

**An investigation of factors associated with school  
dropout in three rural farm schools:  
A case study in Thornville, KwaZulu Natal**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is a product of my original work, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text. It has not been submitted before for any degree at any University.

This dissertation was carried out under the supervision and direction of Professor Nithi Muthukrishna of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

I declare that this dissertation has been submitted with my approval.

Pietermaritzburg

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Abstract**

According to the Education for All 2000 Assessment, in South Africa a significant proportion (i.e. 16 percent) of children 6-14 years of age are out-of-school though they should be attending in terms of the countries education acts and policies.

The aim of this study was to investigate the factors that contributed to learners dropping out of three rural farm schools in Thornville, KwaZulu-Natal. The participants in this study were seven youth who dropped out of school, three parents of youth who dropped out of school, and two teachers who are teaching in Thornville farm school. The study took a form of a qualitative case study. The semi-structured interview was used as a tool of data collection.

The findings show that there are a number of different factors that contribute to youth dropping out of school in the three rural farm schools. Factors such as low socio-economic status, single parent household, mobility, low education attainment of parents and under resourced schools place learners at risk of dropping out of school. Poverty emerged as a major factor.

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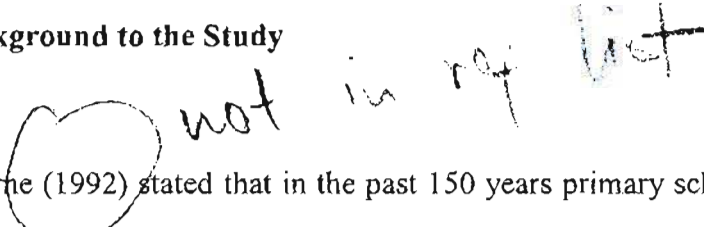
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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Hartshorne (1992) stated that in the past 150 years primary schooling for the blacks in South Africa has been neglected in relation to other levels of education, starved of resources, and generally accepted as a route from which most would dropout by the roadside. The schooling system failed to hold children in schools long enough for it to be of any benefit to them. Children have not stayed in school long enough to even achieve basic literacy and numeracy.

According to Hartshorne (1992), education in rural farm schools has not been seen as having the potential to liberate children from the confines of rural poverty. In addition to this, in rural society, there is a thick blanket of customary community definitions and expectations which reinforce parents' beliefs that formal schooling has very little to offer, and that it is largely irrelevant to what they expect the future of their children to be, that is, labourers on the farm. Nasson (1984) cited in Hartshorne 1992 speaks of farm schooling dependence on white farmers and of the almost absolute power that rested in farmers. Most farmers thought of education of black children to be beneficial in the building of character but did not see schooling as having any direct relevance to farm work.



In April 1994, after South Africa held first democratic election there was a need to off load the apartheid system. A priority for the government was for education system to be restructured. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (act 108 of 1996), recognises that everyone has a right to basic education, therefore, the state must do all that is reasonable to ensure that everyone receive basic education. The National Education Policy Act of 1996 is crucial in facilitating the democratic transformation of the national system of education into one that serves the needs and interests of all people of South Africa, and it up holds their fundamental rights. The South African Schools Act (act 84 of 1996), asserts that all learners have a right to access both basic education and quality education without discrimination of any sort. It also paved way for a single non-racial school system. It makes school compulsory for children aged 6-14 completed years.

According to Kallaway, Kruss, Fataar and Donn (1997), South Africa's first democratic election was a watershed in the country's educational history. Education policies for a 'new' South Africa show remarkable congruence with international trends. The South African government's commitment was to alleviate poverty, education for lifelong learning, and the integration of formal and non-formal education. In the struggle to end apartheid and bring in a new democratic South Africa, the country joined UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) programme.

In 2000, South Africa engaged in the 'Education for All' 2000 Assessment to report progress towards meeting the country's goal in the provision of basic education for children, youth and adults. This report highlights major achievements in the provision

of basic education for all and identifies key challenges and priorities, which needed attention if the provision of quality education is to improve in the near future. The key findings of the South African Education for All 2000 Assessment are as follows:

- South Africa had a net enrolment ratio of 87 percent in primary schools, indicating that it had not yet realised its goal of providing universal primary education to all its children in the official primary school age group (i.e. 6-14 completed years).
- The prevalence of non-school attendance among children eligible to enrol in primary school was relatively high. In 1996, about 16 percent of children aged 6-14 years were out-of-school. This confirms the finding that the goal of universal primary education had not yet been realised.
- Disparities in the country in the proportion of out-of-school children were huge. The prevalence of non-schooling was found to be highest:
  - In rural areas (19.1 percent);
  - Among black African (17.3 percent)
  - Among boys (16.6 percent)
  - In the Eastern Cape (18.8 percent), Northern Province (18 percent) and North West (17.8 percent).

Although it was not possible to locate statistics on KwaZulu-Natal, these disparities are an indication that strategies aimed at improving access to primary Education should be given highest priority for African children, in particular those in disadvantaged provinces and rural areas.

## **1.2 Aim of the Study and Research Questions**

The present study aimed at providing a micro-level analysis of a particular group of out of school youth, specifically, rural schools who have dropped out of the system. The aim was to explore what did the policy imperatives of access to basic education, and quality of education for all mean in the lives of these school dropouts. The key research questions were:

- What factors are associated with learner dropout from three rural farm schools in Thornville, KwaZulu-Natal?
- What are the perceptions of school dropouts, teachers, parents/caregivers about the factors associated with learner dropout in these contexts?
- How do youth who have dropped out of school experience their lives?

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Anderson (1996) argues that successful research is based on all the knowledge, thinking and research preceding it, and for this reason a review of the literature is an essential step in the process of undertaking a research study. The set of ideas from the literature inform and guide the study.

Before examining the issue of school dropout, this chapter argues that children who dropout of school are one group amongst the many groups of children who experience exclusionary pressure in schools, communities and society. The chapter will firstly, discuss the notion of inclusion/exclusion and vulnerable groups in a broader sense. It will discuss vulnerability and what makes children who drop out of school particularly vulnerable to exclusion. Following this is a need to articulate the important roles that schools play in the well-being of vulnerable. In order to do this a brief outline of exclusionary practise in South Africa is necessary.

A number of international studies have presented various perspectives on learner dropout. This chapter provides an overview of research undertaken internationally and in South Africa on the issue of school dropout. The key ideas from the literature inform and guide this study.

## **2.2 Who are vulnerable children?**

All over the world, children are faced with social risk factor on a daily basis. Jenkins and Keating (cited in Maarschalk 2005), explains that risk factors can take the form of biological factors, intra-personal factors, interpersonal factors, social and contextual factors as well as situational factors. Muthukrishna (2005) in the context of a rural community in South Africa found that children and the families who are vulnerable are subjected to range of social and economic difficulties: psychosocial distress, fragile families, stigma, discrimination, isolation, lack of social support; fear of violence, and HIV/Aids, fear of death and sickness, economic deprivation, loss of educational opportunity, social risks factors such as sexual and physical abuse, substance abuse risk; burdensome domestic responsibilities, and fear of their own future.

Vulnerable, as explained by Solnit (1983) cited in Maarschalk (2005) is these and susceptibilities that an individual child maybe exposed to. In other words, vulnerability makes a child at risk for a negative outcome. Maarschalk (2005) argues that when investigating the vulnerability of an individual child, one is accounting for the entire effects of the factors of the child. Risks factors are those factors that challenge a child biologically, environmentally and psychosocial.

### **2.3 The notion of social inclusion/exclusion**

Muthukrishna (2005) argues that debates around the issue of inclusion/exclusion proceed from larger political questions about the nature of society, and the status afforded to people in varying forms and structures of social organisations. Inclusion is about question of access for all people. The issue about who is in and who is out, about which students are valued in the educational mainstream, and who are relegated to the status of 'other'. The World Education Forum (26-28 April 2000, Dakar) adopted the Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All (EFA): Meeting our Collective Commitments. Through the framework, countries that participated in the Forum reaffirmed the vision of the World Declaration on Education for All adopted ten years earlier (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990) of a rights based approach to education supported by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The international community made a collective commitment to uphold the vision that all children, young people and adults have the right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term. At this conference, countries committed to the belief that education is a fundamental human right at the core of development. It is the pathway to sustainable and stability, and a critical means for effective participation in societies and economies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which are affected by rapid globalisation.

The Dakar Framework adopts a broad vision of 'Education for All' as an inclusive concept that takes into account the needs of all marginalised, socially disadvantaged and oppressed groups. This reflects a shift in the inclusion debate from concerns with supporting the rights of learners with impairments to focus on all learners vulnerable to

exclusion and to exclusionary pressure within education. There is a wider emphasis on equity, quality, entitlement, equal access, and participation for all.

Maybe of these debates have argued that a discussion of social inclusion and exclusion cannot be divorced from inclusion and exclusion in society. Social exclusion is seen as education needs to be understood in context-that is, in the complex conditions and factors which act together to keep a child from participating in effective learning experiences in school family, community and society.

Exclusion will persist as long as children and their families are denied effective voice in defining it and changing it. Action needs to build from their perspectives. There is a need to make analyses participatory. UNESCO (2000) emphasises the need to intervene through direct context-specific action with families and communities. UNESCO (2000) recommends that maps of exclusion need to be created and maintained in order to make excluded children and their families and communities visible. These are 'moving pictures' of the changing incidence and patterns of vulnerable families and children. Poverty is the most consistent predictor of systemic and endemic exclusion, but it is rarely used by national education strategies (DFID, 1999).

In South Africa, the South African government has been committed to establishing a society based on democratic values, social inclusion, and fundamental human rights. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa entrenches liberal rights such as freedom, equality, and human dignity. Any kind of discrimination on the basis of gender, sex, race, ethnic origin, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, age, disability, culture, language has been outlawed. Since 1994, the government has put in place overarching policies which provide a framework for addressing the situation of children. Provisions specifically related were included in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996. In 1995, the government also ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was ratified by the South Africa government in January 2000. Many of the provisions in the CRC and the African Charter on the Rights of the Child are embedded in the Bill of the Constitution.

This thinking reflects a shift in the debate to focus on all children vulnerable to exclusion and to exclusionary pressure within society. These would include children who have dropped out of school, those who do not go to school; those who have access to schooling but experience barriers to participation; those who live in conditions of poverty, children living with HIV/Aids, socio-cultural isolation, geographic isolation, racial and /or gender bias; those who live with the burdens of disability and disease, sexual exploitation, family breakdown, unemployment, criminal environments, forced involvement in civil and military conflict, exploitative labour, and limited life chances. Inclusion is seen as one facet of a web of human rights violations that children around



the world experience. It denies children their fundamental human rights, and in conjunction with social and economic instability, leads to deepening inequalities and marginalisation. There is a wider emphasis on equity, entitlement, equality access, and participation for all.

Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) that emerged from the Report of NCSNET and NCESS reflects a paradigm shift to a broad version on inclusion. White Paper 6 is located within the principles and values of the Constitution framework of the country. In this way, the document embraces the “rights” discourse underpinning the policy changes in education since 1994. The White Paper uses the term “barriers to learning and participation”- and stresses the need to minimise barriers and maximise participation. Key barriers in the South African context that render a large number of children and adults vulnerable to learning breakdown and sustained included: problems in the provision and organisation of education; socio-economic barriers; factors that place learners at risks, such as high levels of poverty, violence and crime, HIV/Aids epidemic; substance abuse; attitude; an inflexible curriculum; problems with language and communication; inaccessible and unsafe built environment; inappropriate and inadequate provision of support services to school, parents, care-givers, families and communities; lack of enabling and protective legislation; disability; lack of human resources development; and lack of parental recognition and involvement.

All social policy documents and legislation related to children, that have emerged since 1994, have been developed within this framework of human rights, redress, equity, and social justice (South African School Act of 1996, White Paper on Education and Training, 1995; Education White Paper 6, July 2001; Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education, 2001; White Paper on Social Welfare, 1996; National Programme of Action for Children, 1996). These policies suggest a commitment to the broad view of social inclusion and a strong commitment to the rights of the child.

In summary, children who drop out of school are generally vulnerable both before and after leaving school. In addition, I argue that they are generally vulnerable both before and after leaving school, I argue that they have been subjected to the various exclusionary pressures within schools, community and society.

## **2.4 Definition of school dropout**

According to Levinson, Cookson and Sadonvick (2002), there is no consensus on how to define a school dropout. Definition of a school dropout varies widely, with different states, districts, and even schools within a district using the term differently. Levinson et al. (2002) have defined a school dropout as someone who *leaves school* before completing an open school system, where leaving does not preclude a return at some later date. Different factors may contribute to learners failing to complete school.

Levinson et al (2002) state that dominant theories conceive of early school leaving as *dropping out* and list it as an individual act, signifying individual, or perhaps family or cultural, failure. The other theory conceives of non-completers as *push outs*, and

focuses on unequal economic, political and social structures and certain school practice. Thus the term 'dropout' puts inordinate blame on individual, while the term 'push out' puts inordinate blame on the institution.

Internationally, there is a great deal of interest in the calculation of dropout rates, which are often used as an indication of the success of the educational system. Such rates depend on the definition of dropout. Statistics on dropout rates could differ depending on:

- Different definitions of 'dropout' between school, district, countries or states.
- Time periods during the school year when data was collected.
- Different methods used to calculate dropout rate
- Different procedures for tracking learners' no longer in school to determine if they completed their education elsewhere.

## **2.5 Perspectives on school dropout internationally.**

### **2.5.1. More developed countries**

In the United States of America (USA), Schwartz (1995) reports that in the last few decades both the personal and social cost of dropping out of school has increased. The primary source of information about dropouts in his report was the National Centre for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education that collected and conducted longitudinal studies to present a picture of the dropout situation. About 381 000 students left school without graduating in 1993. Nearly two third of the dropouts leave

before the tenth grade, 20 percent dropout by the eighth grade, and 3 percent do not even complete the fourth grade.

Schwartz (1995) states that usually a variety of school problems and personal factors combine to cause a student to drop out. Using the data from surveys covering four years in the lives of students who began high school, common characteristics were identified based on the youth responses. Nearly one-third of females who dropped out cited pregnancy as the reason. More than half the dropouts moved during the four-year study period. Nearly a quarter of the dropouts had changed schools two or more times. Dropouts reported bad personal behaviours during the last two years of schooling such as cutting classes, late coming, transfer to another school for disciplinary reasons, being arrested, missing school for 10 days, or being put on in-school suspension.

McMillan and Reed (1993) cited in Collins (2003) state that problems such as unemployment, divorce, single parent households, working mothers, poverty, drugs and alcohol abuse, and prejudice have an impact on the lives of children of low income, minority family, as well as the children of well-educated, middle-class majority families. Consequently, children from all types of background come to school 'at-risk'. However, in spite of the presence of at-risk factors, many students exhibit *resiliency*. But there is a growing population of non-minority, suburban, middle or upper income level students who drop out of school.

Collins (2003) conducted a study in Kansas City focusing upon the students who are considered as 'non-resilient'. The aim of the study was to determine the attributes of non-resilient students. The sample was selected from the population of students who had dropped out of three high schools in mostly white, suburban school districts in the Kansas City. The participants dropped out of school during 2000-2001. Of 322 total non-minority dropouts, 41 students met all the criteria for non-resilience. The study revealed that the traits of high school dropouts, as told through their stories, were consistent with many of the traits of non-resilient students. In other words, the students who dropped out lacked resilience.

Downing (1994) examined the response received from a questionnaire, which addressed the reason for staying in schools, distributed to high school seniors from 13 suburban southern communities in the United States. The students were asked to identify reasons why they considered dropping out of school. The questionnaire included the list of reasons, and there was also a space for them to list their own. The results indicated that a total of 74% had contemplated dropping out during high school and, 19% said they thought about dropping out between Grade 5 and Grade 9. 50% of the participants' cited poor grades as a reason and 47% specified problems at home. Other reasons were alcohol problems, drug, legal problems, pregnancy, disciplinary problems, being held back, and having no friends.

Marin (1995) conducted research to determine why Puerto Rican students in the United States drop out of school. Perez (1993) cited in Marin (1995) states that Latino youth account for 10% of all elementary and secondary school students, and are among the most under educated in the U.S.A. There are four subgroups of Latinos: Cuban American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican and Central South Americans. Latino students have higher school dropout rates than African American and White students. High school education attainment for Latinos age 25 years or older is lower (57%) than for African American (63%) and Whites (77%).

Intensive open-ended interviews were conducted with 10 Puerto Rican students who were school dropouts to shed light on the school dropout phenomenon within this population. One target school in each city participated in this research. These cities were Hartford, Bridgeport, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and South Bronx, New York. The study revealed that out-of school and in-school factors related to school dropout of Latino students. The out-of-school factors were that the students who come from single-parent home or parents with low-levels of occupation, or with low incomes dropout more than do students with two parents or parents in higher professional levels. Puerto Ricans have lower income levels than other Latino subgroups. High dropout rate might be attributed to their low socio-economic status. Other background factors included large family size, limited education of parents, and teenage pregnancy. The in-school factors include grade retention, overage (one or more years older than the classmates), cutting classes, and suspension from school.

According to Hess (2000), factors contributing to school dropout among Mexican American students in the United States can be examined using an ecological model. The issues related to academic underachievement and no completion of school may be understood best by examining the interactions among individual characteristics, environment, and socio-cultural factors. The ecological model establishes an organisational framework that considered four contextual environments that impact the individual: the micro-system, meso-system, exo-system and macro-system. The micro-system includes the environment in which the child interacts on a daily basis, such as the home and classroom milieus. The relationships between contexts (e.g. the parents interacting with the school) are addressed in the meso-system. The exo-system might be composed of the family's socio-economic status, the neighbourhood and the larger school system. And the macro-system includes the larger institutions and culture that directly or indirectly impact on the individual, such as legislation, government programmes and the entire education system. From this perspective, high school completion among Mexican American youth is conceptualised as an ongoing mutual accommodation between the individual and the environment in which development occurs in the context of several interrelated systems.

The study found that ecological model applied to Mexican American's under-education provides a guiding framework for organising and understanding the relative impact of multiple variables on school drop out among Latinos. Each child must be viewed as an inseparable part of the system and any disturbance should be viewed as not a problem with the child or the family, but as a mismatch between the needs and abilities of the

individual and the expectations of the system. In the micro-system (individual settings) family background such as single parent, parental education level, amount of available reading material, and language spoken at home have a powerful influence on a child's decision to drop out of school. Parenting style influences academic achievement. Latinos students are less likely than White students to come from families with the authoritative parenting styles associated with higher academic achievement in school.

### **2.5.2 Developing countries**

The investigative unit of the World Bank Monetary Fund project conducted a study in poor areas of Jiangxi in China. The unit investigated the problem of primary and secondary school dropout. Diyu (2001) presents the findings of this study. The investigative unit distributed questionnaires and convened teachers and students meetings at each school to analyse the circumstances and factors related to school drop out. They also went to dropouts' homes to meet them and their parents in order to ascertain why they had dropped out, their feelings on dropping out, and what they did after they dropped out of school.

Diyu (2001) listed four major factors that contributed to learner dropout:

*Social factors:* influenced by the view that to “study is useless”, boys are superior to girls, it is difficult for girls to find employment after going to school, and there is not enough money to send girls to school.



*School factors:* lack of teaching equipment, low quality of education, no money for school fees, poor quality teaching, too much schoolwork and what is taught has no relation to real life.

*Family factors:* family financial difficulties, lost the desire to continue in school because parents would not let them, school is too far from home, family needed help at home, allowed the child to leave early to earn money, and parents attached no importance to their child's education.

*Student's personal reasons:* poor school results, too much pressure to study, do not get along with teachers and fellow students, wanted to work and physical reasons.

In analysing the data, Diyu discovered that teachers, students at school, dropouts, and parents all have different views on why students drop out.

In Kenya, Lloyd, Mensch and Clark (2000) investigated whether primary school quality affected the likelihood of the dropout of Kenyan girls and boys. The study was conducted in May-August 1996 in rural areas of three districts in Kenya (Kilifi, Nakuru and Nyeri). The sample of 36 schools was selected. The focus was on the two years of the primary school cycle (standard 7 and 8) where dropping out begins to emerge as a problem. The field research team spent 2-3 days visiting each school, conducting interviews with the headmaster, teachers and learners. They also observed lessons, the school facilities and activities in the schoolyards.

The study showed that girls are less likely to be in school than are boys, especially in the older age groups. Less than one-third of girls' age 17-18 still attend school compared with nearly one half of boys. The older the adolescent becomes the greater the probability of her or his dropping out. Being Christian reduces the odds of dropping out substantially, as does having parents that are married to each other. Adolescents whose mother has a formal education are less likely to dropout than are those of less educated mothers. The researchers concluded that school quality does have a great impact on school dropouts, particularly in the case of girls. The primary school environment in Kenya is a harsh one for both sexes, and girls experience negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviours in all types of school. Although the element of school quality may matter to the quality of the daily lives of boys and girls, the results showed that they appear to make little difference to whether they drop out of school, instead family factors seem of overriding importance.

Smith (2003) discusses why school disaffection is a growing problem in Africa. He argues that despite the large-scale international programmes such as 'Education for All' backed by UNESCO, the situation remains the same. The World Bank enrolment and retention rate in Africa continues to decline.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2002) demonstrates the low completion rate of those children who are actually enrolled.

**Table 1: Completion rate at Grade 5 in selected African Countries**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Boys' completion rate (%)</b>	<b>Girls' completion rate (%)</b>
Chad	58%	43%
Ethiopia	55%	58%
Malawi	50%	51%
Namibia	80%	87%
Rwanda	48%	42%
Tanzania	78%	83%
Uganda	43%	45%

Smith (2003) argues that schools do not attract pupils. Children drop out of school through a variety of causes both in school and out-of-school. They are pushed out by the demands of the schools or the regime that the school follows. The most cause of failure to attend school or complete schooling in African countries is poverty. The direct costs of schooling in terms of fees, textbooks, uniforms, and other levies do keep many children out of school. Corporal punishment is another factor that pushes learners out of school. Children are beaten for failure to pay school fees, for failure to pass tests, and for a multitude of other reasons. Gender inequities also push out learners from school as girls are treated differently from boys and are subject to all kinds of negative influence from being ignored in class to suffering sexual harassment. Classrooms lack materials and textbooks, and little worthwhile learning can be observed.

Finally, Smith (2003) urges that it is necessary to look at the various impacts of HIV/AIDS on school disaffection. LINS Report (LINS 2000 cited in Smith, 2003) looked at what happens to education system subject to the onslaught of HIV/AIDS. Apart from the loss of qualified teachers which teacher training institutions are unable to keep up with, children find themselves orphaned by the pandemic, and thus unable to pay school fees or even to attend as they have younger siblings to care for. School systems have not been able to respond to the educational needs of such children, let alone their emotional needs. Therefore children become disaffected from schooling.

Egbo (2000) wrote a book on Gender, Literacy and Life Chances in Sub-Saharan Africa. This book originated from a study she did on the living conditions of a group of literate and non-literate women in a rural community in Nigeria, within their living milieu, and as seen from their own perspectives. An important objective of the study was to determine to what extent the women attribute their living conditions to literacy or lack of it. The study explored which particular aspects of their lives the women believe have been most affected by their literate or non-literate status respectively.

The study revealed that literacy affects women's lives in very important ways in Sub-Saharan Africa. While literacy by itself cannot change oppressive social conditions, since as should be by now, illiteracy is symptomatic of large social contradictions in which the scale is tilted against women. The evidence in the study suggested that literate rural women have a much better quality of life than their non-literate peers. The difference, for most of the part, originates from the improved economic conditions resulting from their participation in formal wage labour. Non-literate women have

relatively less power and see themselves as dependent individuals. But, despite their recognition of the potential of literacy in improving their living conditions, most do not regard the acquisition of literacy as a priority. Nonetheless, they believe that for their daughters, access to literacy is indispensable.

Egbo (2000) concludes that access to literacy not only plays a significant role towards enhancing the status of women, but it also one institutional variable that is most amenable to policy interventions, emancipatory action.. Access to literacy and other educational opportunities, therefore, is imperative for profound social reconstruction not only in Nigeria but also in Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.

### **2.5.3 School dropout in South Africa**

The aim of the study done by Motala (1995) in Soweto schools was to establish the pattern of survival, repetition, and dropout in the first four years of lower primary school. Using the method of a tracer survey, her study followed the progress of a cohort of 782 Soweto children who started substandard A (SSA) in 1987. Nine schools in Soweto were surveyed taking 100 children per school. In some schools less than 100 children were enrolled in SSA in 1987. The survey collected two type of information: first, data from school records which provided background information on each child (age, gender, parental occupation, home address, language), and secondly, information on the progress of the child from 1987 to 1990 inclusive. From this, a list of dropouts was compiled. These dropouts were traced to the homes from where other data was collected.

Of the total 782 children who started SSA in 1987, only 430 or 54% completed standard 2 in four years. The survival rates from year to year were 77% in 1987, 82% in 1988, 83% in 1989 and 87% in 1990. Even the national statistics of the Department of Education showed similar rates. The research revealed that even at one of the better schools only 75% of the initial cohort survived to 1990, whilst at one school only 35% survived. No significant relationship was shown between gender and survival, with the girls faring slightly better than boys. Motala states that poor survival can be attributed to a number of discrete factors in school and out of school factors. The overwhelming impression from the research was that education exists within a socio-economic, political and cultural reality. These forces continually impact on the school, particularly on the education of younger children.

The study showed that per year repetition was much higher than dropouts. The most significant out-of-school factors impinging on poor survival, and in particular on the dropout rate were relocation and the instability of housing, violence and poverty. The perception of 'communities in motion' due to socio-economic factors such as retrenchment, violence or family break-up was apparent. What also emerged from the discussions with parents and teachers was that dropout was a result of the school inability to provide diagnostic testing to identify children with special education needs. It was clear that some of the children had dropped out because of learning problems. The existing level of repetition represents a tremendous waste of human and financial resources, and very few strategies exist to address the problem according to Motala (1995).

Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (1997) argue that dropping out of school is a major problem in South Africa and it is important to understand why it occurs. The authors pointed some of the likely causes that may play a part in a high dropout rate. These are:

*Economic causes*

In poor communities, parents often cannot afford the cost of schooling. Many children dropout of school early in order to earn money that can help support their poor families.

*Relevance of schooling and effect of values*

How people see the usefulness and relevance of schooling affects whether and for how long children remain in school. In some communities, education of female children is not important.

*Lack of education flexibility and support*

In poor communities education is costly and children are limited in how much they can contribute towards the immediate survival of their families. The curriculum has not been flexible enough to meet the normal differences and needs of a very high proportion of all children. Children with disabilities and difficulties in learning have not had their special needs identified or addressed.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The major findings from the review of literature show that family background, personal characteristics of the child, the school context and the social behaviour of the children interact to create conditions that place children at risk of dropping out of school.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the methodology adopted for this study. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), methodology refers to the methods, techniques and procedures that are employed in the process of implementing the study. In this chapter, the research context, research design, limitations of the study, and method of data analysis will be discussed.

### **3.2 The research context**

The research site for this study is Thornville which is 16 kilometres away from Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. It is a farm-dominated context, and generations of most families have worked on the farms. They form a community. Today, there are very few people who still work on the farms. There is a high rate of unemployment. Most people depend on old age pensions for survival, and those who are working have low-income jobs. Most people do not own the land on which they build their houses. Development has not reached Thornville. People still obtain water from the river, and there is poor sanitation.

There are two farm schools in Thornville that were built for the children of the farm workers. Chamusela Primary School has grade 1-4 with the enrolment of about 70 learners. Thornville State Aided School enrolls learners from grades 1-6 with the enrolment of 50 learners. Each school has two teachers, who teach multiple grades in one classroom. The schools are under-resourced with no electricity, poor sanitation, no



piped water, and poor road conditions. The third farm school is Nelsrus Combined School. It is five kilometres away from Thornville. Nelsrus offers grades 1-10. The teachers also teach multiple grades in one class. The school is under-resourced.

### **3.3 Participants**

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), units of analyses are those things we examine in order to construct a summary description of all such units and explain differences among them. In social science research, individual human beings are the most typical unit of analysis. The unit of analysis in this study was the phenomenon of school dropout. The participants in the study consisted of seven youths who had dropped out of school, three parents of these youths, and two teachers who are teaching in Thornville farm schools. At first, I planned to interview twelve youth, four parents and three teachers.

As a teacher at Chamusela Primary School I knew a lot of youth who has dropout of school, and I asked them if they liked to participate in my study. Age, gender and race were not considered in the selection of the seven participants. Of these, two were male, and five were female. Their ages ranged from 14 to 20 years. Out of the seven youth, two dropped out from Chamusela, three dropped out from Thornville State Aided School and the other two from Nelsrus Combined School. From the three parents in this study, two were biological mothers of the youth who dropped out and one was the stepfather of one youth in the study. Both teachers were female, one from Thornville State Aided and the other from Nelsrus.

### **3.4 Research Approach**

This was a qualitative study. Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) state that qualitative research is often used when a researcher wants to obtain an in-depth look at a particular individual, situation, phenomenon, or set of materials. Qualitative researchers go directly to the particular setting in which they are interested to collect the data. According to Neuman (2000), qualitative researchers develop explanations that are close to concrete data and contexts, but are more than simple descriptions. The researcher may build new theory to create a picture of social life.

The study took a form of a qualitative case study. According to Bell (1999), the case study is particularly appropriate for individual researchers because it gives an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale. The great strength of the case study is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation, and to identify the various interactive processes at work. In this study seven learners who dropped out of school formed the case.

### **3.5 Data collection methods**

The interview is probably the most widely used method of data collection in education research (Anderson 1999). When used with care and skill, interviews are a rich source of data. Bell (1999) argues that a major advantage of the interview is its adaptability. A skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses, and investigate motives and feelings that a questionnaire can never do. The interview allows for in-depth questioning.

The semi-structured interview was used as a tool to collect data in this study. The interviews were held at Chamusela Primary School, where I teach. They were held during the weekends and after school hours. With the two mothers of the youth who has dropped out, and the two teachers I visited them at their homes for the interviews. All the interviews were done in Zulu and audio taped I then later transcribed them.

### **3.6 Ethical issues**

Informed consent was obtained from participants. The aim and purpose of the study was explained to all the participants. It was impressed upon them that their participation was voluntary, and that they did have to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. They were also told that they could withdraw from the interview at any time. I tried to impress upon them that I was in my role as a researcher who wanted to find out about an issue of concern to me, and that this was the main reason that I was undertaking the research. I was not in my role as a teacher, and that all information would be treated in the strictest confidence. I was concerned about the power imbalance between me and the past learners, and me and their parents. After I had explained all of the above to the participants, I set up appointments to meet with them for the interviews.

### **3.7 Limitations of the study**

I am a teacher at Chamusela Primary School and I believe this impacted the process of accessing school dropouts in this context. I aimed to interview five past learners who dropped out from Chamusela School, another five who dropped out at Thornville State Aided School and two from Nelsrus Combined School. Of five who dropped out of

Chamusela Primary, only two learners participated in the study. I believe that the youths saw me as a former teacher at the school and not as a researcher. I made appointments with the learners explaining the purpose of the study but they did not keep them. Those who participated did not feel at ease initially, although I tried to ease the tension by explaining the aim of the study, and that all information will be treated with the strictest confidence. I do not believe I was able to resolve the issue of power between the youth and me.

### **3.8 Data analysis**

Three sets of data were collected for this study: teachers, parents and the youth.. I interviewed seven learners who dropped out, three parents of the learners who dropped out, and two teachers who teach in Thornville farm schools.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among the categories. Most categories and patterns emerged from the data rather than being imposed on the data prior to data collection. In this study, I carefully read each data set separately, and identified themes and issues that emerged. I then examined themes across the data sets to explore similarities, differences and discrepancies.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has served to outline the research design and methodology adopted in this study. The next chapter is the presentation of findings.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The aim of this study was to investigate the factors associated with school dropout in three rural farm schools in Thornville. In this chapter, I present the findings in relation to the key research question and the sub questions. The three key research questions were:

- What are the factors associated with learner dropout in the three rural farm schools in Thornville?
- What are the perceptions of youths who have dropped out of school, teachers, parents or caregivers about the factors associated with school dropout in this rural context?
- How do youth who have dropout of school experience their lives?

### **4.2 The Context of the Study and Participants**

The participants in the study were seven youths who had dropped of school, three parents of youth who dropped of school, and two teachers who are teaching in Thornville farm schools. The age range of the youths at the time of the study was between 14years to 19 years. Five were females and two males. The seven youths had dropped out from schools in Thornville, KwaZulu-Natal. The farm schools are Chamusela Primary School, Thornville State Aided School, and Nelsrus Combined School. Chamusela has Grade one to four with only two teachers each teaching two

grades in one classroom. The total learner enrolment at the school is 70. Thornville State Aided School has grade one to six with two teachers teaching three grades in one classroom. The school has enrolment of 50 learners. Nelsrus School has a primary and a secondary section, and includes grade one to grade ten. There are five teachers and the principal. All the teachers teach two grades in one classroom. Two of the youth dropped out of school while in Chamusela Primary School, three were in Thornville State Aided School, and the other two were at Nelsrus Combined School.

**Table 2: Educational profile of the school drop outs**

	Youth 1	Youth 2	Youth 3	Youth 4	Youth 5	Youth 6	Youth 7
<b>School last attended</b>	Chamusela Primary	Thornville State Aided	Chamusela Primary	Nelsrus	Nelsrus	Thornville State Aided	Thornville State Aided
<b>Grade</b>	Grade 3	Grade 5	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 8	Grade 5	Grade 6
<b>Age at drop out</b>	12 years	15 years	11 years	17 years	16 years	15 years	15 years
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>Year of drop out of school</b>	2003	2001	1996	2003	2000	2003	2000

The above mentioned schools are under resourced with no electricity and water, poor sanitation, no proper road leading to school, and inadequate learning and teaching

materials. The buildings of these schools are in poor condition. In general, the schools are far less resourced than urban schools.

Teacher 1 commented,

*Our school does not have facilities. It's only that it is better than the other neighbouring farm schools. We have piped water, there was once a Telkom telephone line. There are five classrooms, a staff room and an office because – so we are a big school. But our school has less facilities than the schools in town."*

Out of seven youths, only two live with both their parents and siblings, the other four live with single mothers, and their extended families. One youth is an orphan who lives with his grandmother, uncle and siblings.

*"I live with my mother, two siblings, five cousins, three aunts, two uncles and grandfather." (youth 4)*

*"I live with mother and three siblings, who are two boys and one girl; my aunt with her three year old boy; and one cousin." (youth 2)*

*"Most of the children in Thornville live with their extended families because girls have children at early ages and they leave their children with their parents." (parent 3)*



The findings show that 4 youths lives with their single mothers and/or with their extended families. Girls in the community become parents at an early age.

*"You will find that a girl who is 20 years old has two or three children and she has dumped them with her parents and left to stay with her boyfriend".(Teacher 2)*

Table 3 shows current family income in the households of the seven youths who participated in this study. The findings show that the families in poverty. From my observations and discussions with the teachers, I found that the community does not have clean water and electricity. There is poor sanitation, poor housing infrastructure, and there is no access to the homes by road. Most of the families depend on old pension of grandparents, and receive child support grants. The Child Support Grant is the largest poverty alleviation measure targeting children in South Africa. It aims at helping the caregivers of children to address basic needs, in particular nutrition. Any primary care giver who may be parents, relatives or non-relatives, can apply for a grant on behalf of an eligible child once they are able to prove that the care of the child is their sole responsibility (Department of Social Development, 2003).

There is a high rate of unemployment.

*"I was as a domestic worker long ago but I quit because I was not earning much, and my parents supported me and my four children with their pension. Both my parents died, and now no one is working at home. We only get the*

*grants (child support grants) for my two grandchildren and the father of my three children is supporting us.” (Parent 1)*

Although income poverty is seen as too limiting and narrow a concept to describe adequately the multiple disadvantages suffered by some groups (Klasen, 2001), the following table provides one of a picture of the stark reality in these families. The data was obtained from the youth who were interviewed.

**Table 3: Family income in the families of the dropouts**

Family of Youth 1	Family of Youth 2	Family of Youth 3	Family of Youth 4	Family of Youth 5	Family of Youth 6	Family of Youth 7
Mother is unemployed. The only income is of grandparents' old pension that is R740.00 each pensioner a month.	The youth and her aunt are employed – they earn R400 a month. Her mother earns R300 a month.	The whole family is unemployed. Their father who is not living with them supports the family.	The mother earns R500 a month. The grandfather's old pension, which is R740.00 a month, is also a source of income.	The family depends on grandmot her's pension as a source of income.	The mother is a domestic worker earning R250 a month and father was a security guard – But he is currently unemployed.	The father obtains casual contract work in the building industry usually earn R800 a month. His mother is unemployed.

According to parents, caregivers and teachers most people in the area have low levels of education and skills, and hence cannot obtain better paying job. There are few permanent jobs available for work such as driving tractors, ploughing and cutting grass.

The findings of this study revealed that most people who live in Thornville do not complete grade seven, and there are few people who have grade twelve. Older parents have less than four years of schooling.

*My mother (32years) left school in grade four and my aunt left school in grade six..." (Youth 3)*

*The community does not take education serious, they only think that it is enough if the child knows how to read and write his or her name. (Teacher 2)*

The teachers have the perception that people in the community do not see the value of education. The reason for this is linked to the scarcity of jobs in the area. Whether one has completed grade 12 or not makes no difference to job access. This idea is supported by Youth 2 when she says:

*My neighbour finished grade 12 but I dropped out of school in grade 5. We are working at the same place earning the same money"*

From the above, it can be seen that poverty is just one of the factors that make children vulnerable in contexts such as the above. In South Africa, social exclusion is the term that is used in current debates to describe socially constructed disadvantage (Muthukrishna & Sader, 2004; Sayeed, 2003). This includes children who do not go to school; those who have access to schooling but who experience barriers to participation; those who live in conditions of poverty; children living with HIV/Aids; those who live with the burdens of disability and disease, those who suffer from sexual

exploitation, family breakdown, unemployment, exposure to criminal environments, forced involvement in civil and military conflict, exploitative labour, socio-cultural isolation, geographic isolation and racial and /or gender bias. The debate moves beyond a focus on descriptions of economic deprivation to historical and political causes (May, 2001; May 2000; May, Woolard, & Klasen, 2000).

The youth in this study have been exposed to multiple exclusionary pressures that may be linked to drop out of school at an early age.

#### **4.3 Experiencing schooling in a rural context**

The participants including the youth, parents/caregivers and teachers, gave various reasons for school dropout in this context. The patterns that emerged from the data is discussed in the next sections.

##### **4.3.1 Memories of school**

The youth were asked to talk about experiences at school that they liked and those that they did not like. Very few positive experiences emerged in the interviews. The youths talked about bad experience more often than good experience. Youth 2 and 7 talked about the bad treatment they received from their teachers. Youth 2 said the reason she left school was that she was badly treated by the teachers. She was humiliated in front of the other children and was accused of things that she did not do. At one stage she was ask to undress in front of the other children at school, so that the teachers could ‘inspect’ her.

Youth 7 explained,

*"I did not like my class teacher, we did not get along that much. She liked to pick on us by using bad names such as 'khandakhulu' meaning 'big head'. We were always humiliated in front of the other learners if we did something wrong."*

#### **4.3.2 Family financial difficulties**

The families' financial problems emerged as a strong reason for school dropout. For some of the youth, although this was not the main reason for them to leave school, they suggested that if their families had the finances they could have moved to alternative schools. In the case of Youth 1 and 5, their parents could not afford to cover transport costs to school. The family of Youth 1 moved from Thornville to a council housing settlement built under the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). This required her to use public transport to the school, and her grandparents could not meet the cost that this incurred. In addition, the school fees at the new school were high.

As there is no high school in Thornville, Youth 5 had to take a bus to go to Nelsrus Combined school which is five kilometre away from Thornville. His grandmother was unable to pay the R30 a week bus fare. In the case of Youth 5, financial problems were exacerbated by the fact that his father lost his job. Youth 4's father died, and her mother could not afford to continue paying for her schooling.

#### **4.3.3 Limited choice**

In Thornville, there are only three schools. These are Chamusela Primary that offers grades one to four, Thornville State Aided that has grades one to six, and an ex-House of Delegates (HOD) school, Thornville Primary school that has grades one to seven. The youth, who have completed the level of schooling at Chamusela and at Thornville State Aided School, would have to go to Nelsrus Combined School for their secondary schooling. Nelsrus School is also a farm school five kilometres away from Thornville. Parents have to pay R30 every week for their children's bus fare. Thornville Primary school, which is an ex, HOD is more expensive. The school fees are R250 per year. There is no high school in Thornville so parents cannot afford to pay the bus fare to the nearest high school. The youth who had poor schooling experiences at a school in Thornville generally dropped out as alternative schools would involve financial costs which families could not meet.

#### **4.3.4 Contextual pressures in the lives of the youth**

In the interviews with all participants in the study, a common theme that emerged was that people in Thornville live in poverty and education is at the bottom of their priorities. Even in the case of those learners who complete grade 12, parents cannot afford higher education for their children. Teacher 1 raised the issue of the lack of role models in the community as a factor that contribute to youth dropping out of school:

*“Youths do not have their role models in their home or in the community. Most people do not finish school they do not set a good example for the young children. The community do not take education seriously.”*

Many of the participants raised the issue that there was no incentive for learners in the area to complete their schooling as there were limited opportunities for further education and training.

*“I’ve seen people who have finish grade 12 and there isn’t much different between them and those learners who did not finish school. Lindeni my neighbour finished grade 12 but we are working at the same place and earning the same money.”*

*(Youth 2)*

In the case of youth 7, his father decided that he had to leave school because he was old enough to have his own family. His girl friend was pregnant at the time. The father’s reasoning was that he *“cannot pay school fees for another man”* – the implication was that his son was now a man..

Even though it was not the main reason for youths to dropout of school, the fact that parents needed the youth at home to help with the sick members of the families was a factor that was cited in the study. For example, the mother of Youth one and the sister of Youth six were very ill prior to them dropping out of school.

The pressure to supplement the meagre family income was a further factor that became evident in the study. The youth had to take on menial jobs after school and during weekends and holidays to support the family. Teacher 1 stated,

*“The other reason for the youths to dropout of school is that they get temporary jobs on weekend and during the school holidays so as to get pocket money or help the family. You will find that they will not want to go to school because they are enjoying the money and the family will be happy if the youth works permanent.”*

Death of the main caregiver emerged as a factor associated with school dropout. The father of Youth 4 died when she was in grade 8. Her mother could not afford to pay for her schooling. The mother of Youth 5 died when he was in grade 7. The grandmother subsequently had the responsibility to care for the family, and schooling costs could not be met.

#### **4.4 Life after school**

Out of the seven youths who participated in the study, only one had a permanent job in Durban. This was Youth 2 who had left school in 2001 in Grade 5. She subsequently left Thornville to live with her aunt in Durban. At first she worked as a maid, in 2002 her aunt was able to obtain employment for her at a plastics company. She now works with her aunt, and each of them earns R400 a month. Out of this income, she pays for her accommodation which is R60 a month, buy food, and send money to support the family in Thornville.



Youth 5 and 7 were only about to obtain short term work over the years, for example, in the building industry as contract workers, grass cutters on farms, and casual labour such as building houses for neighbours, cutting wood and so on.

Three of the female dropouts indicated that they wish to go back to school and continue with their education. However, there are no adult basic education facilities at close proximity. The male participants indicated that they did not want to pursue their schooling, but wanted to obtain employment. Teacher 2 stated,

*"Most youths who leave school stay home and do nothing. Some get jobs. Usually the boys get jobs working on the farm ploughing, driving tractors or cutting grass or get other jobs that pay little. For girls, they stay home and they will fall pregnant and start a family at the age of 19 or 20."*

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

The findings presented in this chapter show that there are a number of different factors that contribute to youths dropping out of school in the three rural farm schools in Thornville. Poverty emerged as a major factor.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I presented the findings of this study that investigated the factors that contributed to learners dropping out of school. In this chapter, I discuss the findings and interpret them in light of issues raised in literature that I have studied. Although this is a small-scale qualitative study of seven youths who dropped out of school, there are interesting patterns that have emerged across the data sets.

### **5.2 Contextual factors associated with school dropout**

#### **5.2.1 Low socio-economic status (SES)**

Socio-economic status is usually judged according to the parental income and household wealth. Some indicators of the SES could be whether the house is made of brick or mud, whether it has electricity or not, does the family have a car, and so forth. The families living in low SES earn little or nothing, and most live in poverty.

Much of the literature reviewed in chapter two demonstrate that poverty is a primary factor that causes learners to dropout of school. According to Hess (2000), in study on school dropout amongst Mexican American youth, students from low income families are three times likely to dropout as those from more affluent homes. Students who live in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods may perceive limited opportunities for

employment and success, which in turn negatively affects a student's decision to complete his or her education.

In China, Diyu (2001) found that the primary reason given by parents for their children dropping out of school was financial difficulties, especially in families with many children. Parents cannot afford the money needed to send their children to school. Donald, et. al. (1997) argued those in poor communities' parents often couldn't afford the cost of schooling. Many children dropout of school early in order to earn money that can help support their families.

In this study, poverty also proved to be the main reason for school dropout. The findings revealed that the youths dropped out of school because parents did not have the money to pay for their schooling. Out of seven youth who participated in this study, five of them pointed at the lack of funds to cover school costs as the main reason for dropping out of school. Parents did not have the money to pay school fees, to buy uniforms, buy books and stationery, and cover transport expenses.

In Thornville there is a high rate of unemployment, and those that do earn some income, earn a meagre wage. Most large families depend on grandparents' old age pensions for survival. When young people are placed in certain SES categories, they then shape their thoughts and feelings in a way that reflect these categories, hence their future aspirations (Hess, 2000). In this study the youth belong to low SES, they see themselves as unable to achieve because of the disabling social and economic background.

### **5.2.2 Low educational attainment of parents and the community**

The research suggests that the educational attainment of parents, especially mothers has a positive effect on learner achievement at school. Anderson and Lam (2001) cited in Taylor, Miller and Vinjevoild (2003), argue that there is a strong positive correlation between the highest level of schooling attained by mothers and the educational progress made by their children. Children, whose mother had 12 years of schooling had advanced two grades further than children whose mothers had less than four years of schooling.

In Thornville, there are very few people who have completed grade 12. I am a teacher at Chamusela Primary School, in Thornville since 1997. The motivation for this study was that I have noticed that learners drop out of school before they complete the senior primary phase. Out of the 20 learners who register for grade one only half will reach high school and only four or five will get their grade 12 certificate.

### **5.2.3 Single parent home**

Children growing up in single parent families or step families are more likely to dropout of school than children residing in families with both parents, according to Levinson, Cooks, & Sadovnik (2002). Single parent families have lower income than two parent families and there is frequently less parental supervision and support. The present study shows that most children in Thornville live within extended families. According to the teachers and parents, girls often get pregnant at early ages and are

generally unmarried. They raise their children as single parents within extended families that are often overburdened, vulnerable and living in poverty. The father of youth 4 died in 2003, they were not living together but he was supporting her by paying her school fees, buying uniform and stationery. She could not continue with her studies, because her now single mother could not meet the cost of schooling.

#### **5.2.4 Gender**

Smith (2003) argues that gender inequities are another factor that causes girls to dropout of school. Girls are often treated differently from boys and they are subject to all kinds of negative influence from being ignored in class to suffering sexual harassment. Many girls consequently drop out of an oppressive system.

Diyu (2001) interviewed parents of learners' who have dropped out of school in China, and found that most parents believed that sending girls to school was a waste of time and money. Some even think that it is better for girls to earn money earlier by doing farm work, housework, or some other work because if they are promoted they will just drift along and ultimately be disappointed. Thus they not only want girls to attend school, but they will even force them to drop out.

In China there is a traditional view that it is waste of time to educate girls because the girl will get married and have a family to look after and must not go to work. According to youth 2, her father did not want to send her to school after she passed

grade three. Her father did not stay with the family, he was working in Richmond and come home once a month. Her mother sends her without his permission but unfortunately for her she did not finish school because she was treated badly at school. Her two younger brothers age 16 and 14 are at school both doing grade nine, she also helps in their schooling as their father run away from them.

The mother of youth 2 commented,

*“Her father did not want to send her to school. He believed that it useless to educate a girl because she will get married soon and where will she use her education? But I don’t think so, I think children must be educated to live a better life.”*

The mother of youth 3 said she wanted all her children to get education. She has four children, three girls and one boy. The two older girls have already dropped out of school. The boy who is the third child is doing grade 10 and the last-born is doing grade 7. The mother is unemployed but their father pays for their schooling. Her first child got pregnant doing grade 6 and the second one is the participant in this study.

### **5.2.5 Mobility of families**

For most people who live in Thornville do not have permanent houses. People live on Farmlands, and do not legally own the land on which they build their temporary homes. These are homes they live in while they work on the farms. There is thus a great deal of mobility amongst the families. They tend to leave the area if they become unemployed, and move in search of work on other farms. The study seems to suggest that mobility of families is another factor associated with school dropout. One teacher indicated that the pattern is that by the second term of the school year, a significant number of learners would have dropped out of school. According to the teachers, as families move from one place to another, children suffer from disrupted schooling experiences. Youth 1 stated that the reason she dropped out of school was that her family moved into a new RDP house a long distance from the school she had been attending. This had financial implications as nearest school could only be accessed by public transport. This cost her grandparents could not meet.

### **5.2.6 Overage learners**

In his article Hartshorne (1999) indicated that one third of black children in the six to fourteen age groups on the farms are not in school at all. Those who go to school start school at a much later age than pupils in the urban areas. He found that 41.6 percent of pupils in Grade one were in the 8-10 years age group, and leave school earlier, generally after not more than four years of schooling.

All the seven participants of this study were old for the grades in which they were when they left school. To mention just a few, Youth 1 was 13 years in grade three. She started school late at the age of 9 and repeated grades 2 and 3. Youth 6 started grade one at the age of 10 years. He only repeated grade 6. He left school in 2000 in grade 6 at the age of 15 years. Youth 4 was 17 years old in grade 8 in 2003. In the case of Youths 1 and 4 repeating grades and school disruption due to family mobility led to their classification as over-age learners. Youth 6 tells his story,

*"In 1999 I failed grade 6. I had to repeat it even though I was not happy. I was now the oldest boy in the school. All my friends had gone to do grade 7 in another school because our school had up to grade 6. I passed grade 6 in 2000 I had to register for grade 7 the following year but I didn't."*

In her article Ntombela (2003) examined the challenges of over-age children in South African primary schools. She argues that the phenomenon of overage learners is a result of inadequate educational resources, both human and material, that is, under resourced schools and under qualified teachers. The risk of school dropout is high.

#### **5.2.7 Under resourced schools**

Hartshorne (1999) states that mostly all the farm schools are under resourced. Farm schools were established primarily for the children of employees on the farm. The



structures were generally poor, and resourced very limited. In view of small numbers, teachers had to teach multiple grades in one class. The qualifications of farm schoolteachers were much lower than those of their colleagues in the urban areas.

This study was conducted in three farm schools all of which are under resourced with no electricity, no water, poor sanitation, and poor access to the school by road. It does seem that the conditions in the school do not attract learners to the school or motivate them to remain in school. When the youth were asked to explain what they liked about their schooling experience and their school, most of them were silent on this question. However, they openly articulated their difficult experiences such as learning in multi-grade classes, in poor school buildings, and with limited resources

Ntombela (2003) argues that in under resourced school where teachers are unqualified or under qualified and where teaching and learning materials are insufficient or non-existent, there is a low level of motivation for both teachers and learners. Learners and even teachers absent themselves regularly from school and from classes. If they are present they are disengaged from school and learning, and they contribute to the poor culture of teaching and learning. All that factors leads to a negative a school environment and subsequent failure and retention of large number of students. These factors are also associated with learners dropping out of school all together.

Chisholm and Vally (1996) in their year-long study on the culture of learning and teaching in Gauteng, concluded that it is clear that the socio-economic context within which the schools are located greatly affects the dynamics within these schools. Most

teams points to the stark deprivations faced by many pupils on daily basis, problems that they bring with them to school. Basic necessities such as food, parental love, care, and in some cases shelters, are absent. A high unemployment rate and rivalry over scarce resources in surrounding communities have contributed to social problems such as theft and vandalism of school property, violence against women and children, and so forth. Therefore the culture teaching and learning in schools is non-existing.

#### **5.2.8 Pregnancy**

Much of the literature suggests that teenage pregnancy is one of the most common factors that cause learners to dropout of school. Schwartz (1995), in his study in the U.S. context point out that nearly one-third of the females who dropped out cited pregnancy as the reason. Schwartz reported that in 1992 about one-fifth of the dropouts, approximate age 18, were married, living as married, or divorced, with females more likely than males to be married. In the present study, none of the participants (teachers, parents or youths) cited teenage pregnancy as a reason for dropping out of school. Of the four female dropouts who participated in this study none of them were pregnant or had a child. However, the big sister of youth 3 dropped out of school because she was pregnant. She was 14 years old in grade 5. Youth 7 impregnated a girl when he was only 15 years in grade 6. His father refused to allow him to continue with his schooling.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

In the analysis of the findings in this study, an ecological perspective has been provided. It is evident that factors associated with school dropout can be identified at the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-levels of community and society. The most exclusionary factor that emerges is poverty and under-development in the community linked to wider social, political and economic influences in the country. Children from families that are fractured and living in poverty, where there is unemployment and underdevelopment, where there are no real incentives and motivation for remaining in school, and where schools are severely under-resourced are at risk of dropping out of school.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

It has been ten years since the first democratic election in South Africa which resulted in different policies and legislation put in place. The South African Constitution recognises that everyone has a right to basic education, and South African Schools Act of 1996 makes education compulsory and free to children aged 6-14. Despite all the policies and legislation that have been promulgated, children are still not attending school and many are dropping out of the system. It is clear that the goal of universal primary education has not yet been realized. Systemic, ecological factors embedded in the system are associated with this situation. The findings in this study suggest some factors that are associated with school dropout in the context of a specific group of farm schools.

The different factors that place learners at risk of dropping out that have emerged in the study are.

- *Low socio-economic status.* The research study indicated poverty as the primary factor that caused learner to drop out of school. Parents cannot afford the funds needed to send their children to school, despite the fact that the SA Schools Act has legislated that no child should be refused an education on the basis of fees. There are other exclusionary pressures on poor parents such as school uniforms, and transport costs that are not being addressed.

- *Single parent household.* Children growing up in a single parent household are more likely to dropout of school as there is frequently less parental support and supervision.
- *Mobility.* This plays a strong role in learners dropping out of farm schools as families tend to move when jobs become unavailable.
- *Under resourced schools.* The three farm schools in this study are under resourced. There is a low level of motivation and a low morale for both teachers and learners. The difficult teaching and learning environment contributes to the risk of school dropout, in particular the dynamics of multi-grade classrooms and lack of professional development of teachers to equip them to cope in such settings.
- *Education attainment of parents.* Parents' own educational experiences also shape the expectations they themselves hold for their children. Low educational attainment of parents, especially mothers, has a negative effect on learners' achievement.

The patterns that have emerged in this study are similar to those in other contexts, in particular more developing contexts. These factors are the key challenges that need to be engaged with if the goal of quality education for all is to become a reality in the context of rural farm schools. This small-scale study makes a significant contribution in that it has created what UNESCO (2000:67) refers to as 'moving pictures' of patterns of vulnerable children and their families. UNESCO (2000) suggests such maps of exclusion need to be created to make children and

their families visible. If children are ‘missing’ from the system, there is little pressure to take action.

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## **APPENDIX A: SEMI – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – SCHOOL DROPOUTS**

### **Personal Details**

Surname:

First name:

Gender:

Age:

### **Social Factors**

1. Where do you live?
2. Do you know people in your area that completed matric? Tell me about them.
3. Are people in your area employed? Elaborate.
4. Do you think it is easy to get a job after going to school? Why?
5. Who have better opportunities of obtaining a job, girls and boys? Why?

### **Family Factors**

1. Tell me about your parents/caregivers and your family.
2. What do your parent's/caregivers do?
3. Are they happy with their jobs?
4. What is the education level of your parent(s)?

5. What is your relationship with your caregivers? Do your parent(s) praise you for good things you have done? Do your parent(s) know where you are when you go out?
6. What is the size of your family?
7. What is the education level of your siblings or extended family you live with?

### **Friends**

1. Do you have a best friend(s)? Tell me more about them.
2. What attributes do you admire most about your friend(s)?
3. Do your parent(s)/caregivers like your friend(s)? Tell me why?
4. Are your friends at school or out of school? Do/did they like school? Elaborate/

### **School Factors**

1. Tell me about the school you last attended?
2. How far was your school from home?
3. How long did it take to get to school?
4. How did you get to school?
5. Who did you travel or walk with?
6. What was your age of entry to school?
7. Were you at the same age as your classmates?
8. What grade did you last attend and when?
9. Did your school have good facilities?
10. What was the size of your class?

11. Were there multiple grade classrooms or not?
12. Tell me about the resources at your school.
13. Did children attend regularly?
14. What was the students' attitude about school?
15. Were you kept occupied in your class at all time?
16. Were your teacher(s) always around?
17. Did you think you got/received enough attention in your class?

## **APPENDIX B: PARTICIPATORY TECHNIQUES**

### **Ranking exercise 1:**

Participants are given blank cards.

Instructions: Will you draw things that you liked at school on these cards. Now place the cards on the table and rank them in order according to what you liked the most on top, and what you did not like at the bottom.

Participants were then requested to tell me about the drawings, and why they ranked them in particular ways.

### **Ranking exercise 2:**

A similar exercise to the above was done that requested participants to rank what they did not like about school. Participants then discussed why they ranked things in particular ways.

### **Time Line:**

The idea of a time line was explained to participants.

Instructions: Please draw your time line of a typical day in life. Start from the time you wake up, up to the time you go to bed at night. Participants then discussed their time line.

### **Ranking exercise 3:**

Participants are given blank cards.

Instruction: Will you draw things that you like to change in you life.



Now place the cards on the table and rank the cards in order according to what you would like to change the most top, and the least at the bottom.

Participants then discussed why they ranked things in particular ways.

## **APPENDIX C: SEMI – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW - PARENTS**

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### **Personal Details**

Surname:

First name:

Gender:

Age:

### **Social Factors**

1. Where do you live? Tell me about the area.
2. Are people in your area employed?
3. Do you know people in your area who have finish their matriculation (Grade 12)?
4. What level of schooling did you complete?
5. Do people get job when they complete their schooling?
6. Are you employed? Are members of your family employed?

### **Family Factors**

1. Tell me about your family?
2. Where does family income come from?

### **School Factor**

1. What is your view about school or education?
2. Do the children in your family go to school?
3. Do they enjoy going to school?
4. Do they attend school regularly?
5. How are they performing at school?
6. How do you support them at school?
7. What goals do you have for your children?

8. How far is the school from home?
9. How do the children get to school?
10. What is the age of their first entry to school for each of the children?
11. Do you discuss with your children, their experience at school?
12. I know that one of your children dropped out of school. Why did s/he drop out of school?
13. Would you like your child to go back to school?
14. What are his/her plans for the future, and do you support their plans?
15. How does child, child spend the day?
16. Do you like his/her friend(s)?

## **APPENDIX D: SEMI – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW - TEACHERS**

1. Introduction
2. Personal Details
3. School factors

What is the name of the school?

Where is it situated?

What is its school enrolment?

What is the ratio of teacher to people?

Tell me about the school's facilities and resources.

How much is the school fee per learner?

What are the qualifications of the teachers?

Do students attend school regularly?

What is the approx. percentage of learner dropout per year?

What is the percentage of learners who are older than other learners?

Tell me about them.

What kind of home background do the learners come from?

What is the view of the families about education?

Tell me more about particular learners who have drop out of school.

What do you think are the factors that lead to school dropout?

What do you think keeps learners at school?

What actions has the school taken to address this issue?