a worried and frustrated mode at school and I get very stressed as I think the class is going to laugh at me. It makes me so nervous that then I sometimes even stutter and I usually do not even do that when I am having a normal conversation with my friends... and I never ever do that on the sports field. So I'm sure you can imagine that I find it scary and weird. To make matters

even worse sometimes we have English and Afrikaans orals the day after each other! Then I have to try and take two days off or miss one by going to the sick room. [K4]

Thus, Kenyon's low self-belief is leading to feelings of inadequacy that are manifesting as emotional issues of fear related to a lack of confidence and his perception of himself. This in turn has a severe negative effect on his engagement at school even to the point where he fears school on certain days. He then creates excuses not to attend school. This truant behaviour will then have knock-on effects in other subsystems of his life such as his views of certain subjects and his interaction with specific educators, as he may miss important sections of work and then may have difficulties in those subjects. By his own admittance (as will be pointed out later) Kenyon becomes much disengaged when he doesn't know what is going on in a specific subject and that this causes his concentration to wander during the lesson.

Other emotional fears that Kenyon has at school relate directly to exams. Kenyon finds exams a really stressful occasion and exam anxiety becomes a very real phenomenon that he has to deal with often during the scholastic year. This places immense stress on Kenyon that leads to disengagement from school and the schooling process in general.

Exams really make me nervous these days because I'm not sure what questions the examiner is going to ask and whether I will understand them or not. If I don't I will get bad marks again and my parents are going to ground me. So exam times are really, really stressful for me. I don't have a good attitude towards exams as they make me nervous and anxious and they also take a lot of time away from having fun. During exam times I am forced to study in my room for hours. While I do understand the need to study and get good results, I find this time very frustrating and it makes me slightly depressed. [K8]

Thus, Kenyon's perceived lack of ability is leading to a fear of examinations which results in a general apathy during these times event to the point where he becomes depressed. This is very detrimental to his engagement with the schooling process.

Personal factors that influence Kenyon's experiences of school

As pointed out at the conclusion of the last section, Kenyon has started to develop a rather inferior perception of himself and his academic abilities due to fact that his parents view his

academic ability as inferior to that of his younger sister. His sister's effort is constantly being rewarded with praise, and she is being labelled as the academic while Kenyon is not. He is losing his value of self-worth and this in turn is manifesting as anxiety and fear in specific settings and social contexts. This is creating serious disengagement from school and the schooling process in a student that is actually very capable and who is in need of assistance in dealing with this emotional crisis.

Once again this also points out the highly complex and interconnected nature of all these various subsystems of Kenyon's life and how they are constantly interacting with each other to affect Kenyon's overall experiences of school and the schooling system. The rest of this section will be aimed at identifying the personal view that Kenyon has of himself as illustrated in the interview. Where possible the interconnectedness of the various subsystems of his life will also be emphasised.

To start off with, although his average is a B symbol, Kenyon only believes that he is good in three subjects and that he may not have the academic ability to do the rest of them.

I know for a fact that I am quite good in three subjects and those are [subject], [subject] and [subject]. I get good marks and I find those subjects really interesting. In all the rest I seem to battle and maybe I'm just never going to be that good at them. [subject] is very hard as well. I always seem to make silly mistakes and then get the whole thing wrong. [K7]

The essence of his perceived inability is perfectly encapsulated when he says,

My sister gets a lot of attention. I guess she is just really clever. I wish that I could get her marks. My average is a B and that just isn't good enough for my parents. [K9]

He goes on to say,

I also love my sister but I get really sad when my parents praise her and shout at me. This seems to happen more and more these days as she gets older and older. Her marks are excellent and my parents continually remind me how good she is at school. They say that I need to try harder. [K9]

This fear of self-doubt and inadequacy is also permeating other perceptions that Kenyon has of himself and he really believes that he is not an academic

At home my parents also say that my sister is more of the academic and I'm the sportsman.

[K1]

Thus, to conclude this section, Kenyon's perception of his own ability is impacting on the other subsystems of his school life. He does not perceive himself as adequate and this results in low self-belief which manifests as a fear of exams as well as fears of public speaking, and in fact in any context in which his perceived inadequacies will be exposed. All this leads to a general apathy towards school and an ensuing behaviour of disengagement. Kenyon has started to not enjoy coming to school, especially on certain days and he does not have full confidence in his academic ability.

Family factors that influence Kenyon's experiences of school

Due to the fact that from an outwardly perception, Kenyon's family structure can be seen as normal, in that he comes from a loving home consisting of a happily married mother and father and a sister, it could easily be overlooked at a possible factor that could shape his experiences of school in a negative manner. However, as has been pointed out in both the emotional and personal factors that have been discussed so far, it in fact could be the starting point of all the negative issues that he experiences at school. All this negativity seems to stem from the perceived difference that Kenyon sees between himself and his sister. Kenyon feels totally inadequate and unappreciated and this may manifest as fear and inadequacies in other areas of his life. When questioned on his family life and the factors associated with home life Kenyon was quick to say that he does get support, however, the influence that his sibling has on his life does indeed have an effect on him.

My sister also gets treated better than I did at her age. She is allowed friends over and my parents always buy her things for school and get her things when they go to the shops. They get me things as well but she always sneaks something extra and I find out about it afterwards. Sometimes I think that maybe they prefer her over me. [K9]

As is evident from the description of Kenyon's background as well as his feelings as expressed in his interview, he is experiencing a considerable amount of pressure and stress at being labelled as inferior to his younger sister. Therefore, as he is moving through the

beginning of adolescence, the closest sphere of his life, namely, that of his immediate family, is making him feel inadequate. Thus, the family unit, although having the outwardly perception of creating a functional and supportive framework is indeed not so in reality. It is in fact causing Kenyon a huge amount of anxiety, especially in situations where he has to engage socially, emotionally or academically. As a result, he conjures up ways to escape his anxiety and even tells lies to avoid school and facing his fears. This avoidance behaviour that he is exhibiting signs of may be able to have short-term, temporary success in the reduction of his stress, however, due to the negative impact of missing more school and falling further behind, he is in fact perpetuating the cycle of anxiety and creating some long-term issues at school, which in all likelihood, will lead to further negative experiences and deeper disengagement from school and the schooling process.

The influence of peers on Kenyon's experiences of school

Kenyon identifies two sets of peer groups: one that he has within the context of his specific school and one that he has at home consisting of the children who live in his neighbourhood. Generally, Kenyon regards the influence that both sets of peers have on him as a positive one, especially the friends that he has at school.

My friends are all quite smart and often I can ask them things if I don't understand it the first time myself. I am very fortunate for this as it helps me a lot especially before exams when I am stressed. They get really good grades like 90s. They just seem to be cleverer than me. [K10]

Thus, Kenyon respects this academic prowess that he sees in his peers and he turns this into a positive factor as he uses these friends to help him clarify academic concepts that may battle to initially grasp at school.

Kenyon's second peer set is the one that he has at home and comprises mainly of the boys his age that live in the neighbourhood, with whom he has contact time after school, on weekends and in the holidays. These boys also have generally what one can consider to be a positive influence on Kenyon as they offer him a chance to play sports in a fun and social context which is essential for the holistic development of any adolescent. From the evidence given in Kenyon's narrative these peers may at times serve as a distraction as the need to „escape“ to

the park after a hard day at school may override the need to do homework on occasions, but generally he seems to get this done first before he goes out to play with these peers. His friends that he has at home also generally tend to offer a healthy and supportive context for him to engage socially, however, it must also be noted that he sees these boys as slightly less academically inclined. Not only does he perceive them as not as clever as his school friends but he also likens himself to them. It appears as if the time Kenyon spends with these boys in the afternoons offers him a sense of escapism and respite from the stress and pressure that accompanies school.

I do have some friends who are similar to me though. They do not fail but are B and C students. Some of them go to other schools but live in my neighbourhood. They also seem to be more of the sportsmen and we play a lot of sports together. Some of my school friends also live in my neighbourhood and the highlight of the day is being able to play games of soccer or cricket after school with all these friends. These games are the most exciting and I always look forward to them straight after school!! As we get home we do our homework then grab our boots and get to the grounds as fast as possible. [K11]

To conclude, it appears as if both sets of peers have a supportive and positive influence over his life and this cannot be seen as a major cause of his disengagement towards school and the schooling process.

School factors that influence Kenyon's experiences of school.

The teacher

Exactly as in the case of Jordy, the teacher is one of the major factors that influences Kenyon's experiences of school on a daily basis.

Some teachers are also just very boring they do nothing to make the lesson interesting or to inspire the students. They just speak in very monotonous voices and this makes the lessons feel like they are lasting forever! I really do not like these lessons and that makes me not like the subject either. In these lessons I seem to switch off and I really find it hard to concentrate on what is going on. [K14]

Thus, boring, uninspiring teaching leads Kenyon to disengagement with the subject and a growing dislike of the subject in general. For one teacher and subject in particular, this is negative view is expressed directly in the following statement.

The teacher never ever stands up and just shouts at us from the time that we walk in. She never tries very hard to do anything interesting and we always have to work from our textbooks or she gives us an activity to do. Most of the times she never teaches us at all you can ask the class. I'm not even sure why she shouts so much because no one ever does anything wrong. She just always seems to be in a grumpy mood and that's how she is from the start of every lesson. [K14]

This dislike of the teacher's methods of content delivery creates a direct dislike for the subject and results in Kenyon wanting to miss the lessons and engage in truant behaviour.

I hate going to these lessons and I often think of bunking or wish I could. It is really hard to get motivated to learn for these subjects or even to do the homework because I just cannot relate to it. It's so uninteresting and if I could drop it I would in a flash but my parents still want me to keep the option of being a doctor open. These lessons are probably the worst part about school for me and having to write the exams of these subjects has to be the lowest times of the year for me. [K14]

From analysing the rest of Kenyon's interview it became increasingly obvious that the quality of the teaching was one of the biggest factors that influences his experience of school and that can either cause him to enjoy the subject and be engaged or dislike it and become totally disengaged to the point where he would like to resort to negative behaviour that would allow him to avoid the subject and the teacher altogether.

Further proof of this is found in the following statement in which Kenyon openly states that some teachers are uninteresting and, therefore, he cannot relate to the subject.

Those lessons where teachers just talk and talk are also boring. Sometimes we just walk in and it's like the standard line to take out our textbooks. It's often not even said with much enthusiasm. How are we supposed to get excited about it if the teacher doesn't even seem that excited about it? [K17]

It must also be noted that Kenyon really enjoys it when the teacher makes the lesson more interesting. This captures his attention right from the beginning and leads to a high degree of satisfaction as well as enjoyment in that particular lesson. In turn, this results in engagement during this lesson and a positive feeling towards the schooling process in general.

If teachers just took the time to make lessons more interesting like using technology then it would also make things a lot better. [K17]

In fact, in the case of Kenyon, the issue of technology was such a major influence in his enjoyment of the lesson that it has been decided that for the purpose of the analysis of his interview the influence of technology in the classroom, although intrinsically intertwined with the factor of the teacher and the subject, will be given a separate and distinct heading.

The subject

Right at the onset of this category of questioning, Kenyon was quick to separate his subjects into two distinct groups: those that he likes and those that he dislikes.

I dislike subjects like [subjects] as they are often uninteresting. The work is often very boring because we look at the same themes over and over again. Although I realise that we need to learn about this stuff it is always presented to us exactly the same way year after year and it gets boring. [K12]

Thus, the repetitive nature of the curriculum, especially with regard to certain subjects also has a monotonous effect on Kenyon. It can eventually lead to boredom and behaviour that results in escapism and even further disengagement.

Themes like „teenage pregnancy“ and HIV come up time and time again in all subjects and especially in [subject]. Most of the boys are not interested and then we lose concentration and our minds start to drift off. We often then start to plan our sports games after school or talk about our opponents for the next match. [K12]

Therefore, Kenyon expresses the same sentiment that was uncovered in the readings during the literature review, namely, that the curriculum in certain subjects is rather repetitive and often students tend to become bored and lose focus when presented with these topics. For Kenyon, the ability to enjoy the subject was not purely down to the nature of the subject itself but, moreover, due to the nature of the teacher. Thus, for him the two categories of subject and teacher were inextricably linked.

Technology in the classroom

Kenyon is very direct when he refers to the positive influence that technology can have on his enjoyment of the lessons and how, in turn, this makes him highly engaged to the point where he thoroughly enjoys the lesson and finds the learning process particularly enhanced.

I love it when teachers show us videos and clips from YouTube and the internet. It really gets my attention and I like going to those lessons. I also seem to remember the work easier as I can remember what was said in the video. It just brings the work to life and is way better than just the teacher speaking. Using a board to draw pictures is also nice but us kids today are very interested in technology. [K17]

Kenyon goes on to say that technology forms a big part of his life and that he has the information pertaining to the lessons at his disposal. The following statement that Kenyon makes highlights the fact that he is aware of the power of technology and that it can be a very useful tool. He is also surprised that many teachers still do not use it in order to enrich the delivery of their lessons.

I watch clips all day on my phone and I find it interesting to look at what is happening in the world. Even I can find lots of stuff about what we are studying at school. Sometimes I can find even better stuff than the teachers. I don't know why they all don't use the internet, all the time! [K17]

Thus, Kenyon enjoys the experience that technology and multimedia is able to provide in the delivery of educational content. He finds it both stimulating and engaging. This sentiment is echoed a little later in his interview when he refers to the infrastructure that his old school had in terms of their investment into Information Technology.

My old school in England, the one based on the American system had way more computers than here. They were also buying their students iPad at the time I was leaving. I was quite upset about this. I still talk to many of my old friends from there on Facebook and by email and they tell me about the cool apps that they use for lessons and how much fun they have in class now that they are using the iPad. I wish our school also started this as it would definitely make the lessons more interesting and I know I would enjoy certain lessons more. [K18]

Once again, Kenyon stated his direct affinity for using technology and the interest and fun that it generates in the lesson. Thus, to conclude, in the case of Kenyon this use of multimedia and technology in the conveying of subject content is an essential tool that engages him during the lesson and aids in his positive experience of school and the schooling process.

The influence of extra-curricular activities

Like the other participants, extra-curricular activities play a major part in the life of Kenyon and generally seem to have a positive influence on his engagement with school. He really enjoyed the facilities and the wide variety of sports and activities that he had at his previous school and he states that this was one of the reasons that he enjoyed his previous school.

The last school which I attended was an International school [school], which is actually called an „American school“ situated in England... but it was an American set up. I enjoyed that school a lot as they had way more sports and activities to try out. I could try baseball, basketball, badminton, sailing, abseiling. Their facilities were amazing and they had everything you could possibly want. They even had a gym there, as well as an indoor and outdoor basketball court plus the usual soccer and cricket fields. We have one basketball court, but it's not really in such great condition. For starters it has no net and the backboard is loose. [K1]

Therefore, it is evident, especially in the case of grade 10 males, being involved in extra-curricular activities has a role to play in engaging students to school and thereby making the schooling experience more enjoyable.

Finally, to conclude, like Jordy, Kenyon experiences many factors that can greatly influence his engagement to school and the schooling process. They cannot be looked at in isolation, but rather have to be seen as synergistically impacting on his schooling experience.

4.5 SABELO'S EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL

Introduction

As indicated in the biographical information and background on Sabelo as stated in Chapter Three – Research Design, Sabelo is a 16 year old male of African descent. He has not had a stable start to high school as he has changed schools due to issues that he had at his home in Pretoria. His first year at the school was in grade 9 and he seemed to be finding it difficult to adjust to the settings of his new school context. There are a few teachers that view Sabelo as disengaged from school and the schooling process as his nature in class has been slightly abrasive when questioned, and at time he exhibits signs of being withdrawn. He has been described as a student „to keep an eye on“ by the school's management. His academic performance was exceptionally weak at first and he is still way below grade average.

Emotional factors that influence Sabelo's experiences of school

It must be stated right from the outset of the analysis of this particular case study that Sabelo's experiences of school are deeply influenced by emotional factors and that these emotional factors are very hard to separate from the rest of the contextual factors that influence his experience of school. Once again this is owing to the fact that the factors that have been identified as influencing Sabelo's experiences of school are inextricably interwoven, as they are with the other case studies. This is especially true for the case of Sabelo who has some deep-set emotional fears of being not accepted by peers or having „untruthful“ things said about him by other students at school. These criticisms on his personality create much anxiety in Sabelo and this anxiety can cause serious emotional distress which has the ability to impact negatively on Sabelo's experience of school. This emotional distress can cause Sabelo to become withdrawn and disengaged from school and the schooling process. This is directly evident by examining the statement below.

Sometimes, I don't really care about the negative things that people say about me. But yes, if there was anything that I really didn't like about school then it would be the horrible things that people may say about me. I really don't like this and it's not nice. It makes me not want to come to school and when I am in class I always worry about what people are saying behind my back. Also peer pressure. Like people telling you what to do and you don't want to do it. At the end of the day people kind of look at you differently. That could be the only other thing that could make me anxious. [S4]

Thus, Sabelo is affected emotionally by the perceptions that other students have of him and how others perceive him in terms of his social identity at the school. This social identity and the paradoxical conflict of having to conform to the social expectations of peers is a cause of much anxiety in the participant, to the point where it can cause Sabelo to become seriously disengaged from school and the schooling process. Proof of this is found in the following extract from the interview with the participant.

That kind of stuff makes you just think a lot of things that you really just shouldn't be thinking about and you lose focus on your school work. You know?! Then you do the things that you're not supposed to be doing. Like smoking and drinking alcohol and wanting to go out. Doing things to fit in, just because you want to be accepted and not be talked about. This is definitely one of the worst things about coming to school. [S4]

Therefore, one is able to infer that emotional factors have a profound effect on Sabelo's experiences of school, but these are interwoven with some of the other factors that will be discussed in the rest of this chapter. Other emotional factors which influence Sabelo's experience of school relate to his intense fear of examinations. The emphasis that the schooling system places on examinations causes much fear and anxiety in students and particularly in Sabelo. It is the fear of failing or of underperforming in these examinations and the associated stress which cause anxiety in the participant. This is clearly evident in the statement below.

Exams also scare me. I really hate June and November because exams scare me. I mean I wish they weren't even called exams. Even the word is horrible. It's definitely a very stressful time for me. I always feel like I have time and I leave things to the last minute, then I feel stress and anxiety. Then I don't do well in that test. That is a problem for me. I overthink about things then and get stressed. [S5]

Thus, in the case of Sabelo there are many instances where emotional factors are strong enough to cause negative experiences of school, to the point where school becomes an unpleasant experience and Sabelo becomes disengaged from school. In fact, even right at the conclusion of the interview with Sabelo, when asked to summarise what he found the least appealing and most negative factor about school he had the following to say,

The thing that I dislike the most about school though has to be the people who just didn't like me and who never knew me. I mean those people that have not taken the time to realise what I stand for. They often just believe what they want to believe and make up stories which are untrue. This definitely hurts my feelings and really makes coming to school terrible. [S14]

Therefore, as is evident from analysing the narrative on Sabelo, emotional factors do indeed play a major role on the experiences that the individual has of school and these emotional factors are intrinsically interwoven into the other subsystems of his life.

Personal factors that influence Sabelo's experiences of school

Sabelo did not state any personal factors that could negatively influence his experience of school. He seems to have faith and confidence in his academic abilities. Outwardly, Sabelo exhibits confidence in his academic abilities as well as his personal aptitude. As stated in the previous section, Sabelo did experience many emotional issues that influence his experience of school and the researcher is of the belief that Sabelo's personal factors are extremely tightly interwoven with his emotional factors to the point where they are almost inseparable.

The school factors that influence Sabelo's experiences of school

For this particular participant, the factors that the school itself created were of tremendous importance to the student and he was able to talk freely on those factors.

The teacher

Firstly, Sabelo really dislikes certain teachers and sees them as being unable to understand him as a person. This is linked to personal factors as he believes that if these teachers got to know him a little better as a person and what he stands for without jumping to conclusions and judging him, then this would have a more positive influence on his experience of school. This is evident in the statement below.

They don't really communicate with us on that kind of a real level and that is bad as they never really know who we are and what is actually going on in our lives. With most teachers I find that this is the case. They just don't have a sincere interest in us as a person. [S17]

For the most part though, it is the quality of the teaching from some of the educators which can create the biggest negative experience at school.

If the teachers could teach differently. Yeah. Like when I started with [subject]... my teacher in the beginning was good... but then I felt he... well he kind of got boring. And he just lost hope as well. Like if someone wasn't doing well then he encouraged them to go to [subject] instead of inspiring them to dig deeper and try harder. It's almost as if he lost hope and became discouraged. It's like he doesn't push anyone to do better anymore. And if someone drops to [subject] then he would actually ask if there weren't any others who would also prefer to go down. [S10]

Thus, Sabelo needs the teachers to be continually inspiring and to foster that spirit of determination and motivation in him through maintaining a positive teaching environment and continually supporting and encouraging the student during the lessons. Sabelo goes a step further though to detail a few teachers who have never been adequate in his eyes, and whose lessons are continually very disengaging due to the manner in which they conduct the lesson. This is directly evident in the paragraph below.

There are many bad teachers as well. I really hate going to these lessons as I know I'm going to be bored and maybe even shouted at as well. Sometimes on days when we have a lot of bad teachers and terrible lessons I won't even want to attend class. I mean if I just

stayed in my room and read the textbook it would be the same thing as going to the lesson. All they want to do is stand, do the work and then sit down. Just get it over with. I mean also sometimes they can see that a student or students are not well but they just don't care. You know that kind of thing makes me not like some teachers. They do not take the time to listen to what we have to say... to hear our point of view... they just don't care. That's what makes them a bad teacher. It's like they are just here to teach and get it over with. You can tell. I mean they don't even want to get to know you. Some teachers do not even know our names! You know that kind of thing... like they just don't care about you. Like they are just here to make money. [S11]

Thus, Sabelo views some educators as not using a method of teaching that is engaging enough to create a positive learning experience in the classroom. For the participant these lessons create a negative experience of school. He goes on to say that these same teachers that do not deliver interesting lessons also do not take the time to get to know the students better, or to understand them on a more personal level. He sees a gap between the teachers and students on a level where the teacher is unable to fully understand the context of the student. Due to the fact that the teacher is unable to empathise with the student, Sabelo finds that these teachers are also unable to create an environment in their classes which is conducive to effective teaching and learning.

I wish these teachers would just like take a break from the work and speak about something else! Like getting to know the students. Perhaps give us advice on life. No one really does that and tells us about the things that we need to be told about. No teachers tell us about where they went wrong and a bit about their lives. They don't give us real advice. It feels like there is always a wall up between us and them. Most of them do not tell us about their experiences in life and give us advice that we need and that we can relate to. [S12]

Sabelo goes on to say the following about his teachers,

I wish some of our teachers would make lessons more interesting by letting us watch a video one day. I also like teachers that give frees. That makes you like the teacher in a way and makes you have a different attitude towards the subject. Then you want to go there and it makes you more determined to do work when you have to. But when you are forced to do the same boring stuff over and over again it gets very uninteresting and I lose interest and concentration fast. That's when I want to talk to my friends about fun stuff.[S12]

Thus he also sees the method of instructions as being of tremendous significance to the overall enjoyment of the lesson and the subject. For Sabelo (and other students) present day teaching pedagogy simply does not instill the ability to engage the student in the content of the lesson. For him, some lessons are very boring because teachers are not using resources that are relevant or engaging like multimedia, especially video clips that allow for a different perspective than the one that the teacher is espousing through the verbal narrative of instruction, which he deems as being and unstimulating.

Therefore, for this particular participant the context of the teacher has tremendous importance to the experience that he has during his day at school. However, it is also important to note that the factor of the teacher is also meshed with the other factors that influence his experience of school.

It is extremely important to note that Sabelo is also aware of the positive influence that teachers can make to his experience of school and that he views some of his teachers as being able to deliver very stimulating lessons that capture his attention and that create a positive experience of school that engages him and other students. This is directly evident when Sabelo states that,

Some teachers are really good though. Like for instance miss [teacher] I really like her. She really is a great teacher and I just love going to her lessons. She is just like fun and you want to go to her lesson! Maybe because she is young and she can understand us in a way, maybe because she can talk our kind of lingo... yeah... its things like that. And also the way she teaches, she is like so chilled. She is not too serious or too lazy and always sitting down and doing nothing. Also what is very important to me is that she doesn't just teach and teach all the time and shout instructions. Often she takes the time to get to know us as people and this is what really makes me like her as a teacher.

This is of tremendous significance both to the participant and to the researcher. For the participant, he perceives certain educators as being highly engaging as they are able to understand him and relate to him and the other students on a level which makes it easy for teaching and learning to take place in the context of the classroom. For the researcher this is

also of tremendous significance as the participant is not only painting a picture of total doom and gloom, but rather is able to identify and focus on more positive facets of school and the schooling system which are capable of engaging him. This shows that there is hope for the student to become more engaged with school in the future.

The influence of peers on Sabelo's experiences of School

It was very interesting to note that in the case of Sabelo his peers at school are having a positive influence on his experience of school as they offer him the opportunity to be understood and to express himself. The empathy that a friend can offer Sabelo is extremely comforting to him and results in creating a more positive environment for him, which in turn leads to greater engagement with school and the schooling process. This is evident in the paragraph below where he talks about that influence that his peers have on him at school.

I must say though, that although there are a lot of things which I don't like about my home life and school there are also many things that I do like. One of those things has to be seeing my good friends! Seeing them every day and just being together and with them makes me feel confident. Knowing that we are doing the same stuff and the same work and going through the same things makes me feel so much better. Like Travis... we are very good friends. So I feel like I am not alone. If we have problems we try and help each other out or ask for help. You know like that kind of thing. Like at times you may feel like you are the only one who doesn't understand what is going on. But no... you are wrong as there are also other people that don't know what is going on. Travis and I have a bond in that way. We understand each other and try and help each other. Sometimes we may both get a bad mark for a test and that will on the one hand give you the ability to laugh it off and on the other hand will also give you the ability to say, hey we have got to push now. You know... try help each other out. [S7]

Peers often lead to a positive experience at school and, therefore, be a factor that also engages the student to school and the schooling process. Thus, like it was for both the previous cases in this research study, the peer set has the potential to be a positive influence on the students' experience of school.

Family factors that influence Sabelo's experiences of school

Like the other participants in the case studies, the family context and the characteristics of the family microsystem have tremendous impact on the individual's life. This impact is not just isolated to personal and emotional experiences, but the family context is able to impact upon other subsystems in the microsystem of the participant such as the school. Occurrences within the context of the family can often create situations that lead to negative experiences at home which also lead to disengagement at school.

Sabelo's family context has not been entirely stable as a child. Firstly, his biological mother has passed away and when he was living in Pretoria he was under the same roof as that of his father, step-mother and their two children who have no biological relation to Sabelo. Sabelo states that when he was living with his family in Pretoria, he was unable to find the time to concentrate on his own development as a student. This was due to the fact that he had to perform the function of a minder to his younger siblings. This was a chore that severely limited the amount of time and effort that he was able to direct to his studies. As a result, Sabelo fell behind academically and it resulted in a general apathy towards school and eventually he came disengaged with school, to the point where he decided that he had to leave his previous school. This sentiment is evident in the following excerpt from the transcription of Sabelo's interview.

I decided to leave my last school, [school], which was in Pretoria because things at home were not that great and I was experiencing a lot of difficulties. I definitely was not happy and school was becoming more and more of a nuisance. We lived far from school. We would basically have to drive an hour to get to school. So I'd come back home late. It was like either my sports or my siblings' sports, wait till like five, then there was traffic. Then it was an hour drive back home. Then we would get home at seven, and then I would have to do my homework. Still have to eat, then help my siblings with their homework. Then I would study and you know it was just a bit too much for me. My parents also weren't always at home and I would have to look after the kids a lot of the time. It was just a little bit too much. So I asked if I could attend a boarding school and my parents allowed me, so I came here to [school]. [S1]

Thus, Sabelo's family environment living in Pretoria had already created such a severe negative experience that it had lead him to becoming totally apathetic and disengaged from school to the point where he dropped out of that school.

Despite having come to a new school, Sabelo still views his family context as having a negative influence on his experiences of school because he is of the opinion that his parents should be able to push him a little harder academically. He feels that they could show a greater interest in him as a student by motivating him to perform better in his studies. He acknowledges the fact that there is some form of support at home, but for him, personally, this support is not enough and he feels that his parents need to show a sincere interest in him. This is clearly evident in the following statement that Sabelo makes.

I feel that my parents are not pushing me as hard as they should be pushing me. Like the support is there but I just don't feel that it is enough. I mean my parents care about my academics. They tell me that I need to study hard and they are prepared to pay for my extra lessons but I still don't feel that it is enough. It's just not enough. I don't feel like they are pushing me hard enough. I also wish my parents would show more of an interest in me and talk to my teachers, to find out why certain marks of mine are lower. You know. Things like that. They should push me harder on the subjects that I'm not doing so well at. They just look at my overall marks and not what I'm doing badly at. Also speaking to my teachers... coming for parents' evenings... you know that kind of thing. They really do not take that kind of an interest in my school life [S6]

This abovementioned statement is of tremendous significance for the researcher because it bears testimony to a deeply entrenched emotional component that is also at work. As is evident, Sabelo feels that his parents are letting him down and this is also negatively influencing his experience of school. Thus, once again the researcher is able to observe how, not only the various microsystems impact on the lives of the individual, but how the microsystems impact on each other in the realm of the mesosystem and, most importantly, how the personal and emotional factors can integrate with the various subsystems to further influence and impact upon the experiences of the individual.

4.6 CONCLUSION

In Chapter Four, a detailed analysis of the participants' experiences of school, especially with regard to school disengagement was conducted and presented in the form of descriptive textual data. The original interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded into narratives that reflected the main components of the raw data. Each analysis of the case studies was conducted separately and expressed each participant's unique, contextually rich experiences of school. It must be reiterated that despite the individual analysis of each student, there were many common themes of experiences between them. The data analysis revealed many interesting observations and in the next chapter, Chapter Five – Findings and Implications, the researcher will highlight and present the most significant of these findings and their potential implication for the study. Chapter Five will finally end by providing recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter, the researcher is going to present the findings and the implications of the research study by analysing the various categories that were constructed from the data of the participants and finally by comparing that data that was found in the different case studies and allowing for interpretation of the data in accordance with the theoretical framework and against a backdrop of the information contained in the literature review.

Firstly, it must be stated that this research study consisted of exploratory, qualitative research, in that the researcher posed open-ended questions that need to be answered with descriptive, meaning-rich responses. Thus, the findings will be presented in a similar fashion by giving an in-depth, written account of those salient pieces of information that proved to be common across the various case studies. This will comprise the first level of analysis of the research.

Thereafter, the researcher will present the findings from a second, deeper cross-theme analysis of the data and will discuss the findings pertaining to this deeper level of analysis. At this point the researcher would like to draw the reader's attention to the primary research question, namely – What are grade 10, boys' experiences of school disengagement?

5.2 FINDINGS: CASE ANALYSIS

Seven key findings emerged from the first level of analysis of the data from the semi-structured interviews:

Firstly, there were many common themes pertaining to disengagement that emerged across the case studies and these common themes are also reflected in the growing body of data, worldwide on the phenomenon of disengagement. The common factors that tend to influence the disengagement of male students at the particular research site include: (i) Personal factors of the individual pertaining to their ability and aptitude (ii) Emotional factors of the

individuals pertaining to their feelings and how these feelings may influence their behaviour in a socially constructed reality (iii) The quality of the teacher-student relationship and the ability of the educator to connect with the student, (iv) The student's affinity for the subject itself (v) The influence of curriculum and contemporary pedagogy (vi) The influence of extra-curricular involvement (vii) The influence of peers (viii) The influence of family structure and family characteristics. All of the abovementioned factors can be related to the substructure and central components of the eco-systems theoretical model of Uri Bronfenbrenner at both a micro and mesosystems level.

Secondly, although there are common themes that the researcher can extract from the data that can be viewed as having a greater influence on students' experiences of school, especially with regard to school disengagement, each one of the participants is a unique individual and needs to be treated as such. Thus, although similar categories may be present in the data, they come together differently in each context and each case study needs to be understood, not from the point of view of ascribing to a generically generated list of influences, but from the perspective of his unique socially constructed reality and how this interacts with the identified themes.

Thirdly, these common themes that emerged through the analysis of the case studies are also all inextricably linked and come together differently in each person. In other words, it is very hard to draw clear cut lines of separation between each of the identified themes as they have a tremendous influence on one another and vary from person to person.

Fourthly, disengagement is a multidimensional phenomenon and cannot be looked at from one particular perspective as Bronfenbrenner reminds us. Also, disengagement cannot be analysed and examined through the one theoretical framework either. This multidimensional nature involves the incorporation of many theoretical perspectives, such as Erikson's work on self-esteem and Daniel Goleman's work on emotional intelligence, in order to explain the interactions between the phenomenological subsystems of disengagement.

Fifthly, there is one theoretical perspective which is the most useful as a paradigm for understanding and interpreting research on disengagement and that is the ecosystemic theory.

This is a theoretical evolution from Uri Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which views the individual's life as being shaped by a number of different subsystems, each impacting in a synergistic fashion and collectively creating a unique, socially constructed reality that in turn shapes and influences the way the individual interprets and perceives the world.

Sixthly, disengagement is not easily defined and it means different things to different people depending on their context. However, the research did uncover some excellent descriptions of disengagement in the literature review on the phenomenon from a multitude of sources. However, the following definition of disengagement was the most suitable for the study, as it effectively describes the holistic nature of the phenomenon as explained by the participant's experiences.

It (disengagement) has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of behavioural, emotional and cognitive domains. Behavioural disengagement refers to students' frequent absences, resistance to rule following, and lack of participation in extracurricular activities, cognitive disengagement refers to students' reluctance to learn beyond the classroom and to take up challenging learning tasks, and emotional disengagement refers to students' affective responses to school, including feeling alienated towards school, disliking school and having a poor perception about personal academic ability (Tam, Zhou and Harel-Fisch, 2012: 89)

It is this abovementioned definition of disengagement that the researcher will be drawing on for the remainder of this chapter on the findings and implications, as it includes a behavioural, cognitive and emotional component in its description and this is essential when interpreting the findings and discussing the implications of the research study. The participants in this study also exhibited high levels of disengagement in that they were frequently absent, had disregard for school rules and did not comply willingly with guidance. Furthermore, their academic results were below standard and they seemed reluctant to engage in the teaching and learning process.

5.3 CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

In the second level of analysis the researcher conducted a cross-theme analysis of the data and the following findings were revealed in this second level of analysis:

Firstly, within the context of this research site, the emotional and personal factors were extremely influential on the student's level of disengagement. The emotional and personal factors were also intrinsically interwoven and very hard to separate from each other. They had tremendous significance on how the individual viewed himself within the broader context of the school and how the individual perceived his own ability. This complex mix of personal and emotional factors created one of the most influential factors on disengagement for the participants in this particular study.

Secondly, the family environment was also an extremely powerful influential factor on school disengagement and, in all three case studies, there were different contexts at home, yet which all resulted in commonality of apathy towards school at some point in time despite their fundamentally different contexts. This is due to the fact that the family (or the home) environment is one of the fundamental levels of the microsystem and it impacts directly on the participant's emotional, cognitive and behavioural development. This impact that the home environment has on the individual becomes entrenched as deep psychological manifestations that have their roots firmly embedded in emotional and personal meaning for the individual. Thus, in a simplistic sense, whatever happens at the home will have an immediate effect on the student at an emotional and personal level, which the students will then internalise and use as a point of reference with which to engage with the world. This will then have a direct influence of moulding the manner in which the individual reacts with his socially constructed world.

The perfect example of this abovementioned finding would be that of Kenyon. Kenyon seems to have an ideal family environment in that it consists of a happily married biological mother and father and one sibling, a younger sister. Deeper analysis revealed that the younger sister received more emotional attention in terms of verbal praise for academic prowess and consequently, Kenyon often has feelings of inferiority and detachment from emotional recognition from his parents. This has had a profound psychological effect on him as he has

started to view himself as not academically inclined and, therefore, is a contributing factor in his disengagement from school, especially with regard to academics.

Thirdly, the context of the school is also of tremendous significance for the participants in terms of its ability to influence their levels of engagement or disengagement, and is also intricately linked to the emotional, cognitive and behavioural components of disengagement. All of the participants were of the opinion that there were both good and bad teachers at their school. They viewed the good teachers as having an ability to „inspire them“ and to motivate them to a point where they felt completely engaged in the lesson and this made them enjoy the subject and want to attend the lesson. On the other hand, they perceived other educators as being lazy, dull and boring in their approach to teaching and learning. The participants felt that these teachers did not understand them and were unable to relate to them on an emotional and a personal level, and they did not care to either. They viewed these teachers as being grumpy and mean and that this resulted in the student becoming disengaged in the lesson and in fact developing a dislike for the subject. This dislike for particular teachers and subjects often had the potential to translate into a total disengagement from school, especially on particular days in the timetable. In essence, inspirational instruction seemed to be a factor that these participants were requiring in their daily lives at school and it was something that they were longing to get from their teachers. They want their educators to have a sincere interest in them as people and to understand them and value their context as well as their input, no matter how small.

Fourthly, all the students expressed an intense fear of both orals and examinations. Both these facets of the schooling assessment programme caused the students high levels of anxiety, to the point that they disengaged totally from school on these days. Thus, Erikson’s theory of development is of special significance when critically analysing the experiences of the students. The participants have not fully developed their emotional intelligence and thus their lower developmental state in an impediment to their engagement with some of the requirements of the schooling process.

Fifthly, the pedagogy of teaching in this day and age is fast becoming outdated and the students are becoming bored with the pedagogy as it translates into lessons which are too

narrative and are not participatory enough for the students who are used to interacting with stimuli that is more engaging in their daily lives, such as a diversity of multimedia and technology. The students are also unable to see the relevance in what they are studying in the curriculum and they see certain subjects as being useless information unrelated to their lives.

Sixthly, the subsystem of the peers has the ability to be both a positive and a negative influence on the students' experiences of school. The choice of peer sets with which to socialise is often determined by the other inextricably linked subsystems of the individuals' microsystem, which are for the most part governed by the individuals' emotional and mental state of being. If the individual is happy emotionally and has a balanced life and high sense of self-worth and self-belief, then the individual's self-esteem will be high and the individual will make the correct choices based on rationality and a sound sense of judgement. If, however, the individual is upset on an emotional and personal level then the individual may be driven to socialise with deviant peer subsets and this could have a negative influence on the student's engagement at school, especially if the deviant peer subset enjoys drinking, smoking and bunking school. On the other hand though, the benefits of a positive peer subset on the individual cannot be overstated in its ability to foster high levels of school engagement and a love of learning.

Seventhly, the influence of extra-curricular involvement is almost entirely a positive influence on the participant's levels of school engagement. Extra-curricular involvement allows the individual to create social ties with other students that fill the emotional and psychological need to belong and to feel worthy. The sense of belonging that these social ties create, translates to a higher sense of self-worth in the individual and this translates into greater happiness at school and increased engagement in school life on all levels.

Eighthly, across all three case studies there seemed to be a lacking of inspirational instruction at home and this was a factor that the students were desperately seeking in their daily lives. They wanted more positive affirmation of their academic abilities, especially in the context of their families and households and they wanted their school effort to be valued by their parents. Direct real involvement from parents in the academic lives of the participants seemed to be lacking. The participants were longing for their parents to have a real interest in their

academic needs. This emotional and personal need needed to be fulfilled in order for the participant to „develop“ to a higher level of engagement with school.

Ninthly, the data analysis and the literature analysis revealed that there is a glaring gap in the body of knowledge pertaining to disengagement, particularly with regard to emotional and personal factors influencing engagement. Not only is there a gap in the literature pertaining to emotional and personal factors, there is also a growing need for greater research into this dimension of the phenomenon of disengagement.

Tenthly, and lastly the study revealed that there is a significant omission in the body of literature pertaining to the phenomenon of disengagement experienced at private schools, both in South Africa and internationally.

5.4 IMPLICATIONS

The research study has revealed many implications that can be informative and useful to the researcher, the school context, as well as to the growing body of knowledge pertaining to disengagement.

Firstly, due to the multidimensional nature of disengagement any positive, prescriptive change at any level of the system will reap positive effects and influences on other areas or subsystems in the participants“ lives.

Because all these things are interdependent, changes at one level will always have ripple effects throughout a number of other levels. „Improvement in any part of the system can benefit the entire system (Apter, 1982: 69).

Thus, changes at any levels of system involved in this problem would have repercussions and possible benefits at other levels. As ecosystemic theory stresses, finding a better fit between individuals and their whole social context is what is at stake (Apter, 1982).

As Donald and Lolwana so aptly state,

The importance of this understanding is that solutions are looked for that try to change the disturbances between these levels of system. In other words, we need to understand how disturbances at any one level influence, and are influenced by, disturbances at other levels if any attempts at change are to be effective. This in turn implies a multiple, co-ordinated strategy where different levels of the problem are tackled at the same time and in different ways (Donald & Lolwana, 2002: 237).

Thus, the ecosystemic theory has proved to be the best theoretical fit for the research and the analysis of the phenomenon, as it espouses an integrated, multidimensional view of both the individual as well as the nature of disengagement.

Secondly, motivation and increased academic engagement can be achieved under teachings using a learner-centred practice. In general teachers who show care for their students, focus on developing higher order thinking, listen to students voices and adapt instruction to individual needs, facilitate greater engagement in their students (Atweh, Bland, Carrington and Cavanagh, 2004).

Thus, teachers and students alike would benefit greatly from a revision of the teaching strategies and methods of instruction in the classroom. This can be extended to assessment as well and calls for greater creativity and flexibility in the creation of lesson programmes.

As Atweh, Bland, Carrington and Cavanagh state,

A proposed alternative, based on a critical/ transformative perspective is to construct engagement and disengagement as products of discursive relationships involving students, teachers and schools. This construct allows a re-examination of student disengagement as a breakdown of relationships and can lead to new ways of conceiving potential remedies through, for instance, pedagogical reforms (Atweh, Bland, Carrington and Cavanagh, 2004: 14).

Thirdly, the entire phenomenon of disengagement needs to be looked at as a complex intricate web consisting of different subsystems that impact on the participants' lives. Thus, any support and remedial work conducted should be in the form of multidimensional approaches that attempt to allow the various subsystems to fit together seamlessly and more

efficiently. It turn, it is hoped that this leads to greater self-confidence and an affirmation of ability in the mind of the student. If this academic self-worth can be achieved then there will be greater engagement in the student.

Fourthly, emotional intelligence seems to be lacking in nearly all facets of society and in all the subsystems mentioned in this research study, namely the teacher, the parent and the student. A greater understanding of the work of theorists like Daniel Goleman on Emotional Intelligence is required to guide the development of strategies aimed at improving engagement to education. It seems that in all contexts of society, the actors are lacking in empathy and simultaneously seem to be craving to be understood empathetically. This paradoxical situation needs to be better understood through greater research, in order for it to be rectified.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Thus, to conclude this research study, it is clearly evident that school disengagement is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, that has its roots firmly entrenched in the emotional, cognitive and behavioural aspects of the all those involved, namely, the student, the teacher, the parents and the peers. The ecosystemic theory allowed for an excellent theoretical approach in which to frame and analyse the research question, as well as to interpret the findings and articulate the implications. There was a perfect fit between the research topic, the theoretical framework and the research design that allowed for the researcher to gather a great deal of meaning rich data from the sample. There was a notable silence in the literature pertaining to the voices of disengaged youths explaining disengagement from the perspective of their experiences. There was also a significant void in the literature pertaining to the views of students from privileged contexts and backgrounds, especially in South Africa. Therefore, the research was relevant as it has shed new light on the phenomenon of disengagement and increased our understanding of the topic.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There is a great deal of possibility for future research on the topic of disengagement, especially with regard to hearing the voices of the students themselves and perhaps in the form of a longitudinal study using the same participants as used in this study to shed new light on disengagement in their final year of high school (grade 12).

Cook-Sather (2002) calls students “the missing voices in educational research” (p.5). Johnson and O’Brien call (2002) call for the need to listen to students’ voices and needs for effective education change. Levin (2000) goes even further to claim that education reform cannot succeed and should not proceed without much more direct involvement of students in all its aspects. He argues that not only do students have unique knowledge and perspectives that can make reform efforts more successful and improve their implementation, but also students’ views can help mobilise teacher and parent opinion in favour of meaningful reform (Johnson and O’Brien, 2002: 9)

Thus, any further research into the topic of disengagement will definitely be from the perspective of the students themselves as the researcher is of the firm belief that listening to their voices will ensure effective, informed exploration into the topic.

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5.8 APPENDICES

A. THE CHAPTER OF NARRATIVES

THE RAW DATA – TRANSCRIPTIONS OF INTERVIEWS

Introduction

The narrative method of data presentation has been chosen for this particular study as it allows the reader to understand the real life history of boys and their stories of disengagement from schooling. Another major advantage to the narrative approach in the presentation of the data is that, quite often, it captures chronological events and this allows the researcher to infer causality. It also offers the opportunity for interpretive commentary where relevant and illuminative information can come to the fore easily. It must be noted that the narratives are reconstructions of the transcribed interviews with certain sections deliberately selected to tell the story for the purposes of inquiry. The narratives do not contain any data that was not offered by the participants, however, certain responses have been omitted that were repetitious like the words „um“ and „like“ as well discussions that did not pertain to the focus of the study. Each interview is told through the voice of the respondent and a background and biographical description is included to allow for a better understanding of the person behind the story.

Jordy's Story

J1

I don't have a father. I don't remember him either. I was two years old when I last saw him. I was told by a fortune teller that he died in a swimming accident in Australia. We used to live in Australia until he could no longer support my Mom, my sister and myself and we then had to come back to South Africa. This was for the best because I've been told that my Mom and

Dad always had disagreements and that he didn't treat her well. We now live with our grandparents close to school in Westbrook.

J2

Having no father did have an effect on me as a younger child but not so much anymore. Especially in pre-primary and senior-primary school when they had father-son sports days. I wondered why I was the only boy who had no dad to accompany me and I was envious of the boys who had fathers to play sports with. Often an uncle or family member would accompany me. This made me not like school especially on those days as I felt different to the other boys. It no longer bothers me as much now that I have become older.

J3

This is not my first high school as I attended another rather large all boys' school for grade 8. It was here where I started to become influenced by friends and became more rebellious. I started to not like school that much and my school work became less important to me. All I wanted to do was spend time with my friends doing the things that we liked to do like playing soccer and bunking school. My marks at school started to get very bad. This was one of the reasons that my Mother decided that I needed to change schools. These friends at my old school were involved with alcohol and drugs and were not at all interested in school. They would often bunk school to go to the beach to drink and smoke. A lot of these boys themselves came from broken homes and abusive parents who were alcoholics. Some of their parents didn't even care if we bunked school.

J4

Even these days if I really don't want to go to school I don't always have to. My mom understands me. She always takes my side and has my back. I am very lucky because she stands by me no matter what. I am given no responsibilities at home and I am also lucky because I have absolutely no chores or household duties to do.

J5

At this school my friends are not as bad as my old school. However, some of my friends here are a distraction in class as we like to talk about things that interest us, especially if the lesson becomes very boring. This often gets me into trouble with teachers. Some of things that we like to talk about are sports! Especially if we have rugby match coming up. I must be honest I

am mainly at school for sport. I love being on the sports field and I do not enjoy lessons nearly as much as playing sports. I know I need an education but sport is way more interesting than most lessons, even if it is just talking about the sport.

J6

I also have a new passion and that is gym as I want to become stronger and more developed to make me better at sports, especially soccer and rugby. I admit that during the school day I can often get rather excited and distracted when talking to friends about gym, rugby and sport. This is especially bad on the day before a match or selection for teams. I admit that this often lands me in trouble with teachers as I am often unable to control myself. This is definitely worse for certain teachers and subjects.

J7

Some subjects I find very boring because of the teachers. They just are not that good. This gives me mixed feelings about school. I really and truly don't like certain teachers and subjects as some teachers are unnecessarily strict and that they look for the smallest things to pick on during a lesson. Often If I do something wrong at the beginning of the year a certain teacher will have a bad view of me. Usually the teacher never forgets this and then marks me for the rest of the year. Even if I then try my best to be good this often does not matter as the teacher will then pick on me for the rest of the year.

J8

I really dislike lessons that are too boring and full of talking and when the teacher makes no effort to engage with the class. Certain teachers are very boring and this leads to me becoming frustrated and no longer interested in the lesson. It is at this point when I will often prefer to talk about something else.

J9

Some subjects like [subject] I see no importance in because I will never use it outside of school. Why must I then waste the time studying it so hard if it has no direct use to my life? I also find certain subjects ([subject] and [SUBJECT]) very difficult and hard to understand the first time. It does not sink in straight away and I often need it to be repeated. Certain teachers have no patience when I am unable to grasp a new section and they get angry if I do not know how to do something after being taught it once.

Some teachers just like to sit and teach as well. These are also the boring ones. They don't do anything out of the ordinary to make the lesson interesting. They just read from the book in the same voice, which makes me uninterested. I see these teachers as lazy and I don't like their subjects. Also some subjects like Life orientation just repeat the same things over and over again, they are so boring as there never is anything new and exciting. We always have the same discussions in class. Who wouldn't find that boring?!

Because of some of the things that I have mentioned I have changed my subjects since starting grade 10. I have dropped [subject] for [subject] because the teacher did not like me. He saw me as trouble maker. That is what he actually said to me... and that I was not able to understand things because I didn't listen in class. Meanwhile it was because I am not a fast learner and some things in [subject] are very difficult to understand the first time. This teacher and I really did not get on and I started to dislike coming to his lessons. I decide that it would be better if I changed my subjects and started off fresh with a new teacher and a new subject. I also dropped [subject] for [subject] as there was no point in doing something that was so hard if I didn't need it to get into university. I think that my new subjects will make school much better for me as I won't be scared to ask a question. [Teachers name] is much better than [teacher's name]. She doesn't get so cross and she explains things much better. She seems less cross and angry and is much more chilled and relaxed this makes the lesson not so intimidating and way more fun. She also does exciting things in class and does not just sit and read out the book. She also takes the time to get to know us individually and I know that I am taken more seriously as a person in her lessons. I now enjoy coming to these lessons.

J10

I have a fear of talking in public as well and being embarrassed if I forget what to say in front of the class. Any subject where I have to do orals, I do not like. It makes me very nervous and I start to panic. I often want to stay away from school if I know that these lessons are coming up. Things that embarrass me in class make me hate school. When I teacher calls me lazy or makes me feel stupid is another time when I get very embarrassed. This can also make me angry and I then want to say something back to that teacher to make me feel better inside.

J11

To conclude the narrative on Jordy, it must be said that he is of the opinion that the school is adequately resourced and that this is not a factor that may contribute to his disengagement.

He does, however, feel that in summer months the heat and humidity are valid physical factors that cause him and other students to become lethargic, fatigued and uninterested in lessons.

Kenyon's story

K1

My dad is a manager at [company] and we have to move around a lot. We left South Africa to go to England. The last school which I attended was an International school [school], which is actually called an „American school“ situated in England... but it was an American set up. I enjoyed that school a lot as they had way more sports and activities to try out. I could try baseball, basketball, badminton, sailing, abseiling. Their facilities were amazing and they had everything you could possibly want. They even had a gym there, as well as an indoor and outdoor basketball court plus the usual soccer and cricket fields. We have one basketball court, but it's not really in such great condition. For starters it has no net and the backboard is loose. Sport means a lot to me and that kind of thing getting outdoors makes me enjoy school. Sometimes maybe even a little too much as I often feel the urge to talk about sport in the lesson. Yeah, you can definitely say that I'm more sporting orientated than academic.

At home my parents also say that my sister is more of the academic and I'm the sportsman.

K2

The subjects I've chosen though are Physics, Bio, Geography and EGD. Physics in case I want to go the engineering route. Bio or what we here call Life Sciences because I don't want to completely rule out the chance of still becoming a doctor. Sometimes I feel that I may have chosen too many hard subjects and I find that It becomes quite overwhelming. It makes me a bit upset and discourages me at school. I sometimes wish that I could have taken an easier subject like art or drama as I actually enjoy those. You have a lot of fun in those lessons but they won't lead to such great careers. I didn't choose Business Studies or Accountancy as I missed the foundations of that when moving here in the beginning of grade 8. Ever since then I was unable to catch up and never really enjoyed subjects. I hated those lessons as I didn't know what was going on and then I just sat there and became very bored. I would often just daydream and concentrate even less and think about the next sports match or even my friends at my old school.

K3

At the moment, cricket is by far my main sport. And I must say I really do think that I have some talent there. I play for the first team only sometimes but mostly I prefer to play in my age group U16. I'm also a bit of an all-rounder! Sport means a lot to me because it is something real and I'm good at it! When I'm batting or running around on the pitch I'm happy... plus I'm exercising and I like that. I'm not the type of guy that enjoys being inside and learning all day. So yeah, I can say sport means a lot to me.

K4

When questioned on emotional factors and potential fears that the student may have at school Kenyon was quick to acknowledge that he did in deed have a few major fears at school. First and foremost he admitted hating having to do any type of public speaking.

“Doing orals in front of a class is my worst thing at school. I must say I know this may sound stupid but I really and truly hate coming to school on those days. I always try miss them and pretend to be sick. Even the day before its due I am a nervous wreck and I just worry about it all the time. It makes my stomach all knot up inside. It puts me into a worried and frustrated mode at school and I get very stressed as I think the class is going to laugh at me. It makes me so nervous that then I sometimes even stutter and stammer and I usually do not even do that when I am having a normal conversation with my friends... and I never ever do that on the sports field. So I'm sure you can imagine that I find it scary and weird. To make matters even worse sometimes we have English and Afrikaans oral the day after each other! Then I have to try and take two days off or miss one by going to the sick room.”

K5

When asked to elaborate on other emotional issues that he felt affected him at school he was quick to respond that the fear of bad marks lead to much anxiety and frustration and that this was a source of anguish.

My parents always warn me that if I get bad marks then they will be disappointed in me. This makes me very scared as I know they will be angry if they see a bad report. I find this very frustrating and it sticks in the back of my mind all the time. They may also become even stricter and take away my privileges like playing soccer with my friends in the park. They've

done this before and life really became dull and boring for a few weeks! It didn't really work as I just closed my door and pretended to do study. They don't question me on my work so they really never knew. I then wrote a few easy tests and showed them the marks. I had done really well in those like received a B and an A. When they saw the marks and that I had done well then they decided to let me play in the street with my friends after school. I must admit, I'm much happier because I'm doing something I enjoy doing and I get to have fun and run around! So yeah getting bad marks makes me so worried as my parents come down hard on me. I really don't enjoy it when they do that.

K6

They also consider my marks as bad when they compare mine to my sister. She is younger than me and school is way easier for her so it's obvious that she will be doing better than me. My parents always praise her and make a big deal out of her good marks. Then they always compare me to her and say that she's going to be the doctor in the family when she grows up. This makes me really frustrated and sad and makes me feel like giving up. My sister is quite clever and maybe I'll never be like her and get straight As. Are my parents ever going to be happy with me and tell me well done and be really happy?! This makes me a bit upset and when I'm sitting in some lessons I wonder if I'm actually not good enough. Perhaps they are right and that I'm not ever going to be able to get straight As and get into medicine or a good university. This is quite scary and makes me wonder what is the point of school at all. I would much rather be a sportsman than have to study all the time anyway.

K7

When questioned on personal factors that affect the student's daily school life he perceived his own ability as only good in 3 subjects, namely Physics, English and PE. There seemed to be a growing level of self-doubt in Kenyon.

I know for a fact that I am quite good in three subjects and those are physics, English and PE. I get good marks and I find those subjects really interesting. In all the rest I seem to battle and maybe I'm just never going to be that good at them. Maths is very hard as well. I always seem to make silly mistakes and then get the whole thing wrong.

K8

Exams really make me nervous these days because I'm not sure what questions the examiner is going to ask and whether I will understand them or not. If I don't I will get bad marks again and my parents are going to ground me. So exam times are really, really stressful for me. I do don't have a good attitude towards exams as they make me nervous and anxious and they also take a lot of time away from having fun. During exam times I am forced to study in my room for hours. While I do understand the need to study and get good results, I find this time very frustrating and it makes me slightly depressed.

Kenyon discussed his family structure and life quite candidly and openly and it is interesting to note that the comparison between him and his sibling came to the fore once again.

K9

My parents don't really fight much and they are quite happy most of the time. My mom really loves my dad and she does everything that he says. She does run around a lot for us and I appreciate everything that she does for both my sister and I. I also love my sister but I get really sad when my parents praise her and shout at me. This seems to happen more and more these days as she gets older and older. Her marks are excellent and my parents continually remind me how good she is at school. They say that I need to try harder. My sister also gets treated better than I did at her age. She is allowed friends over and my parents always buy her things for school and get her things when they go to the shops. They get me things as well but she always sneaks something extra and I find out about it afterwards. Sometimes I think that maybe they prefer her over me. I know it sounds strange but sometimes I wonder. I mean they are always happy with her and seem to spoil her and they always strict with me and only happy sometimes. My sister gets a lot of attention. I guess she is just really clever. I wish that I could get her marks. My average is a B and that just isn't good enough for my parents.

When asked about social factors that contribute to the students experiences of school Kenyon was quick to answer that most of his friends were good guys and that they had a positive influence on him. His immediate peer set is supportive and has a good influence on him.

K10

My friends are all quite smart and often I can ask them things if I don't understand it the first time myself. I am very fortunate for this as it helps me a lot especially before exams when I am stressed. They get really good grades like 90s. They just seem to be cleverer than me as

they get good grades without really even trying or putting in a major effort. These guys always help me the days before the exam.

K11

I do have some friends who are similar to me though. They do not fail but are B and C students. Some of them go to other schools but live in my neighbourhood. They also seem to be more of the sportsmen and we play a lot of sports together. Some of my school friends also live in my neighbourhood and the highlight of the day is being able to play games of soccer or cricket after school with all these friends. These games are the most exciting and I always look forward to them straight after school!! As we get home we do our homework then grab our boots and get to the grounds as fast as possible. We choose sides every time and often just for fun we will place some bets on the games and this makes it even more exciting! Afterwards we joke and laugh about the games and we make plans for the weekends. It's really fun. I wish that I could be a professional sportsman and play cricket or soccer as a career. Imagine being like one of the English Premier league soccer stars these guys are earning millions of Rands every month just for walking on a soccer pitch and being idolised by the whole world. I am going to study hard and try my best to be good at sports!

Up to this point, with the exception of the test anxiety and self-doubt, Kenyon's experience of school wasn't entirely negative and possible disengagement to school could only be limited to personal and emotional issues. Kenyon enjoys the extra-curricular and social aspect of school more than the academics. His attitude changed markedly when he was questioned on the school factors that could influence his experience of daily school life.

K12

Firstly, Kenyon was quick to separate his subjects into those that he likes and those that he dislikes.

I dislike subject like [subjects] as they are often uninteresting. The work is often very boring because we look at the same themes over and over again. Although I realise that we need to learn about this stuff it is always presented to us exactly the same way year after year and it gets boring. Themes like „teenage pregnancy“ and HIV come up time and time again in all subjects and especially in [subject]. Most of the boys are not interested and then we lose concentration and our minds start to drift off. We often then start to plan our sports games

after school or talk about our opponents for the next match fixture. So yeah... boring subjects definitely make school not such a great experience for me sometimes, but luckily not all lessons are like that.

K13

Also I find that in some lessons the teachers haven't planned properly and they are unorganised. There isn't a proper structure to the lesson and this makes it hard for me to follow. The teacher will start off talking about one thing and then he or she will go completely off the topic and talk about things which are not part of the syllabus. This confuses me as I'm often unsure of exactly what to remember or not. I seem to remember the things that are not important and forget those that are. When the teacher jumps all over the place during the lesson like this I find it very confusing. I like to be able to see exactly what every lesson is going to be about and that's why I prefer subjects where we work from textbooks rather than having to create our own notes and diagrams.

K14

Some teachers are also just very boring they do nothing to make the lesson interesting or to inspire the students. They just speak in very monotonous voices and this makes the lessons feel like they are lasting forever! I really do not like these lessons and that makes me not like the subject either. In these lessons I seem to switch off and I really find it hard to concentrate on what is going on. [Subject] is one of these. The teacher never ever stands up and just shouts at us from the time that we walk in. She never tries very hard to do anything interesting and we always have to work from our textbooks or she gives us an activity to do. Most of the times she never teaches us at all you can ask the class. I'm not even sure why she shouts so much because no one ever does anything wrong. She just always seems to be in a grumpy mood and that's how she is from the start of every lesson. I hate going to these lessons and I often think of bunking or wish I could. It is really hard to get motivated to learn for these subjects or even to do the homework because I just cannot relate to it. It's so uninteresting and if I could drop it I would in a flash but my parents still want me to keep the option of being a doctor open. These lessons are probably the worst part about school for me and having to write the exams of these subjects has to be the lowest times of the year for me. Luckily we don't have many teachers who are like this.

K15

Some other lessons that are uninteresting are [subjects]. In these lessons the teachers are not grumpy and are often in good moods but just don't give us very interactive lessons and therefore the lessons aren't that great and we get bored easily. Once I'm bored I start to want to talk to my friends and I lose concentration very quickly. If these teachers were able to be more interesting then I wouldn't want to talk.

K16

We have some teachers like [Teachers names] who are amazing teachers! I absolutely love coming to these lessons because we always do interesting things in class and no lesson is ever boring. They try a bit harder than the other teachers and make lessons interesting by playing games with us and interacting with us. These teachers just seem to understand us much better and these lessons are fun. Like [Teacher's name] he is just able to get us. All the things that he uses to explain things are that we can relate to in our lives like the music we listen to and the movies we watch. He even used to be a DJ so we enjoy his lessons. Then there are other teachers who make lessons interesting by taking us outside of the classroom and doing practical lessons with us where we actually make things for ourselves or we do stuff outside of the classroom. This is really fun and I find that these lessons are the highlight of my week. These are the lessons that I talk about about when I go home to my parents. I wish all of my lessons could be like this. School would be awesome.

K17

Those lessons where teachers just talk and talk are also boring. Sometimes we just walk in and it's like the standard line to take out our textbooks. It's often not even said with much enthusiasm. How are we supposed to get excited about it if the teacher doesn't even seem that excited about it. That's when you know it's going to be another boring lesson. If teachers just took the time to make lessons more interesting like using technology then it would also make things a lot better. I love it when teachers show us videos and clips from YouTube and the internet. It really gets my attention and I like going to those lessons. I also seem to remember the work easier as I can remember what was said in the video. It just brings the work to life and is way better than just the teacher speaking. Using a board to draw pictures is also nice but us kids today are very interested in technology. I watch clips all day on my phone and I find it interesting to look at what is happening in the world. Even I can find lots of stuff about what we are studying at school. Sometimes I can find even better stuff than the teachers. I don't know why they all don't use the internet, all the time!

K18

My old school in England, the one based on the American system had way more computers than here. They were also buying their students iPads at the time I was leaving. I was quite upset about this. I still talk to many of my old friends from there on Facebook and by email and they tell me about the cool apps that they use for lessons and how much fun they have in class now that they are using the iPads. I wish our school also started this as it would definitely make the lessons more interesting and I know I would enjoy certain lessons more.

Sabelo's Story

S1

I decided to leave my last school [school] which was in Pretoria because things at home were not that great and I was experiencing a lot of difficulties. I definitely was not happy and school was becoming more and more of a nuisance. We lived far from school. We would basically have to drive an hour to get to school. So I'd come back home late. It was like either my sports or my siblings' sports, wait till like 5, then there was traffic. Then it was an hour drive back home. Then we would get home at 7, and then I would have to do my homework. Still have to eat, then help my siblings with their homework. Then I would study and you know it was just a bit too much for me. My parents also weren't always at home and I would have to look after the kids a lot of the time. It was just a little bit too much. So I asked if I could attend a boarding school and my parents allowed me, so I came here to [school].

S2

I'm doing Physics, History, Business Studies; I was doing IT, which I dropped for Geography. I was kind of thinking of being an IT specialist, and just wanted to know more about the subject and what it was like, but I don't really like the teacher and I don't like the way she teaches. She just didn't get across to me and I just wasn't doing so well. That was the main reason. I wasn't going to stay in a subject that I'm not performing at. And for Physics, I was thinking of doing something in the field of engineering, so I will probably need that. I took Business Studies in case I opened my own business and wanted to know more about that. Geography I took because I like the subject. Also my cousin, he is a pilot now and when he was in matric he didn't take geography. Apparently he actually needed it to

become a pilot... or it would have helped a lot and he never did it. So yeah I just took it to open more doors.

S3

I like taking care of myself. I don't like people telling me what to do and how to do things. If they have to then yes I will understand, but I will say no to things that I feel I don't have to do. It's not that I don't like being told what to do. I mean I will do things if I know that it needs to be done but I won't just do something because I've been told to do it. Like when my step-mom and dad forced me to do chores and to do things that wasted my time. Sometimes it bothers me. But sometimes I will do it. I don't like being told to tidy my room or told that I have to have manners, that's obvious and because I have that already. My life in Pretoria wasn't that nice at all and it made me feel unhappy at school as well. It really didn't make me want to do well.

When asked to discuss any negative experiences at school Sabelo had the following to say:

S4

Sometimes, I don't really care about the negative things that people say about me. But yes, if there was anything that I really didn't like about school then it would be the horrible things that people may say about me. I really don't like this and it's not nice. It makes me not want to come to school and when I am in class I always worry about what people are saying behind my back. Also peer pressure. Like people telling you what to do and you don't want to do it. At the end of the day people kind of look at you differently. That could be the only other thing that could make me anxious.

I really hate people talking rubbish about me. That is the biggest thing that I've had to deal with at school recently. Like when they say things that aren't me. Like lies like untruths. Like telling someone a lie to make themselves look better. You know... things like that. I mean I know why they do that... to make themselves feel better. But why would you do that knowing that all the while you're making someone feel bad at the same time. That kind of stuff makes you just think a lot of things that you really just shouldn't be thinking about and you lose focus on your school work. You know?! Then you do the things that you're not supposed to

be doing. Like smoking and drinking alcohol and wanting to go out. Doing things to fit in, just because you want to be accepted and not be talked about. This is definitely one of the worst things about coming to school.

S5

Exams also scare me. I really hate June and November because exams scare me. I mean I wish they weren't even called exams. Even the word is horrible. It's definitely a very stressful time for me. I always feel like I have time and I leave things to the last minute, then I feel stress and anxiety. Then I don't do well in that test. That is a problem for me. I overthink about things then and get stressed. So I'm trying to change that and become prepared way before time. Like next week I have a difficult Maths test and already I've planned to go to extra lessons and to get some of those friends that are good at maths to help me prepare.

I honestly feel like exams just shouldn't even be called „exams“ because that just scares everyone. It's just a big test... that's all it is. It shouldn't be called an exam, because as soon as you say the word it just totally scares everyone. But if it were called a test then it would come across as a totally different thing.

S6

I feel that my parents are not pushing me as hard as they should be pushing me. Like the support is there but I just don't feel that it is enough. I mean my parents care about my academics. They tell me that I need to study hard and they are prepared to pay for my extra lessons but I still don't feel that it is enough. It's just not enough. I don't feel like they are pushing me hard enough. I also wish my parents would show more of an interest in me and talk to my teachers, to find out why certain marks of mine are lower. You know. Things like that. They should push me harder on the subjects that I'm not doing so well at. They just look at my overall marks and not what I'm doing badly at. Also speaking to my teachers... coming for parents evenings... you know that kind of thing. They really do not take that kind of an interest in my school life.

S7

I must say though, that although there are a lot of things which I don't like about my home life and school there are also many things that I do like. One of those things has to be seeing my good friends! Seeing them every day and just being together and with them makes me feel confident. Knowing that we are doing the same stuff and the same work and going through the same things makes me feel so much better. Like Travis... we are very good friends. So I feel like I am not alone. If we have problems we try and help each other out or ask for help. You know like that kind of thing. Like at times you may feel like you are the only one who doesn't understand what is going on. But no... you are wrong as there are also other people that don't know what is going on. Travis and I have a bond in that way. We understand each other and try and help each other. Sometimes we may both get a bad mark for a test and that will on the one hand give you the ability to laugh it off and on the other hand will also give you the ability to say, hey we have got to push now. You know... try help each other out.

S8

There are also some subjects that I enjoy, like: Business Studies, History, Afrikaans. I mean I don't know why. I Get better marks for Afrikaans than I do for English. So it kind of excites me going to Afrikaans. And like for orals and stuff I don't prepare for orals and I'm always the best in my class. So that... yeah... like I don't know why but I like that. And ever since I have been young I have always been good at Afrikaans. I just don't know why. History and Geography I also find very interesting. Like Geography my marks aren't where they are supposed to be but I really enjoy the stuff we talk about because it's about the world we live in and this really interests me. Also the teacher presents the work in a fun way. He doesn't just walk in and start reading from a textbook in a monotonous voice or simply tell us to do an activity. He makes the lesson fun and interesting by interacting with us.

S9.

There are also some lessons that I hate! That's Maths and Physics for sure. And that's because I'm not performing well at it. I know that I have to go and improve, but I just don't like attending the subject. I know it's wrong but I have a negative attitude towards the subject.

S10

If the teachers could teach differently. Yeah. Like when I started with Maths... my teacher in the beginning was good... but then I felt he... well he kind of got boring. And he just lost hope as well. Like if someone wasn't doing well then he encouraged them to go to Maths Literacy instead of inspiring them to dig deeper and try harder. It's almost as if he lost hope and became discouraged. It's like he doesn't push anyone to do better anymore. And if someone drops to Maths Lit then he would actually ask if there weren't any others who would also prefer to go down.

S11

Some teachers are really good though. Like for instance miss [teacher] I really like her. She really is a great teacher and I just love going to her lessons. She is just like fun and you want to go to her lesson! Maybe because she is young and she can understand us in a way, maybe because she can talk our kind of lingo... yeah... it's things like that. And also the way she teaches, she is like so chilled. She is not too serious or too lazy and always sitting down and doing nothing. Also what is very important to me is that she doesn't just teach and teach all the time and shout instructions. Often she takes the time to get to know us as people and this is what really makes me like her as a teacher.

S12

On the other hand there are many bad teachers as well. I really hate going to these lessons as I know I'm going to be bored and maybe even shouted at as well. Sometimes on days when we have a lot of bad teachers and terrible lessons I won't even want to attend class. I mean if I just stayed in my room and read the textbook it would be the same thing as going to the lesson. All they want to do is stand, do the work and then sit down. Just get it over with. I mean also sometimes they can see that a student or students are not well but they just don't care. You know that kind of thing makes me not like some teachers. They do not take the time to listen to what we have to say... to hear our point of view... they just don't care. That's what makes them a bad teacher. It's like they are just here to teach and get it over

with. You can tell. I mean they don't even want to get to know you. Some teachers do not even know our names! You know that kind of thing... like they just don't care about you. Like they are just here to make money.

S12

I wish these teachers would just like take a break from the work and speak about something else! Like getting to know the students. Perhaps give us advice on life. No one really does that and tells us about the things that we need to be told about. No teachers tell us about where they went wrong and a bit about their lives. They don't give us real advice. It feels like there is always a wall up between us and them. Most of them do not tell us about their experiences in life and give us advice that we need and that we can relate to.

S13

I wish some of our teachers would make lessons more interesting by letting us watch a video one day. I also like teachers that give frees. That makes you like the teacher in a way and makes you have a different attitude towards the subject. Then you want to go there and it makes you more determined to do work when you have to. But when you are forced to do the same boring stuff over and over again it gets very uninteresting and I lose interest and concentration fast. That's when I want to talk to my friends about fun stuff.

S14

The thing that I dislike the most about school though has to be the people who just didn't like me and who never knew me. I mean those people that have not taken the time to realise what I stand for. They often just believe what they want to believe and make up stories which are untrue. This definitely hurts my feelings and really makes coming to school terrible.

S15

There a few other things about our school which is not that nice, like our Ninos... I mean it's so boring. It is nothing like a real Ninos. I mean if you go outside off campus to a real Ninos you would see that it is nothing compared to this.

S16

And of course free Wi-Fi! We have been told for so long that it is happening and we still never see it. We get the devices like iPads but then when it comes to actually being able to use them then there's always a problem! This is really disheartening. We have been told since I first was thinking of coming to this school that the whole school will have Wi-Fi by the start of 2013. Well this still hasn't happened and now I'm beginning to worry whether that was just a lie to get us to come to the school. I mean what is the point of having a laptop if you can't even connect to the internet. Lots of other schools have excellent internet and Wi-Fi everywhere on campus. These students are so happy and they love school it really does make a difference especially with research projects and group work.

S17

Also sometimes school just becomes too much. It's like teachers aren't aware of how much other work you may have to do. They just like pound you with work. It's like you get teachers that give you proper homework, where you can actually do the homework and still have time to sleep, or get a little bit of time to get what you want to do. The often it is just a bit too much and totally unrealistic! And then you get sports. Some teachers don't understand that students like playing sports! I also can't understand why two teachers teaching the same subject to the same grade teach totally different things at totally different times. I feel like the [subject] department should have a meeting and say like we have to get through this and this by that date. Also with tests... the [subject] department should find out if there are any other tests on those days before they just drop a massive test on us with so much to learn. That is unfair and it makes me lose my enthusiasm and sometimes gives me a bad attitude towards school. I feel that teachers should talk more about that. They don't really communicate with us on that kind of a real level and that is bad as they never really know who we are and what is actually going on in our lives. With most teachers I find that this is the case. They just don't have a sincere interest in us as a person