

**CAUSES OF SCHOOL DROPOUT AMONG LEARNERS IN A
RURAL FARM SCHOOL**

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degree of

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work on “Causes of school dropout among learners in a rural farm school” is my own work, both in conception and execution and that the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete reference.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines factors contributing to school dropout among learners in a rural farm school. The researcher used the qualitative case study method as a research design. The participants in this study were ten young people between the ages of 16 and 20 who *dropped out of school*, *four mothers of the learner participants*, as well as two educators. Data was collected through the use of school records, semi-structured interviews and one focus group interview. Data analysis was done through the process of coding. The findings reveal that several factors contribute simultaneously to school dropout: personal problems, the family, economic causes, school factors, teachers and friends. The emphasis, however, lies with economic factors and school factors that include the actions of teachers. Strategies in identifying and intervening with at-risk learners are recommended. It became apparent with this research that the actions of teachers as well as inadequacies within schools need to be addressed as a priority if the problem of school dropout is to be dealt with effectively.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The non-completion of school by many young people in South Africa is a serious concern for our educational and economic system. By leaving school before graduation, many dropouts have considerable educational deficiencies that limit their financial and social well-being throughout their adult lives (Hess, 2000:1; Lan & Lanthier, 2003:309; Croninger & Lee, 2001:548). It is, therefore, important to examine the complex process that underlies the decision to leave school.

The latest available national statistics on the dropout rate appeared in a document published by the Treasury in 2003. It showed that, on average, for every 100 children in Grade 1, there were 52 in Grade 12 (Govender, 2005:1).

In the Editorial of the *Sunday Times* of 18 September 2005, it was stated that:

In a fast developing economy such as South Africa, the need for a functioning and efficacious education system cannot be overstated. It is therefore shocking and worrisome that according to recent studies, almost half of the country's pupils are either dropping out of school, or not finishing school in the expected 12 years.

It is crucial to understand why so many children are excluded from educational opportunity. Until these reasons are clarified, actions to remedy the situation can neither be planned nor effected.

1.1 Motivation for the study to be undertaken

School dropout is a highly visible sign of a society that has failed to prepare its youth for successful transition into adulthood. Large numbers of dropouts weaken the economy because they are unprepared to work and they place a burden on unemployment and welfare services, as well as the criminal justice system. Dropouts run the risks of becoming drains on society rather than productive and contributing members (Capuzzi & Gross, 1989:326). Gage (Downing & Vette, 1994:1) states that dropping out also means higher mortality rates, higher suicide rates, and higher rates of admission to mental health programmes in hospitals.

It is a well-substantiated concern that far too many students drop out of school (Finn, Freeland, Kominski, as cited in Downing & Vette, 1994:1). A number of studies carried out by countries participating in the Dakar conference in 2000, on “Education for All”, found that globally, primary school enrolment has increased by 82 million pupils since 1990, and there were 44 million more girls in school in 1998 than in 1990 (Brink, 2001:79). Unfortunately, the results are not all so positive. There are still more than 113 million children who have no access to primary education, and 880 million adults are illiterate. Gender discrimination continues to permeate through education systems, and *quality of learning and the acquisition of human values and skills fall short of the aspirations and needs of individuals and societies*. Youth and adults are denied access to the skills and knowledge necessary for them to find gainful work so they can contribute and participate in the societies in which they live (Brink, 2001:79).

Recently it has been estimated that there are over half a million children – approximately 5 percent of school-age children – who are not attending school in South Africa (Porteus, Clacherty, Mdiya, Pelo, Matsai, Qwabe & Donald, 2000:8).

This is a critical issue given the new constitution and its commitment to equal and appropriate education for all. Policy analysts and politicians have most often attributed the numbers of children who are out of school in South Africa to an undersupply of schools and classrooms, particularly in the poorer provinces (Porteus *et al*, 2000:8).

While school dropouts constitute only a sub-set of those who are out of school, the problem of dropout is recognised to be an issue which should not be oversimplified (Trueba, Spindler & Spindler, 1989:20) nor disengaged from its social context (Porteus *et al*, 2000:8). Previous research (Gordon, Bekombo, Palme, as cited in Porteus *et al*, 2000:8) have shown that, in Africa specifically, economic factors related to poverty and the need to earn, traditional family role expectations, and problems related to the perceived irrelevance of the school curriculum, are a few of the factors that have been found to relate to dropout.

Findings of a longitudinal study of U.S. high school students, conducted by the National Centre for Education Statistics in 1986, state that dropouts usually come from low-income, single-parent families and that they are likely to be members of a minority group, and possess low basic academic skills. Male youth are more likely to leave school than female youth, and male youth drop out to work, whereas female youth drop out because of pregnancy (Downing & Vette, 1994:1).

Similar findings were made by Kronick and Hargis (1990) in their extensive research on the reasons why children leave school and the recommended action. The professional literature is reasonably consistent as to the nature of the dropout population (Downing, Harrison & Thomas, 1990:2).

The data tracing progression of children through school in South Africa, who started grade 1 in 1983 and reached grade 12 in 1994, show that girls drop out at a far lower

rate than boys. There are also disparities between the different race groups, with coloured children having the highest dropout rates. Only 30 % of coloured girls and 23 % of coloured boys reach standard 10 over the same period (Research Institute for Educational Planning, University of the Orange Free State, December 1995; in Pillay, 1996:156).

It is the needs of the particular group of vulnerable children who dropped out of school and have fallen outside the more traditional and recognised social, educational or familial institutions that will be addressed in this research.

As a teacher at a farm school for more than fourteen years, the researcher had witnessed too many children leaving school to work on the farm on which their parents are also labourers. This is an issue that the researcher remained passionate about, even after leaving the small school to accept another position. This research, therefore, attempted to make a detailed analysis of the factors leading to children being out of school in a poor and marginalised rural community. It is hoped that the research can contribute meaningfully to the existing body of literature about school dropouts that often focuses on urban youth, ignoring the fate of young people who live in rural areas who might be even more disadvantaged.

1.2 The Context

The research was undertaken in the small rural community of De Doorns and surrounding farms. De Doorns is situated about 140 kilometres from Cape Town. Farms are owned by white farmers. Farm labourers here earn about R1 200, 00 per month, which is far below the minimum living wage. The area is poverty-ridden. Farm labourers mostly live on the farms in housing provided by the farm owner, and their children attend schools situated on the farm. The youth who participated in this study are learners who have dropped out of one such farm school, namely Bonne

Esperance Primary School and a secondary school in the small rural town of De Doorns, Hex Rivier Secondary.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions are as follow:

- 1.3.1 What do the learners who participate in this study see as the causes leading to them dropping out of school?
- 1.3.2 What perceptions do they hold of themselves and their future?
- 1.3.3 What perceptions do they hold of their school experiences?

1.4 Research Aims

The research aims arise out of the problem statement and can be stated as follow:

- 1.4.1 *To explore the factors leading to learners being out of school in poor and marginalised rural communities.*
- 1.4.2 To examine the perceptions which learners hold of themselves and their future.
- 1.4.3 To examine the perceptions learners hold of their school experiences.

1.5 Operational definition of terms

1.5.1 “Out- of- school- children”

The term out of school children in this study shall mean children who leave school for any reason except death, before completing a programme of studies that equip them with necessary work-related skills and without transferring to another school.

1.5.2 Marginalised rural community

The term marginalised rural community in this study shall mean farm workers earning below minimum wage.

1.5.4 School experiences

In this study, the term school experiences shall refer to the time that the children spent in school and what happened to them specifically in relation to what led up to their dropping out.

1.5.5 Farm school

The term farm school in this study shall refer to a school that serves the educational needs of children from the surrounding farms.

1.6 Method of investigation

1.6.1 The research design

This study was conducted within the qualitative paradigm. Brink (1991:14) states that, in qualitative research, there is an attempt to humanise the research process. One of the characteristics of qualitative research is the fact that the researcher attempts to understand people in terms of their own definitions of the world. The qualitative researcher is concerned with humans and their environment in all their complexity (Polit & Hungler; in Brink, 1991:14). The qualitative research approach is particularly suited for the research aims and problems of my research as I endeavoured to understand and describe a particular phenomenon, namely children residing in a rural farming community who have dropped out of school.

This study can be viewed as explorative, because the researcher wants to gain insight in terms of the factors leading to children being out of school, the perceptions they hold of themselves and their school experiences.

The researcher utilised a case study research design. In a case study, a particular individual, programme, or event is studied in depth for a defined period of time. A case study is suitable for learning more about a little-known or poorly understood situation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:149). Review of the relevant literature shows that few studies have investigated the school dropout problem in the South African “coloured” community (Van Rooyen, 1990:5) and the particular dynamics of rural school dropouts (Weis, Farrar & Petrie, 1989:56).

1.6.2 Sampling Design

The participants in this study were children who dropped out of school for any reason except death, before completion of a programme of studies that equip them with necessary work-related skills and without transferring to another school.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:400), purposeful sampling is “selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth”. This type of sampling is most often used in qualitative research (Babbie & Mouton, 1999:287). The researcher searches for information-rich key informants to study. Purposeful sampling is done to increase the utility of information obtained from small samples. The power and logic of purposeful sampling is that a few cases studied in depth yield many insights into the topic (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:401).

The researcher also made use of snowball sampling, where the preceding participant named the next participant. Participant referrals are the basis for choosing the sample

(McMillan & Schumacher, 2001: 403).

The criteria for participation in this study were that the child (i) must have dropped out of school between 2002 and 2004, (ii) must be between the ages 16 and 20 years and (iii) must have passed Grade 5.

Participants were accessed by means of school records drawn from one farm school in the De Doorns area, namely Bonne Esperance Primary. The researcher is an ex-teacher of the school, and this prior relationship and knowledge of the school culture allowed for easier access to possible respondents.

The researcher identified twenty-four learners from the school records. After contacting the learners, the sample was narrowed down to ten. Two of the identified prospective participants no longer resided in the area and a further two were not willing to participate in the study.

To gain further insight into the reasons for their dropping out, the parents of four of the participants were also interviewed. Two teachers, who had experience in working with these children and who were willing to participate in this study, were also interviewed.

The participants all reside in the rural town of De Doorns or on surrounding farms. All participants were “coloured”, and were the children of farm workers.

1.6.3 Method of data collection

Data were collected by means of individual interviews and one focus group interview. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant, the parents and the teachers. A young female psychologist facilitated the focus group

interview. The interviews were audio-taped after permission for this had been obtained. These recordings were transcribed *verbatim* and the resulting texts analysed.

1.6.4 Administrative procedures

Permission was obtained from the learners who participated in this study as well as from their parents, in cases where children were under the age of sixteen.

1.6.5 Method of data analysis

Data was analysed in accordance with the method of Huberman and Miles, as described in Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 428-429). The transcripts of all the interviews were read through in order to get a global impression of the content. Thereafter, categories were identified to cluster the data into meaningful groups and the data were coded."

1.6.6 Validity and reliability of the research

The validity of this study was supported by describing the findings in sufficiently rich, "thick" detail so that the readers can draw their own conclusions from the data presented. The researcher also consulted with colleagues in the field to determine whether they agree or disagree that the researcher has made appropriate interpretations and drawn valid conclusions from the data. The researcher took the conclusions back to the participants in the study and asked them whether they agree with conclusions and whether they make sense based on their own experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:106).

To increase the reliability of the study the researcher used low-inference descriptors

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To increase the reliability of the study the researcher used low-inference descriptors

by tape recording all interviews, transcribing these tapes according to the needs of reliable analysis and presenting long extracts of data in the discussion section (Silverman, 2001: 226). A case study protocol and a case study database were also used to enhance reliability (Yin, 2003:37).

1.7 Summary

In this Chapter, the researcher attempted to contextualise the problem of school dropout in South Africa. Furthermore, literature from previous studies on the phenomenon of school dropout was discussed. The researcher also described how participants of the present study were identified and accessed, as well as the research design that was deemed to be most appropriate for the purpose of this study. Operational definitions of terms utilized in this study were given.

In the following chapter, a detailed review of the relevant literature is presented.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Dropping out of school is a major problem in our society, as it is in much of Africa, because of the high numbers involved and because of the wastage of potential for what are essentially preventable reasons (Donald; in Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002:209). Technological advancements have placed a demand for a highly educated work force and decreased demand for unskilled labour. Not long ago, a high school dropout could secure a job at a local factory and do quite well. Today, manual labour jobs have been eliminated by automation, or pay so poorly that such work cannot support a family (Schoenlein, 2004:15).

Reasons for dropping out of school are complex and should not be oversimplified (Trueba, Spindler & Spindler, 1989:20). Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesco and Fernandez (1989:221) state that background conditions arising from family, social and economic circumstances all can contribute to an individual's decision to leave school. Some school policies and practices can also lead students to quit school.

In Southern Africa the problem has not yet been sufficiently researched. Weis, Farrar and Petrie (1989:3) point out:

Although there is some literature on the subject of dropouts, we still know relatively little about the subject. We do not know why, from the students' own perspective, dropping out may appear to be a viable option. We also do not know the extent to which an economy that denies jobs to so many at this point in time relates to the dropout problem.

Much work has however been done on the reasons why children leave school and the characteristics of the dropout population will be discussed at length in this chapter. The researcher will also discuss South African literature about the phenomenon of school dropout that will serve to highlight the complex challenges facing South African youth.

The focus of this chapter will be to review the literature on school dropouts so as to provide sufficient background and context to the present study.

2.2 Definition of a dropout

There is a lack of a common, accepted definition of a dropout (Frymier & Gansneder, in Egeyed, McIntosh & Bull, 1998:153; Cohen & deBettencourt, 1991:264; Kronick & Hargis, 1990:62; Weis, Farrar & Petrie, 1989:2). However, there have been several attempts to identify and define major types of dropouts. Morrow (1986:343) noted that dropouts could be defined in several ways: “pushouts,” undesirable individuals the schools actively try to force out of school; “disaffiliated” learners who neither bond to school nor to people in it and who do not want to continue to be in contact with the school; “educational mortalities”, meaning those who are incapable of completing the programme before they age out of it, usually slow learners or those in special education; “capable dropouts,” individuals who possess the skills for graduation but who are not socialized to school demands or to the value of a diploma; and “stopouts,” individuals who leave and typically return within the year.

Bickel, Bond and LeMahieu (cited in Capuzzi & Gross, 1989:347), pointed out that the term “dropout” itself is potentially misleading because it implies a single decision point to leave school, with the learner as the sole decision maker. That is not always the case. Some learners merely “fade out” after a period of feeling alienated from

school. Others can be subtly “pushed out” by school personnel who do not want to deal with them any longer. Still others are “pulled out” either by more important demands on their time such as parenting or supporting elderly family members, or by negative community influences such as gangs. Some learners also leave school but do return, perhaps only to drop out again. It is clear from the abovementioned definitions that different learners, even learners within the same school, leave school under different circumstances and for varied reasons.

In America, a learner can be considered a dropout in one state if absent for 15 unexcused days; whereas, in another state, the criterion is 45 unexcused days. Since each state specifies its own definition, the term dropout includes a variety of school leavers with various characteristics such as expelled learners, learners with prolonged illnesses, learners who have been incarcerated, and those who have died (McMillan *et al*; in Cohen & De Bettencourt, 1991:264).

Some studies have provided less concrete definitions of the dropout. Mann (1986:311) identified death, marriage, employment, the military, early college entry, expulsion and incarceration as general causes of dropping out, but failed to provide specific definitions of each cause. In addition, some states view learners as dropouts only if they have reached legal age, therefore not accepting those who leave school prior to sixteen years of age as legitimate dropouts (Weis, Farrar, & Petrie, 1989:2).

The imprecise use of the term tends to impede systematic research. Hammack (1986:324) pointed out that there has been intense political pressure to keep the dropout rate down, and this pressure can affect the data. Morrow (1986:343) concluded that, because the term is so ill-defined and potentially includes any or all of the above, it is difficult to monitor the population we call dropouts and conduct systematic research on the subject.

Morrow (1986: 344) suggested three criteria for a definition: (1) is the student actively enrolled? ; (2) if not, has the enrolment been formally transferred to another legitimate institution? ; and (3) has the student earned a high school diploma or its equivalent? A school's dropouts are those students, at one time formally enrolled, for whom all three questions are answered in the negative.

For the present study the dropout will be defined as persons who neither are enrolled in school nor are graduated from high school.

Implicit in much research on school dropouts is the assumption that a better understanding of the characteristics of dropouts will permit educators to develop policies and to provide practices that will reduce the number of dropouts (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986:376). As Wehlage and Rutter so acutely stated:

The intent is noble, but the results have been negligible because the focus on social, family and personal characteristics does not carry any obvious implications for shaping school policy and practice.

In a study of a relationship between disciplinary problems in school and dropping out, there is some evidence that suggests that the school itself may contribute to negative school experiences leading to dropout (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986: 375). Wehlage and Rutter (1986: 376) also noted that “[t]hey leave because they do not have much success in school and they do not like it”.

The diversity of the reasons given for dropping out of school, comprising academic, behavioural, economic, and personal factors, suggested that there is no single, simple cause underlying this problem. The literature suggests that researchers should look for the cause of dropping out not only in the characteristics of the dropout, but also in relation to those institutional characteristics that affect the learner in a negative

manner.

Wehlage and Rutter (1986:25) identified three general causes of dropping out: social and family background, personal problems and school factors. These sets of factors are interrelated and interact in ways that are not yet well understood. These factors affect learners differentially; that is, situations or influences that affect one learner's decision to drop out seem to have little effect on another's. The complexity of these causal factors suggests that learners drop out for different reasons at different times.

During the 1960s and 1970s, research tended to focus on learner characteristics that correlated with lack of success in finishing high school. The assumption of such research was that it is the entering learners who themselves are responsible for dropping out rather than the institution of schooling or aspects of broader society which must be held accountable for the problem (Weis, Farrar, & Petrie, 1989: 3). The research has now begun to move from a simple description of the background characteristics associated with dropping out to explanations of what it is about these characteristics that cause dropping out and how these characteristics interact with schooling to produce dropouts (Wehlage 1989:2).

2.3 The South African context

From the 1996 census, it was found that 1, 3 million children aged between seven and eighteen were not enrolled in schools or other educational institutions in South Africa (The Education Foundation, 2000:33; in Donald *et al*, 2002:211). A report in the *Sunday Times* of 18 September 2005 stated that 50 % of children who started Grade 1 made it to matric. The paper also found that, in the Western Cape, 39 302 of the 81 137 learners in Grade 3 in 1996 are in matric this year; in Mpumalanga, 16 681 learners dropped out of school this year; between 6 000 and 7 000 learners left school prematurely in KwaZulu Natal in 2004; a total of 150 562 Grade 1 learners in 2001

and 136 684 in 2002 disappeared from the school system nationally; in the Eastern Cape, 23 000 learners dropped out of Grade 11 in 2003; and a total of 19 969 dropped out of schools in North West in 2003. In a document published by the Treasury in 2003, it showed that, on average, for every 100 children in Grade 1 there were 52 in Grade 12 (Govender, 2005:1).

A study conducted by De Jager (2005:1) found that, in 2000, sixteen percent of individuals in South Africa, aged 6 – 14 years, were not enrolled in school. In 2003, fifty three point three percent of learners in the Western Cape, who were in grade 8 in 1999, matriculated in 2002 (Ibid).

Further research tracing the progression of children through school shows that girls drop out at a far lower rate than boys. There are also disparities between the different race groups. For every 100 African girls who started Grade 1 in 1983, 51 reached Grade 12 in 1994. The comparative figure for African boys was 35. For every 100 white girls starting Grade 1 in 1983, 86 reached Grade 12 compared with 84 white boys. For every 100 Indian girls starting Grade 1 in the same year, 82 reached Grade 12 compared with 72 Indian boys. Coloured children have the highest dropout rates with only 30 % of coloured girls and 23 % of coloured boys reaching Grade 12 over the same period (Research Institute for Educational Planning, University of the Orange Free State, December 1995; in Pillay, 1996:156).

The abovementioned statistics show a grave picture of the dropout rate in South Africa. Understanding the reasons why so many children are currently out of school is a critical issue and needs to be clarified before actions to remedy the situation can be planned or effected.

2.4 Characteristics of school dropout

It is a well-substantiated concern that far too many learners drop out of school (Finn, Freeland, Kominsky, as cited in Downing & Vette, 1994:1). Recent studies have addressed the urgency of correcting this situation (Downing & Vette, 1994:1) if the commitment to equal and appropriate education for all (South African Constitutional Assembly, 1996) is to be achieved.

Identifying characteristics of learners who drop out of school has traditionally been a starting point for remediation (Cervantes, 1965; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock, 1986; Kronick & Hargis, 1990; Downing, Harrison & Thomas, 1990). There are three general causes of dropping out identified in the literature: social and family background, personal problems and school factors (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko & Fernandez, 1989:25 - 26).

The causes as identified will now be listed and discussed.

2.4.1 Social and family background

- Low socio-economic status
- Racial/ethnic minority groups
- Single parent homes
- Poverty
- Parents with a low educational achievement

2.4.2 Personal problems

- Health problems, both mental and physical
- Substance abuse

- Legal problems
- Trauma from divorce or death in the family
- Pregnancy
- Learning disabilities

2.4.3 School factors

- Retention in grade
- Course failure
- Truancy
- Suspension
- Disciplinary problems

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the above three sets of factors are interrelated and interact in different ways and affect learners differentially; that is, situations or influences that affect one learner's decision to drop out seem to have little effect on another's. It is therefore suggested that the problem of dropout is not a simple one and that there are many causes for a learner's decision to leave school (Wehlage *et al*, 1989; Ekstrom *et al*, 1986).

Researchers have focused far more on the learner than the school. Some researchers, however, especially Wehlage and Rutter (1986:377), claim that the point of concern should be the school and that research needs to focus on the characteristics of the school rather than that of the learner. As Kronick and Hargis (1990: 67) stated: "If meaningful insights into the problems of the dropout are to be achieved, issues which are centred around the impact of the educational system should be further explored".

2.5 Social and family background

2.5.1 The role of parents in dropping out

Family is an important factor related to dropping out. Researchers who have investigated the impact of the family environment on dropping out focused their attention on the interaction between children and parents. They found that parents' expectations for children's education, parents' involvement in children's schoolwork, and parents' support of learners' autonomy were positively related to the likelihood that the children would graduate from high school (Lan & Lanthier, 2003:311).

According to Fensham (1986:308), learners from poor families or from parents who have had little education are more likely than others to see little meaning in their studies, to perform poorly in school work, to dislike school and to leave school early. The above findings are supported by Rumberger (as cited in Hess, 2000:5), who also found that parenting styles are thought to influence academic achievement by fostering the development of autonomy and maturity in children. Hess (2000:5) stated that: "Parents of dropouts tend to be more permissive, to use negative sanctions and emotions in reaction to their children's academic performance, and to be less engaged with their children's schooling".

2.5.2 Socio-economic status

Several authors have shown that individuals with ethnic minority backgrounds and low socio-economic status consistently have shown higher dropout rates (Ekstrom *et al*, 1986; Pollack & Rock, 1986; Kaplan *et al*, 1997; McNeal, 1995; Rumberger, 1983 & 1987, as cited in Lan & Lanthier, 2003:311). Finn, in Wehlage, Rutter *et al*, 1989:29) supported the argument and argued that nearly every study shows that dropping out are correlated with low socio-economic class, minority status, low test

scores and grades, and dissatisfaction with school. He concluded that “the problem exists not because of deficiencies in the schools but rather of deficiencies in individuals and families”.

2.5.3 Poverty

Donald *et al* (2002: 209) have found that, in South Africa, the single most influential factor that causes children to drop out of school is an economic one. In poor communities, parents often cannot afford the costs of schooling. There is also often the expectation that children should take on economic responsibilities so that the family can cope. The result is that children drop out of school to earn money (Gordon, in Donald *et al*, 2002:209) or take on other family and social responsibilities (Bekombo, as cited in Donald *et al*, 2002:209). In a study conducted by Porteus, Clacherty, Mdiya, Pelo, Matsai, Qwabe and Donald (2000), where the factors underlying school non-attendance in three poor, marginalized communities in South Africa were analysed, the findings revealed that poverty was judged to be the most common primary and contributory reason for children being out of school. These findings were supported by Everatt and Jennings (as cited in Pillay, 1996:157). These authors have done a national survey of out-of-school children in South Africa and reported that the main reason given by respondents for dropping out of school was financial. Crouch (as cited in Pillay, 1996:158) comments as follows: “There is no such thing as free education. Even when it is nominally free to the user, it is not free of costs in terms of out-of-pocket expenditure”. An article in the *Sunday Times* of 18 September 2005 quoted Lilla du Toit, Acting Chief Director for Examination Assessment in the Eastern Cape: “Poverty contributes to pupils dropping out of school. They don’t have money for the basics. School is a luxury; you just don’t go”.

2.6 Personal Problems

Literature on at-risk learners indicates that dropping out of school is a complex phenomenon. Some learners, regardless of their race, class or family status, develop personal problems that make continued schooling difficult or impossible: physical health problems, drug abuse, pregnancy and psychological depression prevent these learners from staying in school (Wehlage *et al*, 1989:221). Similar risk factors that are frequently reported as learner-related risk factors and that may lead to a learner dropping out of school include personal problems independent of social and family background as well as legal problems (Asche, 1993:10).

2.6.1 Teen pregnancy

Although it is no longer legal to dismiss a learner on the basis of her pregnancy or marital state, it is nevertheless commonplace for a pregnant teen to drop out because of social pressures, inability to schedule classes, feelings of social rejection, absence of day care, or health problems. In a study by Fine (1991:77), it was reported that forty percent of pregnant teens drop out of school. The negative effects of early pregnancy on mothers and babies are exacerbated, because of inadequate prenatal services, access to contraception and abortion, sexuality education, and child care facilities. The employment opportunities for teen mothers also make having a child and the simultaneous pursuit of education nearly impossible (Fine, 1986:405). Problems like family violence, illness, death, and unemployment combine in ways that make some adolescents, particularly young women, feel as though they have to leave school to care for family needs (Fine, 1991:78).

Wehlage and Rutter (1986:377) have found similar findings in analysing the data from the High School and Beyond national sample. They argued that the problem of girls leaving school because of marriage and/or pregnancy is a major factor in the

dropout rate and that about half of all female dropouts leave for this combined reason. They supported this by saying:

It is an important social phenomenon when children are having children, but it is also a reflection on the holding power of the school for low socio-economic females, since having a child generally means termination of high school. How is it that childcare is more attractive than schooling or that schools are unable to entice these young mothers back into the education stream?

2.6.2 Behavioural problems

In a study by Egyed, McIntosh and Bull (1998: 154), the authors found that no hope of graduating, emotional problems, frustration, being too old for the peer group, undiagnosed learning disabilities, being too different from the peer group, and medical problems correlate high with dropping out of school. Behavioural problems are usually evidenced by disruptive classroom behaviour, cutting classes, truancy and suspension and other disciplinary infractions (Asche, 1993:10). Furthermore, behaviour problems often lead to conflict with the law, which also is cited as a major factor causing school dropout.

Farmer, Estell, Leung, Trott, Bishop and Cairns (2003: 218), in a study of subtypes of school dropouts, noted that youth who had high levels of problem behaviour tended to have the highest likelihood of dropping out.

2.6.3 Working

Researchers have also found that working can contribute to a learner dropping out of school (Mann, 1986:310). Ekstrom *et al* (1986:361), in their analysis of the salient characteristics of the dropout population, reported that dropouts were more likely to

be working for pay during their sophomore years than were stayers. The future dropouts reported working more hours per week than the stayers and receiving a higher hourly wage. They also found their jobs more enjoyable than school and reported that their job was more important to them than school. Mann (1986:310) argued that work-related reasons, as cited by dropouts, are a push-pull situation. Some are pushed by family necessity and some are pulled by the attraction of cash. He concluded: "Either way, being in paid employment poses a cruel choice for young people already at risk. Given limited time and energy, schoolwork suffers" (Ibid.).

Capuzzi and Gross (1989: 351) supported this evidence and also reported that dropouts were more frequently working for pay during their sophomore year and that dropouts were more likely than graduates to view their current jobs as being more important than school.

2.7 School factors

According to Wehlage *et al* (1989:46), it was argued that much of the research on the dropout problem has focused on the personal and demographic characteristics of the dropouts themselves. The assumption fostered by much of this research is that dropouts are deviants or the products of deficient homes. According to this research the problem is thus viewed as one of fixing up deviant and defective learners, and not as an educational issue.

According to Wehlage *et al* (1989: 36), while several data bases and analyses have differed in certain respects, mainstream research has tended to create a rather one-sided view of dropouts. It is the characteristics of learners, along with their families and cultural backgrounds that are responsible for their dropping out. The major studies have not questioned the policies and practices of schools. More recent research into dropping out have begun to produce a more complex and balanced

picture of the problem, however. There is strong evidence that course failure and school disciplinary problems, in combination with chaotic personal, social and family background conditions contribute to dropping out (Ekstrom *et al*, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Fine, 1986).

Although it was established through research that learners' home and personal problems contribute to their failure in school, schools contribute in important ways to the problems of learners. Evidence supporting this argument was drawn from studies in Boston middle schools, as well as High School and Beyond studies. The evidence called into question policies and practices that cause many learners to be suspended, to receive failing marks, and to be retained in grade (Wehlage *et al*, 1989:47).

Several researchers argued that it is time to stop focusing on causes in relation to individual learners and their backgrounds, and to start pointing the finger at the school itself (Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005:3). The researchers further maintain that the role of schools in pushing children out is largely underestimated (Smyth & Hattman, Lee & Burkman, Riehl, as cited in Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005:3). Most learners do not report seeing themselves dropping out earlier in their schooling. Kronick and Hargis (1990:67) have noted that what appears continually in the literature is that the dropout reports "school was not for me" as the main reason for leaving. They concluded that something in the very nature of the school operates to facilitate these youth in their leaving school. This phenomenon is often referred to as pushout rather than dropout. Grier (2000: 55) explained the pushout phenomenon as follows:

Many learners who are pushed out feel unwelcome and unsuccessful. Over time, they begin to spend less time and energy on academics. The feeling of being pushed out can lead to disruptive behaviour, habitual absenteeism, or a kind of intellectual dropping out. Schools usually punish this kind of

behaviour by suspending learners or giving them failing grades, but this often just exacerbates the problem.

Fine (1991: 79) reported in her study of high school dropouts in an Urban Public High School that almost one quarter of those interviewed claimed that they had been discharged coercively or forced to leave school prior to graduation. She reported that for males the pushout scene was routine. For example, there is a fight and the boy is referred to the headmaster's office. He is discharged with little discussion of learners' rights and a fairly substantial withholding of information. Because the learners are from low income households and have scarce resources themselves, as do their parents or guardians, the likelihood that they will appeal is slight. Fine (1991: 80) concluded that schools engage in a rationalized exiling of learner bodies. Beekhoven and Dekkers (2005: 2) also identified push factors as problems at school, either with learning, behaviour or motivation that push learners out of the school system.

Research that studied the school-related behaviours and attitudes of dropouts has found that the immediate causes of dropping out are most often linked with school problems (Wehlage *et al*, 1989:26). Ekstrom *et al* (1986: 358) pointed out that children who dropped out of school had:

- lower school grades and lower test scores
- did less homework
- reported more disciplinary problems in school
- cut classes more frequently
- have been suspended from school
- have had trouble with the police
- reported higher rates of absenteeism and tardiness

2.7.1 Poor academic performance

Rumberger (as cited in Lan & Lanthier, 2003:312), using information from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), has found that learners' academic performance, measured by their course grades and standardized test scores, was a significant predictor of dropping out. Other researchers such as Simner and Barnes (as cited in Lan & Lanthier, 2003:312) found that the academic performance of learners in their early school career was negatively related to high-school dropout. They reported that low reading and arithmetic scores in first grade predicted a high probability of dropping out before high school graduation. Grier (2000: 56) agreed in his study on dropouts and noted that over 90 percent of the dropouts in the school he studied experienced academic trouble and that trouble started early. Most learners did not read on grade level at the end of third grade and fell further behind as their educational careers continued.

2.7.2 Low self-esteem

Students who become dropouts have been shown to be dissatisfied with school and to have lower self-esteem (Ekstrom *et al*, 1986:357). Lan and Lanthier (2003:313) supported these findings and noted: "If dropping out is characterised by a lack of academic success and low motivation for school work, it is not surprising to find that dropout learners have low self-esteem". Wood, Hillman and Sawilowsky (in Lan & Lanthier, 2003:313) compared learners at risk of dropping out and dropout learners who lived in shelters or were homeless. The study showed that the learners who strayed away from school and home had lower self-esteem.

2.7.3 Low motivation

In a study investigating changes in personal attributes of high school dropouts between the 8th grade and 12th grade, low motivation is found to be an important factor predictive of dropouts (Lan & Lanthier, 2003:312). Vallerand and Fortier (as cited in Lan & Lanthier, 2003:312) argued that if school administrators, teachers, and parents were supportive of learners' autonomy, the learners would feel competent in school activities and self-determinant in school-related affairs. The perceived autonomy and competence on the part of learners would further develop into self-determined school motivation. Other researchers (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Kaplan *et al*, 1997, in Lan & Lanthier, 2003:313) have reported similar findings, namely that learners were losing their motivation for school work before dropping out.

2.7.4 Alienation from school

Ekstrom *et al* (1986:364), using data from the High School and Beyond study, reported that one third of all dropouts in the study leave high school because they do not achieve in school and/or because they are alienated from school. As part of an extensive research project on street children, Schärf, Powell and Thomas (1986:272) also found that children of working-class families on the Cape Flats are educationally disadvantaged throughout their schooling, and for many of them school becomes a frightening and alienating experience. In order for them to cope with these difficult situations, they leave school.

Similar findings were reported by Lan and Lanthier (2003:314), who noted that dropout learners' alienation from school is also manifested in their negative perceptions of school, including disliking school and the feeling of not belonging in school. In a study by Rumberger (in Lan & Lanthier, 2003:314), the author found that

Hispanic male learners chose disliking school as the reason for dropping out more often than they did economic reasons. Barrett (2003: 357) concluded that negative school experiences too often lead learners to become alienated and disengaged from school. Ultimately the disconnected learners simply leave school.

2.7.5 Behaviour of dropouts

Research by Ekstrom *et al* (1986: 360) analysed the differences between school stayers and leavers. One of the major differences that was found was behaviour problems. Dropouts were more likely to have cut classes, to have had disciplinary problems, to have been suspended from school, or to have had trouble with the police. The dropouts also reported higher rates of absenteeism and tardiness. Astone and McLanahan (in Egyed *et al*, 1998:160) noted that behaviour patterns of dropouts showed more disengagement from school, as indicated by low grades, low aspirations, poor attendance and negative attitudes.

2.7.6 Retention

Donald *et al* (2002: 211) found that the numbers of children repeating classes, particularly in the early grades in disadvantaged schools, in the past have been very high in South Africa – and estimate that it could be as high as up to 30 percent in Grade 1. These children become much older than their classmates, and their physical, social and emotional development may become out of line with their scholastic development, which, in turn, may cause difficulties for them, for the other children and for the teacher. This has been a very common problem in the past, although the numbers of children being required to repeat classes is reducing under current policies.

According to Barro (as cited in Fine, 1991:74), nationally, the dropout rate doubles for learners who have repeated a grade compared with their age peers. Fine (1991:75) also noted that the experience of being held back in grade seems to dramatically disrupt one's educational and psychological well-being, and seems not to be associated with educational benefits. Jackson (cited in Fine, 1991:75) states that "there is no reliable body of evidence that indicates that grade retention is more beneficial than grade promotion for learners with serious academic and adjustment difficulties". More recent analysts suggest that:

Retention is a major intervention in a child's life ... The stress and disappointment associated with failure, the monetary cost of another year of school and the extra year of schooling in the child's life are substantial costs (Niklason in Fine, 1991:75).

Rigid retention policies are increasing, despite the fact that studies consistently link retention with dropping out of high school (Ibid).

Payne (1989:116) noted that being held back often means just repeating the kinds of teaching that failed the first time. Many educators still support the notion that school delay allows learners the opportunity to "catch up," yet numerous studies demonstrated that retention is a significant predictor of dropping out (Fine, 1991; Hirano-Nakanishi, 1986; Roderick, 1994; Velez as cited in Hess, 2000:6). "Schools that regularly practice retention are contributing to the problem of increased dropout rates," according to Hess (2000:6).

2.7.7 Truancy

A study by Beekhoven and Dekkers (2005:8) that assessed the reasons for very early school-leaving of four boys in the lower secondary vocational track concluded that truancy was common among the boys studied.

2.7.8 Holding power of school

According to Wehlage and Rutter (1986: 381), there is a serious problem with the holding power of school for some youth. Dropouts do not expect to get as much schooling as their peers. They do not perform as well as their peers on school tests, their grades are lower than those of their peers, they are more often truant both in and out of school, and they get into more disciplinary trouble than other learners. These learners then leave school for a different environment. They also noted that dropouts widely perceive their teachers as being uninterested and the discipline system as being ineffective and unfair as an indication of an institutional lack of legitimacy.

In a study by Engel (as cited in Egyed *et al*, 1998:156), the researcher found that dropouts reported school as being boring, uninteresting and unimportant. He also found that learners' negative reports of teachers were often based on the perception that the teachers were seen as uncaring and did not engage learners in active participation.

Wehlage and Rutter (1986:376), in their analysis of the High School and Beyond data, found that learners leave school because they do not have much success in school and they do not like it. For the dropout, school is a place where one gets into trouble.

Wehlage and Rutter (1986:385) concluded:

The process of becoming a dropout is complex because the act of rejecting an institution as fundamental to the society as school must also be accompanied by the belief that the institution has rejected the person. It begins with negative messages from the school concerning academic and discipline problems; the choice is between continuing an extra year or more in a setting that offers increasingly negative experiences and dropping out.

These youth believe that school is not for them.

Fine (1986:403) noted that classrooms are organised more around control than conversation, more around the authority of the teacher than autonomy of learners, and more around competition than collaboration.

Trueba, Spindler and Spindler (1989:138) stated that school personnel are more concerned with discipline and conformity than with building learners' capacity to think and develop their skills. Teachers are hard pressed to accomplish their tasks because of limited time, more curriculum objectives and other tasks. They are worn down and their capacity for human interaction deteriorates. The consequences of the over-demanding tasks and insufficient time are that teachers give the impression that they do not care about learners, and thus learners leave school. The single most important reason given by school dropouts for leaving school is the lack of caring on the part of the teachers. Similar findings were cited by Croninger and Lee (2001:551), who stated that dropouts frequently complain that their teachers do not care about them, are not interested in how well they do in school, and are unwilling to help them with their problems. They reported that they have fewer positive social interactions and less access to assistance from teachers than their successful peers.

Coley (as cited in Egyed *et al*, 1998:154) summarized a study of school dropouts, which used a self-report questionnaire to ask learners the reasons why they dropped out of school. They reported school-related problems such as not liking school, getting poor grades, not being able to keep up with school work, and not getting along with their teachers as four of the top six reasons for dropping out. The quality of learners' relationships with teachers is an important predictor of educational success. Teachers, through their daily interactions with learners, can provide young people with emotional support and encouragement, particularly when school-related difficulties undermine their confidence in themselves as learners (Croninger & Lee, 2001:568). Schoenlein (2004:17) noted: "Research suggests that students are much more likely to stay in school if they feel some connection to something or someone in school".

2.7.9 Role of parents

Ekstrom *et al* (1986: 361), in their analysis of the 1980/1982 High School and Beyond data, reported that parents of dropouts are reported doing less monitoring of the learners' activities both in and out of school. It is also reported that dropouts tend to come from families in which parents are not graduates. Homes where mothers create an environment where studying can be done have fewer dropouts than homes where this environment is not created (Kronick & Hargis, 1990:67).

The contact between the family and the school can also influence a child's connection to school. Hess (2000:3) stated that parents and schools can model relationships that are supportive, opposed, or indifferent, and each is likely to help shape the child's own outlook on the value of school. Rumberger (cited in Hess, 2000:8) stated: "to better understand how both schools and families influence achievement and dropout behaviour, one must focus on the interaction between families and schools". It is frequently reported that parental involvement is critical to academic achievement and

school completion.

In an article that reviews the literature on school completion for Mexican Americans, it has been found that, because Hispanic parents tend to interact significantly less than do non-Hispanic parents with school personnel, teachers often see parents as uninvolved. Some teachers and administrators interpret these behaviours as not caring, which can lead to negative feelings towards parents (Valdivieso & Nicolau as cited in Hess, 2000:9). These authors suggested that Hispanic parents do care but do not think that they belong to the school.

Parenting styles are thought to influence academic achievement by fostering the development of autonomy and maturity in children. An authoritative parenting style is considered the most conducive to academic success because it cultivates better social attitudes and behaviours through joint decision-making (Rumberger *et al*, as cited in Hess, 2000:5).

2.7.10 Peer relationships

Peers exert a powerful influence on children, especially as they reach adolescence. Learners who drop out may experience difficulty in forming close relationships (Hess, 2000:6). In a study by Valverde (as cited in Hess, 2000:6), the impact of the peer group was the second strongest determining factor in the learners' decisions to leave school. Dropouts indicated feelings of alienation and rejection by peers. Dropouts were also more likely to engage in non-school activities. As they become disengaged from the purposes of schooling, these learners find peers like themselves. Research by Elliott and Voss (as cited in Kronick & Hargis, 1990: 67) supported this finding and noted that, if at-risk youths associate with other at-risk youths or dropouts, the probability is high that they will drop out of school.

Farmer, Estell, Leung, Trott, Bishop and Cairns (2003:218 - 219), in a study of subtypes of school dropouts, noted that youth, who had high levels of problem behaviour, tended to associate with delinquent peers. These youth are at increased risk of dropping out of school.

Ekstrom *et al* (1986:361) concluded: “dropouts appear to have chosen friends who are also more alienated from school than the friends of stayers”.

2.8 Summary

It is clear from the literature that dropping out of school involves a set of related variables that cut across the learners’ experiences and behaviours, the school environment, and support systems outside of the school including parents and peers.

Research has shown that the lack of a common, accepted definition of a dropout has clouded the research in this area (Egyed *et al*, 1998:153). Without a clear-cut definition, there cannot be quality intervention or true awareness of how great the problem is (Kronick & Hargis, 1990:65).

Learners drop out for a variety of personal reasons, and the impact of leaving school is affected by when an individual drops out and what he or she does after dropping out. Studies showed that the learners’ home environments have a critical, although indirect, impact on the decision to leave school (Ekstrom *et al*, 1986: 371).

Fine and Rosenberg (as cited in Payne, 1989:119) argued that much of the discussion concerning the dropout issue obscures more than it illuminates. The stress on the psychological problems of dropouts, their family problems, and their educational weaknesses divert attention from the possibility that dropouts are offering a critique of schooling and its relationship to society (Payne, 1989:113).

It is apparent that very little South African research has been done to illuminate the problem of school dropout in our unique country. More research needs to be done in order for the problem to be understood, and for the necessary changes in the educational policies and practices to be effected. The present study purports to shed light on the lives and experiences of “coloured” youth from a rural community in the Western Cape, in the hope that, with the knowledge generated from this research, more could be done to support young people to stay in school.

In chapter three the research methodology will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Katzenellenbogen, Joubert and Karim (1997:3) state that research is the systematic search or inquiry for knowledge. To obtain this knowledge, the researcher makes use of scientifically acceptable methods to investigate issues in order to make valid conclusions. To plan scientific inquiry, the researcher needs a research design. The researcher should state clearly what the intended study wants to achieve and determines the best way to do it (Babbie, 1998:89).

Mouton (as cited in Henning, Van Rensburg & Smith, 2004:30) makes the same point and talks about a design type as the way in which the research is conceived and executed, and how the findings are eventually put together.

The purpose of the present study was to explore the reasons why youth from a poor and marginalized rural community dropped out of school. The intention of the research is exploration. According to Babbie (1998: 90), this type of research is done to explore a topic, or to provide a beginning familiarity with that topic. Literature reveals that there are few studies done on school dropouts among coloured people in South Africa (Van Rooyen, 1990:9). This study can add to the literature by showing *relationships between events and meanings as perceived by participants*. Babbie (1998:90) explains that exploratory studies are done for three purposes:

- To satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding,
- To test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study,
- To develop the methods to be employed in any subsequent study.

Exploratory studies are essential whenever a researcher wants to gain new insights into a topic.

3.2 Research problem

Leedy and Ormrod (2001:49) state the following:

The heart of every research project is the problem. To see the problem with unwavering clarity and to state it in precise terms is the first requirement in the research process.

The researchers further conclude that the problem should address an important question to which the answer can make a difference in some way. It should improve the confines of knowledge by leading to new ways of thinking, suggesting possible applications, or paving the way for further research in the field.

The purpose of this study was:

- To explore the factors leading to learners being out of school in poor and marginalized rural communities.
- To examine the perceptions which the learners hold of themselves and their future.
- To examine the perceptions they hold of their school experiences.

The problem of school dropouts is a serious concern for our educational and economic system. In this study the learners themselves pointed out the relevant reasons for their early school leaving.

3.3 Research design

3.3.1 Qualitative research

This study is concerned with the meaning of the phenomenon and the lived experiences of the participants. In this study the researcher used the qualitative case study method as a research design. Brink (1991:14) emphasises that, in qualitative research, there is an attention to the social context in which events occur and have meaning and there is an emphasis on understanding the social world from the point of view of the participants in it.

The qualitative approach was used in a study conducted by Farrel, Pequero, Lindsey and White (Maykut & Morehouse, 1995:70) in the development of a dropout prevention programme. The researchers state:

To set up a viable program, it was necessary to gain some understanding of the population we were dealing with that went beyond attendance records, test scores, promotion records, and guidance referrals. First we needed to know what the lives of the students were like and how school fitted into those lives.

Farrell *et al* (Maykut & Morehouse, 1995:70) found the traditional quantitative approaches ill-matched and inappropriate to conducting an inquiry into the lives of students.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:1) describe qualitative research as multi-method in focus, which involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them.

To demonstrate the differences between the qualitative approach and the quantitative approach, Brink (1991:15) summarises the aims of the two approaches as follows:

The aim of qualitative research is to understand and interpret the meanings and intentions that underlie every day human action, while the aim of quantitative research is to explain human behaviour in terms of universally valid laws and generalisations.

Understanding in qualitative research is acquired by analysing the many contexts of the participants and by narrating participants' meanings for these situations and events. Participants' meanings include their feelings, beliefs, ideas, thoughts and actions. The researcher uses interactive strategies; that is, participant observation, direct observation, in-depth interviews, artefacts, and supplementary techniques (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:396).

Janesick (1994:212) agrees with the abovementioned researchers and describes the qualitative design as holistic. It looks at the larger picture and begins with a search for understanding of the whole. It requires the researcher to become the research instrument, and makes meaning from her engagement in the project. The researcher will present the meaning as findings; in other words, what he / she has interpreted to be the meaning of the data (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004:7). This means the researcher must have the ability to observe behaviour and the skills necessary for observation and face-to face interviews.

3.3.2 Case study

The case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena. The case study allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-

life events (Yin, 2003:2).

Feagan, Orum and Sjoberg (1991:2) defined a case study as “an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single phenomenon. The study is conducted in great detail and often relies on the use of several data sources.”

In a case study the main assumption is that a phenomenon is investigated as a “bounded system” (Stake in Henning et al, 2004:2). The system may be a group of people. Any social entity that can be bounded by parameters and that shows a specific dynamic and relevance, revealing information that can be captured within these boundaries, may be a case study (Henning et al, 2004:2).

The researcher selected a group of children, their parents and teachers that are bounded by their experiences of school dropouts, and then conducted in-depth interviews with each of them, and interpreted their reflections. Ferreira, Mouton, Puth, Schurink and Schurink (1987:1) state that the main purpose of the case study is to understand the case, or cases, which are being studied in depth. Case studies can provide very engaging, rich explorations of a project or application as it develops in a real-world setting (Frechtling & Sharp in NSF, 1997:24).

Merriam (1988:16) agrees with the abovementioned researchers and states that the qualitative case study can be defined as an intensive holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or a social unit. She identifies four features of the qualitative case study: particularistic, descriptive, heuristic and inductive. Inductive means that the case study relies on inductive reasoning and data are grounded in the context itself.

Feagan *et al* (1991:7) describe the characteristics of a case study as follow:

- It focuses on social settings and social structures in natural settings.
- It provides information from a number of sources and over a period of time.
- It enables the investigator to examine continuity and change in life world patterns.
- It encourages and facilitates theoretical innovation and generalization.

This research focused on school dropouts in their natural settings, information was gathered from a number of sources, the learners reflected on the changes in their lives and earlier concepts' interpretations are re-examined.

The researcher defined the case and its boundary. This case was bound by place (a rural town and surrounding farms), multiple sources of information in data collection to provide a detailed, in-depth picture of the learners' responses were used, and the context or setting for the case was described, situating the case in a rural town and surrounding farms (Creswell, 1998:36). This study provided a detailed description of the case, an analysis of the themes and issues, and the researcher's interpretations or assertions about the case (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:37).

As a research strategy, the case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena. The case study has been a common research strategy in psychology, sociology, political science, and social work (Yin, 2003:1). Fine (1986) conducted an in-depth case study about school dropouts (Capuzzi & Gross, 1989:252), and the literature on the use of case studies is extensive.

The rationale for the use of a case study is explained as follows by Yin (2003:43):

One rationale for a single case is the revelatory case. This situation exists when an investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyse a

phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation, such as Whyte's (1943/1955) *Street Corner Society*, and Liebow's (1967) *Tally's Corner*, a case study about unemployed men.

Although much research has been done on the dropout problem, and the problems are common across this country, few studies have investigated the dropout problem in the coloured community (Van Rooyen, 1990:5), and the problems of rural school dropout (DeYoung, Huffman & Turner, 1989:56).

3.4 The context

The research was undertaken in the small rural community of De Doorns and surrounding farms. The town of De Doorns, situated 32 kilometres north-east of Worcester and 140 kilometres from Cape Town, is in the centre of the Hex River Valley. The Hex River Valley produces a major share of South Africa's export grapes. The N1 highway passes through the valley.

Farms are owned by white farmers. Farm labourers here earn about R1 200.00 per month, which is far below the minimum living wage. The area is poverty-ridden and there is a high level of unemployment. Farm labourers mostly live on the farms in one- or two-roomed brick houses provided by the farm owner, and their children attend schools situated on the farm.

Bonne Esperance Primary is such a farm school. It has about 590 enrolled learners who all reside on the farm or on neighbouring farms. The learners are all children of farm labourers from surrounding farming communities.

Hex Valley Secondary School is one of three high schools situated in the town of De Doorns. The school is mostly attended by working-class "coloured" learners, who

reside in the predominantly “coloured” township in which the school is located. The other high school situated in the centre of the town of De Doorns is predominantly attended by white learners as well as coloured learners from more affluent homes, while the third high school, located in the black township, is attended only by black learners. This strict separation on the basis of race is due to the legacy of apartheid laws, which segregated institutions of learning as well as spaces of living according to the different “race” groups.

3.5 Description of research participants

The participants in this study were ten young people (two males and eight females) between the ages of 16 and 20 who dropped out of school, four mothers of the learner participants, as well as two educators. One of the educators is based at the primary school while the other is based at the secondary school attended by the learner participants.

The young people and the parents who participated in this study reside on the neighbouring farms of Quarta and Meiringshoop, a few kilometres outside of De Doorns.

One of the educators interviewed is the principal of Bonne Esperance Primary. He resides in the town of De Doorns and has been at the school for eighteen years, initially as an educator before being appointed the post of principal. The second educator, based at Hex River Secondary, commutes from his home in Worcester (26 kilometres from De Doorns) on a daily basis and had been an educator at the school for ten years.

Two learners dropped out while still attending Bonne Esperance Primary School – one during her Grade 6 year and the other while in Grade 7. Eight participants

dropped out while they were learners at Hex Valley Secondary School - five learner participants dropped out of school during their Grade 10 year, two dropped out during their Grade 9 year, while one learner participant dropped out while in Grade 11.

The mothers interviewed had very little formal schooling and were semi-literate or illiterate. One of the mothers interviewed progressed to Grade 5, after which she dropped out of school, while the remaining three mothers left school while in Grade One. The parents of four of the learners who participated in the study are married, while the other six learner participants are raised by their single-parent mothers. The fathers of the learners who participated were either not living with their families or not available on the days of the interviews.

A focus group was held with five young women, two of which were individually interviewed by the researcher and three who were identified as having dropped out of school by the two who agreed to do a focus group discussion.

All participants speak Afrikaans as their mother tongue; thus, all the interviews were conducted in Afrikaans.

3.6 Sampling design

According to Walker (1985:31), sample design in qualitative research is usually purposive; that is, rather than taking a random cross-section of the population to be studied, small numbers of people with specific characteristics, behaviour or experience are selected. Miles and Huberman (1994:27) agree that qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth.

Brink (1991:15) explains that the qualitative researcher identifies potential types of

persons, events or processes to be sampled, depending on the needs of the study and according to the specific qualities. Information about the phenomena the researcher seeks to understand may not be evenly distributed in the population. The researcher used two sampling strategies in the present study to select the participants, namely purposive sampling and snowball sampling.

McMillan and Schumacher (2001:433) conform to these explanations and state that purposeful sampling is a strategy to choose small groups or individuals likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon of interest. The researcher deliberately chooses respondents or settings in order to ensure that the sample covers the full range of possible characters (Katzenellenbogen *et al*, 1999:179).

The criteria for participation in this study were that the learner (i) must have dropped out of school between 2002 and 2004, (ii) must be between the ages 12 and 19 years and (iii) must have passed grade 5.

The researcher made use of school records from one farm school in the De Doorns area, Bonne Esperance Primary, to select the participants. Twenty-four learners were identified from the school records. After several days of driving to De Doorns and looking on the farms for the identified prospective participants, only two learners from the list were located and were willing to participate in the study. Two of the identified prospective participants no longer resided in the area and a further two were not willing to participate.

Due to the unreliability of addresses and phone numbers (because of frequent residential mobility) listed in the learners' records at school, snowball sampling provided a better way of recruiting participants. Miles and Huberman (1994:28) explain that the purpose of snowball sampling is to identify cases of interest from people who know what cases are information-rich. In snowball sampling each

successive participant or group is named by a preceding group or individual. The researcher develops a profile of the attributes or particular trait sought and asks each participant to suggest others who fit the profile or has the attribute. This sampling strategy is frequently used for in-depth interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001: 403).

Babbie (1998:195) notes that snowball sampling is appropriate when the members of a special population are difficult to locate. Snowball refers to the process of accumulation as each located subject suggests other subjects. Because this procedure also results in samples with questionable representativeness, it is used primarily for exploratory purposes.

Through snowball sampling a further five participants were identified for this study. The researcher asked the two participants who were identified through the school records if they knew someone who dropped out of school. They supplied the names of the five participants who also resided on their farms. These learners agreed to participate in the study.

The parents of four of the learners who participated were also interviewed voluntarily.

Two teachers with extensive experience of teaching at farm schools who were willing to participate in this study were also interviewed.

3.7 Data collection

Polit and Hungler (as cited in Brink, 1991:16) state that data collection in qualitative research requires a minimum of researcher-imposed structure and a maximum of researcher involvement. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection.

The researcher uses multiple forms of data in any single study. Any potentially useful data should be recorded thoroughly, accurately, and systematically, using field notes, audiotapes, sketches, or any other suitable means (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:158).

In the present study data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews with each participant and one focus group interview. The interviews were all audio-taped and transcribed *verbatim*. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:443) support this method of data collection and state that interviews may be the primary data collection strategy. Research done by Porteus *et al* (2000:9) made use of qualitative interviews to explore specific issues related to learners' non-attendance at school.

3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews

According to Rubin and Rubin (1995:5), qualitative interviewing is a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds. Interviews can yield a great deal of useful information, as the researcher can ask questions about facts, people's beliefs about the facts, feelings, motives, present and past behaviour, and standards for behaviour (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:159).

Yin (2003:89) states that, throughout the interview process, the researcher needs to follow her own line of inquiry, and to ask her actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner that also serves the needs of the line of inquiry.

Qualitative researchers believe that understanding can be achieved by encouraging people to describe their world from their own perspective (Rubin & Rubin, 1995:6). In the present study, the researcher wanted to find out the feelings of the participants about their dropping out of school and their experiences in school, and how they made sense about these for themselves.

The use of interviews as a data collection method begins with the assumption that the participants' perspectives are meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit, and that their perspectives affect the success of the project (Frechtling & Sharp in NSF, 1997:15). The participants in this study are knowledgeable on the subject of school dropouts and their experiences and reflections are accepted as authentic.

In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer may use a detailed topic guide or a skeleton questionnaire in which the key questions are specified, but a great deal of space is provided for writing down detailed and lengthy answers (Walker, 1985:29).

A copy of the interview guide used in this study is attached as Appendix C.

In the present study, three of the interviews with the learners were conducted in a hall on one of the farms. The other interviews took place at the homes of the participants. Two of the interviews took place in the researcher's car, because the two learners did not want to be interviewed in their homes.

3.7.2 Focus groups

A focus group involves a number of people with common experiences or characteristics who are interviewed by a researcher for the purpose of eliciting ideas, thoughts and perceptions about a specific topic. A focus group interview differs from interviews with individuals in that they explore and stimulate ideas based on shared perceptions of the world (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996:144, 145).

According to Frechtling and Sharp (as cited in NSF, 1997:19), focus group participants are typically asked to reflect on questions asked by the researcher. Participants are permitted to listen to each other's responses and to make additional

comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say. It is not necessary for the group to reach any kind of consensus, nor is it necessary for people to disagree.

The researcher made use of the focus group interview to observe interaction on the topic of school dropouts. The participants also interacted more spontaneously as they felt more comfortable talking in a group than alone.

The focus group was conducted in the library of the school and was facilitated by a young female psychologist. The researcher felt that the participants would feel more at ease with a younger woman who is also skilled at facilitating group discussions.

3.7.3 Audio taping

All the interviews were audio taped. This is essential, according to Walker (1985:37), as one's memory is likely to be highly distorted by such factors as the emotional intensity or the loudness of voice with which views are expressed, or even by one's own preconceptions. Sacks (as cited in Silverman, 2001:161) agrees with the abovementioned researcher and concludes that we cannot rely on our notes or recollections of conversations. We can usually summarize what different people said, but it is impossible to remember (or even to note at the time) such matters as pauses, overlaps, and in-breaths.

The tape recordings enabled the researcher to dispense with note taking and to concentrate on what is being said and to be an active part of the interview process.

3.8 Administration procedures

The researcher wrote a letter to the principal of Bonne Esperance Primary in which

she explained the purpose of the study and asked for permission to have access to the school records and also to use the library and principal's office.

Permission was also obtained from the participants as well as from the parents of the children who were under the age of sixteen. The purpose of the study was explained to them and they were assured that their names would not be mentioned and that the information is confidential.

3.9 Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data (Moore & Rossman, 1995:111). Brink (1991:16) states that, in qualitative research, analysis is an ongoing process. There is usually a large amount of data collected; therefore, the researcher begins processing the data from the first day. Moore and Rossman (1995:111) describe data analysis in qualitative research as: "... a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process".

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:461), qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organising the data into categories and identifying patterns or relationships among the categories. Most categories and patterns emerge from the data, rather than being imposed on the data prior to data collection.

In this study, the researcher started with a set of data, namely the transcribed interviews. The transcripts of all interviews were read through in order to get a global impression of the content. This is known as open coding. Open coding is an inductive process, whereby the codes are selected according to what the data mean (Henning *et al*, 2003:104). Miles and Huberman (1994:56) describe coding as analysis. Codes are labels for assigning units of meaning to the information accumulated during a study.

In the present study, the researcher created a start list of codes at the outset of the study. Predetermined categories were derived from the interview guide. The following categories were used and coded:

- School attendance
- Academic performance
- The family
- Friends
- Educators
- Personal perceptions

Once all the sets of data have been coded and categorised, each category was used as the basis for an argument in the discussion of findings.

Patton (as cited in NSF, 1997:35) comments as follows on qualitative analysis:

Because each qualitative inquiry depends, at every stage, on the skills, training, insights, and capabilities of the researcher, qualitative analysis ultimately depends on the analytical intellect and style of the analyst. The human factor is the greatest strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis.

3.10 Validity and reliability of the research

According to Brink (1991:16), qualitative validity criterion refers to the extent to which the data provides insights. Qualitative validity is concerned with confirming the believability of the findings that have been established by the researcher. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:407) note that the validity of qualitative designs is the degree to which the interpretations and concepts have mutual meanings between

the participant and the researcher.

A different view is held by Steiner Kvale (Henning *et al*, 2004:146) who argues that, in qualitative inquiry, the conventional view on validity is whether, by using certain methods, we are investigating what we say we are investigating. Kvale (Henning *et al*, 2004:146) further argues: “Validation depends on good craftsmanship in an investigation, which includes continual checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings.” This implies that to validate is to check (for bias, for neglect, for lack of precision), to question (all procedures and decisions critically), to theorise (looking for and addressing theoretical questions that arise throughout the process).

If all research steps are declared and documented, the research is potentially replicable and someone may then assess, by doing it all in the same way in a similar setting and with similar participants, whether the replicability is feasible (Henning *et al*, 2004:151). Feagin *et al* (1991:19) concluded that the researcher who uses the case study method could check validity by asking several different people the same in-depth questions and by checking with alternative and independent sources of information.

The validity of the findings in this study was supported by describing the findings in sufficiently rich, “thick” detail so that the readers can draw their own conclusions from the data presented. The researcher also consulted with colleagues in the field to determine whether they agree or disagree that the researcher has made appropriate interpretations and drawn valid conclusions from the data. The researcher took the conclusions back to the participants in the study and asked them whether they agree with conclusions and whether they make sense based on their own experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:106).

Silverman (2001:231) notes that the credibility of qualitative research studies rests not only on the validity of their findings, but also on the reliability of their data and methods. Reliability, as defined by Hammersley (as cited in Silverman, 2001:225) refers to: "...the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions."

High reliability is associated with low-inference descriptors. This involves: "... recording observations in terms that are as concrete as possible, including verbatim accounts of what people say ..." (Seale, as cited in Silverman, 2001:226).

The researcher in this study used low-inference descriptors by tape recording all interviews, transcribing these tapes according to the needs of reliable analysis and presenting long extracts of data in the discussion section.

In case studies, the goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study (Yin, 2003:37). The reliability of the case study research can be increased by:

- having a case study protocol to guide the researcher in carrying out the data collection from a single-case study; and
- establishing a case study database; that is, the way in which data collected for the case study was organised and documented.

The abovementioned procedures were incorporated in this study to increase the reliability of the research.

3.11 Ethical considerations

Research ethics concern the acquisition and dissemination of trustworthy information in ways that will cause no harm to those participating in a study (Rubin & Rubin, 1995:22). As research often invades a person's privacy, participation must be

voluntary and people can refuse to divulge certain information about themselves. This right to privacy demands that direct consent for participation must be obtained from adults and, in the case of children, from their parents or guardians. This consent must be informed, and the participant must be aware of the positive and negative aspects of participation (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:102). Informed consent was obtained in writing from the parents and the children who participated in the study before proceeding with the interviews. Participants were informed that their participation is fully voluntary, and that they may withdraw at any stage.

Confidentiality refers to the information gathered from the subjects, and anonymity refers to the principle that the identity of an individual is kept secret (Mouton, 2001:243). Care was taken to ensure that the contents of the audio taped interviews and the interview transcriptions remain confidential, and participants were assured of the researcher's respect for their confidentiality. The researcher assured the participants that the purpose of the study was not to make judgement about their behaviour, but to improve knowledge and to help role players to identify at risk learners and to plan for intervention strategies. The anonymity of participants was ensured through the use of pseudonyms in the research report.

3.12 Summary

In this chapter, the research design and methodology of the study were discussed.

The researcher used the qualitative case study methodology as a research design and the purpose of the research is exploration. Two sampling strategies were used to select the participants: purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Data was collected through the use of school records, semi-structured interviews and a focus group.

The researcher made use of an inductive process of organising the data into categories and identifying patterns among the categories for the purpose of analysis. The process of data analysis will be discussed in chapter four. To support the validity of the findings in this study the researcher described the findings in rich, “thick” detail. The researcher consulted with colleagues in the field about the interpretations and conclusions and discussed the conclusions with the participants. The researcher made use of low-inference descriptors, a case study protocol and a case study database to increase the reliability of the study.

The participants were assured that the information will be regarded as confidential and that they would remain anonymous.

In chapter four, data analysis and interpretation in this study will be presented.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that have been accumulated to increase the researcher's own understanding of them and to enable the researcher to present what has been discovered to others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982:145). McMillan and Schumacher (2001:462) describe qualitative analysis as a “relatively systematic process of selecting, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing, and interpreting to provide explanations of the single phenomenon of interest”. The aim of this study is to produce a detailed and systematic recording of the themes and issues addressed in the interviews and to link the themes and interviews together under a reasonably exhaustive category system.

4.2 Method of analysing the interview transcripts

In the present study the researcher started with the transcribed interviews. The transcriptions were typed in double line spacing with a wide margin on the right-hand side of the pages for notes and the writing of codes. The transcripts of all interviews that were conducted were read through to get a global impression of the content. Already some themes were observed, prior to the coding process. Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004:104) state:

Because open coding is an inductive process, whereby the codes are selected according to what the data mean to the researcher, you need to have an overview of as much contextual data as possible.

As the researcher read through the data, units of meaning were identified. By using different colours of markers, units of meaning were marked and labelled. Henning *et al* (2004:105) note that, in open coding, codes are literally made up as the researcher works through the data. Once the codes were awarded to different units of meaning, the related codes were grouped or categorised. The ensuing categories were again named inductively, using the data as a guide in deciding what a category should be called. The categories were worked through and repetitious or very similar categories were removed to produce a final list. Each transcript was worked through with the list of categories and coded according to the list of categories. Coloured markers were used to distinguish between each piece of the transcript allocated to a category. Each coded section of the interviews was cut out of the transcript and all items of each code were collected together. To ensure that the context of the coded sections is maintained, multiple photocopies of the transcripts were made. The multiple copies allowed for the sections either side of the coded sections to be cut out with the coded areas. A complete transcript was kept for reference purposes.

Folders were labelled with the list of categories and the cut out sections were filed in the folders. The data in the folders were read through and themes were constructed from the categories. Each theme was used as the basis for an argument in a discussion around them. Henning *et al* (204:107) argued that:

processed data do not have the status of “findings” until the themes have been discussed and argued to make a point and the point that is to be made comes from the research questions.

The data examples and the commentary were linked to the literature by writing up the findings alongside references to the literature. In this way, according to Burnard (1991:461), the findings section of the research becomes both a presentation of the

findings and a comparison of those findings with previous research.

Six themes were constructed from the categories, and these will now be discussed.

4.3 Identification of Themes

4.3.1 Personal problems

Some learners identified personal problems as the reason they chose to leave school early. The issues of pregnancy and childcare illustrate this argument well. Although it is no longer legal to dismiss a learner on the basis of her pregnancy or marital status, it is nevertheless commonplace for a pregnant teen to drop out because of social pressures, inability to schedule classes, feelings of social rejection, absence of day care, or health problems (Fine, 1991:77):

D: I became pregnant and that is why I left school, because my stomach was big.

D: I will not go back, because there will be nobody to care for the child.

D: I felt that I could not go on, because my stomach was too big. In high school there is always children who make fun of you.

De: I knew I was pregnant, that's why I did not want to go to school, and did not tell them.

E: Not that I did not like to go to school, I was too ashamed, because everybody will look at me, I am a mother and still going to school.

Therefore I was too ashamed to go back to school. And I wanted to learn.

According to the educators interviewed, most young girls who dropped out of school did so because they were pregnant. They reported that the learners did not discuss the problem with them, but just stayed away. Sometimes the mother would come to school and inform the principal of the learner's condition.

Other problems like death in the family, or illness of a family member, combine in ways that make some learners feel as though they have to leave to care for family needs (Fine, 1991:78):

R: After my grandmother and grandfather died, I went to school for only one month. I decided no, I would not go further, because I have no income so I am going to leave school.

R: No, nobody influenced me to leave school, it was the death [of my grandmother and grandfather] that made me leave school.

A: Yes, after my father's death I told my mother I am going to leave school.

A: ...my father is not here anymore who earned money.

W: My grandmother was ill, so she informed the teacher and he said it was okay. So I left school, because I had to care for her, because my mother did not stay with us for a while.

The parents confirmed what the learners said about death in the family being the reason for them dropping out:

E1: He felt he must leave the school, because there were no one; his grandmother and grandfather helped me to keep him in school and when they were gone there were no one that could help me and I am alone, his father is already dead. So he decided to work.

M: Yes, it was after his father's death.

The educators interviewed were of the opinion that substance abuse and conflict with the law contributed to the problem of dropping out:

Mr. P: Alcohol abuse is one of our biggest problems. Alcohol abuse, drugs, our learners are involved from a young age.

Mr. F: Alcohol abuse is one of the main causes, especially here in the Valley ...

Mr. P: Sometimes the police come and fetch the learners, of the boys, at school that were for some time involved in the selling of drugs...

Mr. F: Our children are caught up in drugs and alcohol on the farms

4.3.2 Family

Family is an important factor related to dropping out. Some researchers focused their attention on the interaction between children and parents. They found that parental involvement is critical to academic achievement and school completion (Rumberger,

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cited in Hess, 2000:8). As one learner explained:

A: I have a simple family, my mother's people are just what they are, they don't worry much ...

The teachers confirmed this statement:

Mr. F: The parents are not interested in what their children do, if a child goes to school or not.

Mr. F: Parents do not come to the school to get the learners' reports; they are not interested in the progress of their children.

Mr. P: The dropouts' parents usually do not attend parent meetings, they are not involved in functions at school...parents are not interested and then the child also loses interest.

Unemployment in the family is identified in the present study as one of the factors that lead to children leaving school. Some of the parents encouraged the learners to leave school, because there was no money for school fees:

W: There was no income at home.

W: My parents did not work.

W: There was no one at home to help me with school fees and books.

M: I told him to leave school, because I was alone in the farm, with the school fees and so on ...

The findings of this study show that most of the dropouts' parents have a low level of educational achievement. Three of the parents are illiterate and the other nine parents have not completed grade 4. The statements of one parent as well as the educators illustrate this:

M: I cannot read so that I can help him.

Mr. P: The parent can, in most circumstances, not help the children...our farm workers do not have the academic qualifications to help the child with homework.

Mr. F: Most of the parents cannot read or write so the children sign the letters themselves ...

Fine (1991:77) noted that educators often repeat that family problems are a primary reason that causes low-income youngsters to dropout. In the present study, the teachers commented as follows:

Mr. F: I think it is a lack of discipline at home; parents have no control over their children ...

Mr. F: I know of a child that hit his parent, but if the child is disciplined at school the parent supports the child, then the parent forgets that she was humiliated by her own child

Mr. P: Her father was incarcerated once or twice...also marital problems between the mother and father ...

Mr. P: ... the father is involved in wrong things or the mother is involved in wrong things...

One of the learners describes her problems with her family as follows:

P: My mother, stepfather and I argued, so I decided that I am going to leave school...

P: My sister and I did not want our mother to become involved with him, because when he is drunk he spreads rumours about us and when we tell our mother she doesn't believe us, she says we lie. That's why I decided to leave school.

4.3.3 Economic causes

In South Africa it is likely that the single most influential factor that causes children to drop out of school is that of poverty. In poor communities, parents cannot afford the costs of schooling (Donald *et al*, 2002:209). This is evident in this study where the participants are from a poor, rural community:

E: After a while there was no money, so I left. I never went back, because there was never again enough money to study.

S: At high school you need money almost every day. My mother did not have money, because there was only two at home who worked. My brother and my aunt's son are at primary school. We need to pay my school fees, my brother's school fees; my aunt needs to pay her two children's fees. So I decided to leave school; then it will be only those three that are still in school.

Er: At school you worry, because if the teacher tells you on Friday you had to have money on Monday and if you do not have the money you will be punished, then you worry. Then you borrow the money and when your mother pays, they do not earn much on the farm, then you need to pay that money back.

The teachers and parents responded as follows:

M: No, I could not go on alone, the school fees and so on. I never had money.

L: The money was never enough for school fees; the money we worked for was only for food.

Mr. P: The circumstances at home; there is no money ...

Mr. F: Poverty is one of the main reasons why children leave school

Keeping the child in school where there is no visible progress does not make sense for anyone – let alone for those who cannot afford it (Ibid).

There is also often the expectation that children should take on economic and other responsibilities so that the family can cope. The result is that many children drop out of school early in order to earn money (Gordon, as cited in Donald *et al*, 2002:209):

P: I wanted to help my mother; my mother was alone and my two sisters are also in school and my mother cannot give each of them money.

A: I told her that she worked alone and that I should leave school to work so that I can help her.

Er: I dropped out because there was a lack of income at home and my cousin who stayed with us, wanted to study. So I left school to help my mother and my money helped, because he is still studying.

Researchers have found that working can contribute to a learner dropping out of school (Mann, 1986:310). One parent explains it as follows:

EI: He worked in the afternoons and during vacations on the farm. So he asked the foreman if he could have a permanent job. He said he wanted to help me ...

Research has also shown that some children found their jobs more enjoyable than school and reported that their job was more important to them (Ekstrom *et al*, 1986:361):

P: I wanted to work so that I can buy things that I want. If I want something then I can buy it for myself, because my mother cannot always buy it for me.

E: To work is nice, because you can buy for yourself and you can do what you like...

J: Work is nice; I find it interesting. You can buy for yourself and if you have worked for a year and you earned your money then you can

decide today I will buy this, and this I give to my mother. It is better to work for yourself than to go school. School is only a problem.

4.3.4 School factors

Although it was established through research that learners' home and personal problems contribute to their failure in school, schools contribute in important ways to the problems of learners (Wehlage *et al*, 1989:47). The results of the present study indicate that retention substantially contributed to the learners' decision to dropout from school:

J: So I told my friend that if I fail this year I am going to leave school...so I failed and I decided that I am not going back to school.

D: I failed grade 8.

P: I failed grade 10. Then I left school.

Le: She told us that if she failed she would leave school.

Do: So we saw that she failed. And we decided to take her out of school, because what is the use, we pay school fees but she can't progress at school.

Mr. P: The grade nines, they can stay one or two years in the grade, then they can say that they do not feel like repeating the grade, then they leave school.

Being left back may offer the final justification to give in, to acknowledge defeat, and

to surrender to the pressures of poverty and family needs (Fine 1991:74).

Truancy is cited in the literature as an important predictor of dropping out (Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005:8). The learners in the present study began to exhibit truant behaviour, such as class cutting and absenteeism. Their poor attendance results in poor grades and class failure. In the present study, seven of the learners stated that they were often absent from school and used to cut classes regularly:

W: When he sent me to school I sat at the dam and in the afternoon I go home with the school children.

R: (t)hen I sometimes stay at home for a day or two ...

S: Then I walk back, or if I am at school, I climb through the fence and go home...

G: I did not really go to school. I just walked to town and then I went back home again.

D: I travel with the bus to school and then I come back again.

Mr. P: The learners start to stay at home sporadically, it starts with a day or two, three days and later it is two weeks ...

Literature shows that poor academic performance, low self-esteem and feeling indifferent and resentful towards the school community are of the reasons responsible for learners' drop out decision (Lan & Lanthier, 2003:314):

D: In high school I did not do well.

De: School was not nice; the work was too difficult.

J: I did not find school interesting ...the work was too much... sometimes it was difficult; I just wanted to put my books down, because I did not like it.

J: I told them I am going to leave school, because it was not nice at school.

J: ... the way they treated you, judge you by the face ...

Er: I told him, you must not look at the face and hair, we do not have your straight hair, so are you going to treat us like you treat them. So he told me that I need not come to his class, so I showed him I did my work outside on the stoep, my work was done every day.

Er: I told my mother I cannot go and sit in the class and I know for a fact I do not want to be in school. I am going to leave school.

As experiences associated with being a learner become increasingly negative and dissatisfying, the learners begin to experience feelings of not belonging in school.

The teachers reported that the learners showed a disengagement from school and the repeated negative experiences decreased the learners' commitment to school:

Mr. F: The learners have low self-esteem ... Such a child believes that he is not worthy of anything and that is why they feel that it is better at home or with his friends on the farm ...

Some learners experienced problems when they were promoted to secondary school. They had problems adjusting to a new environment and reported that they longed for their primary school days, because they enjoyed school, liked their teachers, got along with their peers, and did well academically. As one learner reported:

J: I was happy at Bonne Esperance. If they taught to grade twelve I would have come back here. Here they explained the work and if you did not understand, you asked again and they explained again, but there ...

Mr. F., the secondary school teacher, also commented on the adjustment of learners at high school:

Mr. F: I think the biggest problem is adjustment. At high school the learners are confronted with reality. Learners are promoted too easily to a next grade and then these learners are not academically and socially matured enough for high school.

Mr. F: I think the learners were not adequately prepared for the challenges of high school.

4.3.5 Teachers

Wehlage and Rutter (1986:381) noted that dropouts widely perceive their teachers as being uninterested and the discipline system as being ineffective and unfair. Engel (as cited in Egyed *et al*, 1998:156) found that learners' negative reports of teachers were often based on the perception that the teachers were seen as uncaring and as not engaging learners in active participation. In a study by Flores-Gonzalez (2002:37),

where she examined who drops out and who graduates among Puerto Rican learners in an urban high school, the researcher pointed out that it is the lack of meaningful relationships that has the most negative repercussions. The learners denounce the foul treatment they received from teachers. These learners say that unprofessional and uncaring teachers hurt them badly. In the present study, the learners confirmed the above and explained their relationship with the teachers as follows:

J: They are only for themselves, although we speak with them, they do look at you like that, they do not worry.

J: The teachers are weird, they say the weird things, but they do not think about our feelings ...

P: They are rude, insult you and hit you on your body with a pipe.

W: I did not have bad manners, but he always picked on our group, on my friend and me, then he tells us to leave his class.

S: The teachers were not nice ... they shouted and yelled at us; they did not know how to talk with us. "Hulle het van een 'n witbroodjie gemaak en van die ander 'n bruin broodjie." (Some children were favoured / teachers' pets.)

E: There is one teacher at that school that I did not like at all, so I greeted him that day and told him, sir, you should know one thing, I am going to leave school, but I am not finish with you.

E: Those two teachers made it difficult at school; I would never never forget them. When my mother went to school meetings, then I am

always the biggest problem in class... (s)o I found out, this teacher lied to my mother, he told her things that I did not do in class.

Some teachers engaged in actions that emotionally hurt the learners. They described incidents in which they were humiliated and where they felt shamed in front of others:

E: I did not like it when the teachers insult me in front of the class, for example, our personal files are with the teacher, and if I have a problem, in my file it says that I cannot read, then he would tell me in class, why don't you keep your mouth shut (hou jou bek), you cannot even read properly.

J: The teacher would say, farm children get out of my way.

The parents explained their children's humiliation in school as follows:

L: She told us the teacher gave her an insulting answer; he would have hit her ...

D: The teacher was nasty to her and the teacher told her, yes ... she spit at her ...

According to the learners, some teachers do little to engage them in the classroom and they do not bother to make sure that the learners understand the work:

J: Sometimes you come into the classroom and then the teacher gives you work and do not explain to you, as you would like her to explain. She would then say, I am not going to explain again, you are

“raasbekke”. (blabbermouths)

R: I did not like it when the teachers yelled at me over homework.

Some learners described incidents of prejudice and discrimination in the classroom. They attributed these prejudices to the fact that they grew up on a farm and that they are the children of farm workers:

E: The teachers are fond of saying you are from the farm; no it does not look good for you of the farm to get good marks ... so I told him we are more disadvantaged as those who live in town ... if they want to ask him something, we must leave the classroom so that the children with straight hair can ask him questions.

The high school teacher commented as follows:

Mr. F: There are cases of discrimination... teachers look critical at where the learners come from and I think this plays a role in how they treat the learners.

Another factor that was raised by learners, parents and teachers was that the teachers did not call or visit the learners' homes when they stopped coming to school:

R: When I stopped going to school nobody visited my home.

D (parent): Nobody from school visited me to inquire about J's leaving school.

Mr. P: In the past we visited the parents at home, but that is one of the

things that do not happen any more.

Mr. F: Compulsory home visits were part of our job and then we knew what the learners' circumstances were. I think home visits should again become part of our school duties.

Mr F. concluded the interview by stating:

Mr. F: I sometimes have the feeling that some of our teachers earn their salaries at the end of the month by focussing on the academic and neglect to develop the learners on other levels.

4.3.6 Friends

At all stages of development, but particularly during adolescence, the peer group can have a powerful influence on behaviour. This can be negative or positive depending on the values held by the peer group, and the sort of identity and acceptance needs of the individual (Donald *et al*, 2002:244). In the present study, the teachers explained the power of the peer group as contributing to the low self-esteem of the learners:

Mr. F: The children seek acceptance and sometimes they become like slaves for the other children, because they want to be accepted in the peer group.

Mr. F: The children from the town, they have the perception that their circumstances are better than the children of the farm ...

Mr. F: There is animosity between the two groups... the children from the farm have a self-esteem problem, because they feel that the

children from the town think that they are better than them.

In a study by Valverde (as cited in Hess, 2000:6), the impact of the peer group was the second strongest determining factor in the learners' decision to leave school. Dropouts indicated feelings of alienation and rejection by peers. As one parent reported:

Do: She told me that at high school the children did not like her ... they are jealous about the way she looks ...they say she thinks she is pretty she is a (pittekop) bad hair and conceited.

One teacher commented as follows:

Mr. P: If their peer group tells stories about them at school this can lead to fighting or that they leave school or stay at home for a few days.

Another factor that was raised by the parents was the negative influence of a boyfriend:

Do: She did not want to go to school, she had a boyfriend and she did not want to study further.

L: At high school she was involved with a boyfriend and she became disinterested in school.

The teachers commented on the negative influences of older peers:

Mr. P: He does not have friends in his own peer group, he has friends

that are older and they give him wrong guidance...the parents come to me and complain that their children did not sleep at home, the child has delinquent friends, that is the reason why the child has no respect and bad manners.

Mr. F: The majority of the dropouts have friends that already work. These children earn money ...

Dropouts were also more likely to engage in non-school activities. As they become disengaged from the purposes of schooling, these learners find peers like themselves (Valverde, as cited in Hess, 2000:6).

W: I have three friends that are still in school, the others have already dropped out.

D: My friends also decided to drop out.

A: They told me to come work with them on the farm.

J: I told them one day that I do not want to go to school anymore and one of my friends said that she just waited for one to talk about it. That day we discussed it.

5. Summary

In this chapter the researcher discussed the results and findings of the study. It became clear that a number of factors interrelate to cause learners to drop out of school. Six themes were identified as causal factors to dropping out: Personal Problems, Family Issues, Economic Causes, School Factors, Teachers, and Friends.

The most important factor seemed to be economic difficulties, and it is interesting to note that a lot of discussion, especially in the focus group, revolved around the seemingly negative attitudes of teachers, which included perceived discrimination against learners who hail from farms.

The following chapter will include a brief discussion of the results, limitations of the study as well as recommendations arising from the present research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The present study focused on the causes of school dropout among learners in a rural farm school. Although several factors influencing learners to drop out of school are well known from the literature, the challenge to determine how several important characteristics work together remains. In the present study, in-depth interviews were conducted in which the learners reflected on their dropping out, as well as interviews with some of the parents or caregivers of those learners and teachers from two schools attended by the learners.

In this chapter the results of the study are discussed. The discussion focused on the three general causes that were identified as contributory factors to dropping out. The researcher will also discuss the limitations of the study and make recommendations for dropout prevention.

5.2 Discussion of results

As discussed in Chapter Two, three general causes were identified in the literature (Wehlage & Rutter, 1989:25) as contributory factors to dropping out. These causes are: social and family background, personal problems and school factors. These factors are interrelated and interconnected, leading up to learners' decisions to leave school. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of previous research.

The three causes will now be discussed in relation to the findings of the present study.

5.2.1 Family and social background

Finn, in Wehlage *et al* (1989:29), argued that nearly every study shows that dropping out is correlated with low socio-economic status. The findings in this study are consistent with the research, as unemployment and lack of money for school are reported as factors contributing to learners leaving school.

The low level of educational achievement of parents, as indicated in the study, resulted in parents being unable to help and support their children academically.

Fine (1991:162) points out that strong parental involvement in schools correlates with academic achievement for their children. All the parents in this study desired a good education for their children, but the findings show that the parents were not involved in school activities. This may be because they feel intimidated by the school environment and ashamed of their own inadequate schooling.

Consistent with other researchers (Donald *et al*, 2002; Mann, 1986; Ekstrom *et al*, 1986), economic problems were cited as the main contributing reasons for dropping out. All the learners' parents in this study were from lower socio-economic backgrounds and most of the learners left school because they live in surroundings characterised by poverty and unemployment. There was simply not money for school and they felt the need to alleviate the financial burden of the family. According to Parsons and Howlitt (1996:110) schooling, however, no longer leads to guaranteed employment. Many who leave school at 18, having matriculated, in the hope of finding employment, find that this is no longer an option. As a result, there is an alienation from school's purpose and a lack of tolerance for the presumed function of schooling.

5.2.2 Personal problems

Personal problems were cited as an important cause for leaving school. Problems like teenage pregnancy, death in the family, and illness of a family member made it difficult for these learners to stay in school, resulting in their decision to drop out.

The present research found that some of the learners cited work-related reasons for leaving school. Farming activities have provided some opportunity for employment without the need for specific educational credentials, therefore making it easy for learners to be lured by the possibility of earning money to help their families.

Behaviour problems had significant effects on the school achievement of the learners. The learners reported exhibiting disruptive classroom behaviour, cutting classes and truancy, which resulted in poor academic performance, alienation from school and subsequent dropping out.

Another factor that is cited by the teachers and parents that participated in this study is the association of the learners with older, sometimes delinquent peers. Their association with these peers resulted in them being excluded from school activities that sustain school engagement. The learners become disengaged from the purposes of schooling and eventually also leave school.

5.2.3 School factors

Negative school experiences often lead learners to become alienated and disengaged from school. The results of this study support the views of researchers (Ekstrom *et al*, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Fine, 1986; Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005) that schools contribute in many important ways to the problems of learners and that schools are not responsive to the conditions and problems accompanying the personal

and socio-economic characteristics of the learners who dropped out.

Retention in grade had significant effects on the school achievement of the learners studied. The learners and parents in the present study reported that being retained contributed to the learners' decision to drop out of school. Being held back confirmed some of the participants' own sense of inadequacy. Previous research has demonstrated that retention does not, on average, afford retained learners a lasting academic or social advantage, nor does it appear to be an effective remediation strategy (Meisels & Liaw, 1993:70).

Truancy and cutting classes were common among the learners studied. The findings of this study suggest that the learners felt unwelcome and unsuccessful in school and therefore simply left school. The participants in this study indicated that their poor attendance resulted in poor grades and class failure.

Some learners experienced problems with their transition to secondary school. Their reports illustrated the deterioration of school performance during tenth grade. They stated that they were good students until they transferred to secondary school. The negative experiences decreased their commitment to school and contributed to their early school leaving.

Research shows that teachers play a significant role in the dropout problem (Payne, 1989:113). The results of this study found that learners perceived their teachers as being uninterested, uncaring and unprofessional. The learners linked their dissatisfaction with school to inadequate relationships with teachers. The findings of this study show that the learners had little chance to participate in class or to ask questions.

The learners also believed their teachers to be prejudiced and made special mention

of the teachers labelling them as “from the farm”. These discriminatory practices led learners to feel inadequate and heightened their negative feelings towards their teachers significantly.

A factor that was raised by the participants was that the teachers did not call or visit their homes when they stopped coming to school. This was perceived by the learners as lack of caring on the part of the teachers, and thus further estranged them from school.

In conclusion, it is clear from the present study that early school leaving is the result of a number of factors. However, in each case there appears to be an incident that forced the decision. The incident can be in the form of a personal problem, e.g., pregnancy, or death in the family, or something that happened at school, e.g., continuous humiliation by teachers. The incident has an impact only because of the background against which it occurs; i.e. problems with achieving sufficiently or personal problems that divert attention from school.

Educators need to become more sensitive to the needs of disadvantaged learners, as the comments of the learners interviewed about their educators were particularly striking in that it demonstrated the ability of educators to further alienate learners already facing so much adversity.

The findings of this study suggest the need for changes in the structure of schools if they are to respond to the needs of the learners and to reduce the number of learners dropping out.

5.3 Limitations of the study

This present study explains the views of a group of dropouts, four parents and two teachers on the dropout problem in a rural farm area.

The small size of the sample limits the representativity of the research findings, as it only focuses on a small part of the dropout population, namely learners from a rural area. However, the researcher wished to highlight the issues that learners from rural areas deal with, as much of the existing literature from South Africa and abroad focused on learners attending schools in urban areas.

The researcher felt that her interview style limited the responses from the learners who participated in this study significantly, partly because she is an older woman, an ex-teacher at one of the schools attended by the learners, and partly because her interview style could be perceived as rigid. The researcher felt that the group discussion facilitated by a younger psychologist not familiar to the learners provided for a richer description of their experiences.

The use of the tape recorder also seemed to limit the responsiveness of some of the learners who participated. Some of the learners seemed to be overly aware of the fact that the conversation was being recorded, and therefore took more care in how they constructed their answers.

The researcher is also of the opinion that not enough information on the learners' perceptions of their futures was gained. The researcher felt that she should have probed more to achieve a sense of how learners viewed their future.

5.4 Recommendations

The results of this study raised many questions regarding the issue of dropping out and how schools and teachers can become more involved in dropout prevention and intervention. The following strategies are recommended as steps in defining and intervening with learners who may be at risk of leaving school early:

1. Identify potential dropouts early. Learners who are at risk of dropping out of school exhibit certain behaviours. The behaviours are:
 - Truancy and excessive absences.
 - Limited participation in school activities.
 - Low or failing grades in at least two learning areas.
 - Difficulty communicating with teachers and other learners.
 - Showing little interest in classroom work.
2. Start support programmes.

Teacher support:

Teachers can provide support by listening to learners, being understanding of their needs and by encouraging them to develop their skills to the fullest potential. Every learner should be tied to a teacher, an activity or an organization in the school.

Peer support:

Successful learners could be used as peer counsellors to work with those individuals having trouble in school. These learners could provide support in social and study skills.

Academic support

For learners who are having difficulty succeeding academically, a support team of teachers, counsellors and social service personnel could be utilized to work with at-risk learners and families. If these additional support services appear to be ineffective an alternative programme with an adapted curricula and varied teaching strategies could be implemented.

Community support

The school and the community should form a partnership where the community brings resources and experience into the school, or take the learners into the community to experience first-hand things learned only abstractly in classrooms.

3. *Develop interesting extra-curricular activities.*

Schools should encourage learners to participate in extra-curricular activities and after-school programmes to decrease social isolation.

4. *Establish work-study programmes.*

Schools should prepare learners to deal with real life by giving them concrete and practical advice (career guidance). Learners need to learn practical, job-related skills in school and apply academic learning to real-life situations.

5. *Conduct exit interviews*

If a learner persists in dropping out, the school should find out why such a choice was made. The school should also conduct a follow-up interview after the learner has dropped out to determine whether there is regret over the decision and whether there are ways to bring the learner back into the school system.

(Adapted from Kronick & Hargis, 1990:137 – 139).

6. Form a truancy partnership with juvenile court judges.

The deputy principals of schools should contact learners on their fifth day of unexcused absence from school and let them know that, unless they are in school on the next school day, the court would be informed. If the learner is absent for a sixth day, the judge would summon both the learner and the parent to court (Grier, 2000:57).

These strategies should help schools in reducing their dropout rates.

5.5 Recommendations for further studies

As mentioned earlier, there are still many unanswered questions that relate to the issue of school dropouts and the manner in which schools and teachers can intensify their attempts to prevent and intervene in this regard. Little research has been conducted on the dropout problem amongst rural farm learners in South Africa. Future studies should focus on the development and implementation of prevention programmes for at-risk learners in a rural community.

5.6 Conclusion

The findings of this study have shown that the dropout problem is a complex social problem. Difficulties arising from family, social and economic circumstances all contribute to a learner's decision to leave school. Some learners develop personal problems that make it difficult for them to continue with their schooling. Many economic and social factors, as well as certain learner characteristics in combination with certain school conditions were responsible for learners' decision to leave school early.

Some school policies and practices may also lead learners to drop out from school. Negative school experiences, high retention rates, inadequate relationships with teachers, discriminatory practices by teachers are contributing to the problem of dropouts. In conclusion, intervention strategies aimed at preventing school dropout must focus on the individual, the family and the school.

Economic causes were cited as the main contributing factors to dropping out, as were school factors that included the actions of educators that were perceived by the learners as discriminatory towards learners who lived on farms. Another causal factor seemed to be the lack of support that learners received from parents, who have low levels of educational attainment and are often illiterate.

The above realities of life on farms are not bound to change in the near future, and it seems that schools have to play a more important role in supporting learners who live in dire poverty, rather than pushing them out of the school community. It also seems as if educators need to become more sensitive to the needs of disadvantaged learners, as the comments made by the learners interviewed about their educators were particularly striking in their allusion to teachers' abilities to further alienate learners already facing so much adversity.

The present research served to shed light on the lives of young people who live on farms. It is my hope that the research will contribute meaningfully to the growing body of literature about dropping out, but will also serve to bring a deeper understanding of the reasons why learners drop out of school in order for schools to become pro-active in preventing the phenomenon of dropout which is so prevalent in disadvantaged communities.

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APPENDIX A

Navorsing: Die redes waarom leerders woonagtig in 'n landelike gebied die skool vroeg verlaat

TOESTEMMING TOT VRYWILLIGE DEELNAME AAN NAVORSING

Die volgende inligting word aan u verskaf sodat u kan besluit of u wil deelneem aan hierdie navorsing. U kan besluit om nie deel te neem nie, en u kan besluit om te onttrek in enige stadium van die navorsing.

Die doel van my navorsing is om te bepaal wat die redes is waarom leerders woonagtig in hierdie omgewing besluit om nie hul skoolloopbaan voort te sit nie.

Data sal verkry word deur middel van onderhoude met leerders, opvoeders en ouers van leerders wat alreeds die skool verlaat het. Hierdie onderhoude sal op band opgeneem word, waarna die navorser die onderhoude sal transkribeer vir verdere analise. Onthou dat die inligting wat u verskaf konfidensieël is. Die navorser sal ook nie die name van deelnemers bekend maak nie.

Die voordele van deelname aan hierdie navorsing is die geleentheid vir deelnemers om by te dra tot bestaande kennis van die redes waarom leerders besluit om die skool te verlaat, asook die geleentheid om deel te neem in 'n waardevolle studie.

Teken asseblief hierdie vorm indien u verstaan waaroor die navorsing handel en vrywillig besluit om deel te neem.

Baie dankie vir u deelname.

.....

.....

Handtekening van deelnemer

Datum

Lynette Minnaar, MA (Opvoedkundige Sielkunde) student, Universiteit van Zululand

APPENDIX B

Ms L Minnaar
102 Fairbairn Street
Worcester
6850
13 Julie 2005

Bonne Esperance Primary School
P.O. Box 148
DE DOORNS
6875

Dear Mr Paulse

PERMISSION FOR ACCESS TO SCHOOL RECORDS FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES

I am an M. Ed (Psychology) student registered at the University of Zululand. A requirement of the course is the completion of a research project.

I have decided to focus on the reasons why learners attending a school in a rural area decide to leave school. As an ex-teacher at Bonne Esperance, I am well aware of the hardships that learners are faced with, and I would like to bring the plight of rural learners to the fore. I intend to interview learners who dropped out of school, their parents as well as their teachers about this issue, using semi-structured interviews.

I therefore request that you provide me with access to your school records in order for me to identify learners who have dropped out of school. I will also need the contact details of these learners and their parents, whom I will then approach to request their participation in my research.

Do not hesitate to contact me at 023-3482233 or cell. 0834619390.

I appreciate your assistance in this matter.

Thank you.

Lynette Minnaar
Intern Psychologist

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL DROPOUTS

Introduction

The researcher introduces herself.

Purpose of interview

The researcher states the purpose of the interview.

“We are here today to talk about the causes why you dropped out of school. This interview is part of the research that I am undertaking towards the completion of my M. Ed (Psychology) degree.

I would like you to tell me how you experienced school, how you came to the decision to leave school, and your feelings about what you are doing now.”

Procedure

“I will proceed by asking you some questions. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you think and feel, and to remember that there are no right or wrong answers.

The interviews will be audio-taped to facilitate transcription of the interview material. Everything that we talk about will be treated as confidential – no one but my research supervisor and I will have access to the audio-tapes and subsequent transcriptions.

Each interview will last approximately 1.5 hours.”

Interview questions

School attendance

1. Did you like going to school?
2. Did you attend school regularly?
3. What were the main reasons for your absence from school?
4. Did you tell your parents that you want to leave school?
5. How did they react?

Academic performance

1. How did you do in school?
2. What did you like about school?
3. What did you dislike about school?
4. What are your strengths?
5. Did you fail any grade? If yes, which grades?
6. How did you do feel about homework?
7. What did your teachers think about your ability to cope with the demands of your school career?
8. What did you do when you did not understand your schoolwork?
9. Were you involved in activities at school, for example sports, cultural activities?

The family

1. Who are the members of your family? Do any members of your extended family live in your house? (Questions focus on family constellation)
2. Do you discuss your problems with your family? If yes, what member of your family do you feel most comfortable to discuss your problems with?
3. How did your family react when you told them of your intentions to leave school?
4. How did your family assist you in getting a job after you dropped out of school?

Friends

1. What does your family know about your friends?
2. How do they feel about your friends?
3. Were most of your friends still in school, or were most of your friends' young people who dropped out of school?
4. How did your friends react when you told them of your intentions to leave school?
5. How many of your friends finished high school?

Teachers

1. What kind of relationship did you have with your teachers?
2. How did your teachers make you feel about yourself?
3. Were you ever suspended or told to leave the classroom because of undesirable behaviour?
4. How did your teachers help you to build on your strengths?
5. How did your teachers respond when they learned that you were no longer attending school?
6. Were you able to discuss your concerns about your schoolwork with your teachers?
7. Were you able to discuss your personal problems with your teachers?

Personal Perceptions

1. Tell me about your decision to leave school.
2. How do you feel now about your decision to leave school?
3. How do you think that completion of your school career would have helped you to get a job?
4. Who would you say influenced your decision to leave school the most?
5. Who did you go to for help? Who did you talk to before or when you made the decision to leave school?
6. If you had the opportunity to “do things over”, would you come to the same decision or would you continue with your schooling?
7. What would you say is the primary factor that caused you to leave school?
8. If your best friend told you that he/she has decided to leave school, what would you tell him/her?

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Introduction

The researcher introduces herself.

Purpose of interview

The researcher states the purpose of the interview.

“We are here today to talk about the causes why your child dropped out of school. This interview is part of the research that I am undertaking towards the completion of my M. Ed (Psychology) degree.

I would like you to tell me your perception of how your child has experienced school, your feelings about your child leaving school, and your feelings about what he/she is doing now.”

Procedure

“I will proceed by asking you some questions. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you think and feel, and to remember that there are no right or wrong answers.

The interviews will be audio-taped. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. Everything that we talk about will be treated as confidential – no one but my research supervisor and I will have access to the audio-tapes and subsequent transcriptions.

Each interview will last approximately 1.5 hours.”

Interview questions

School attendance

1. Did your child like going to school?
2. Did he/she attend school regularly?
3. What were the main reasons for his/her absence from school?
4. How did you find out about your child’s decision to leave school?
5. How did you react?

Academic performance

1. How did your child do in school?
2. What did he/she like about school?
3. What did he/she dislike about school?

4. What are his/her strengths?
5. Did he/she fail any grades? If yes, which grades?
6. How regularly did your child do homework?
7. What did his/her teachers think about his/her ability to cope with the demands of the school?
8. What did your child do when he/she did not understand his/her schoolwork?
9. Was your child involved in activities at school, for example sports, cultural activities?
10. Were there enough resources available at home for your child to assist him/her with homework?
11. Did he/she have a place to do his/her homework?

The family

1. Who are the members of your family? Do any members of your extended family live in your house? (Questions focus on family constellation)
2. Does your child discuss his/her problems with you?
3. What member of your family does your child feel most comfortable to discuss his/her problems with?
4. How did you feel when your child informed you of his/her intentions to leave school?
5. How did you assist him/her to get a job after he/she dropped out of school?

Friends

1. What do you know about your child's friends?
2. How do you feel about your child's friends?
3. Do you know your child's best friend?
4. Do you know if most of his/her friends were still in school, or were most of his/her friends young people who dropped out of school?
5. What do you think his/her friends' reactions were when he/she told them of his/her intention to leave school?
6. Do you know how many of his/her friends finished high school?

Teachers

1. Did you know your child's teachers?
2. What kind of relationship did you have with your child's teachers?
3. Was your child ever suspended or asked to leave the classroom because of undesirable behaviour?
4. Were you ever asked by the teachers to discuss your child's problems?
5. How did you inform his/her teachers of your concerns about his/her school performance?
6. How were you included in school activities?
7. How regularly did you attend parent meetings?

8. How did the teachers respond when they learned that your child was no longer attending school?

Personal Perceptions

1. How do you feel about your child's decision to leave school?
2. How do you think that completion of his/her school career would have helped him/her to get a job?
3. In your opinion, who would you say influenced your child's decision to leave school the most?
4. Who did you go to for help? Who did you talk to when your child made the decision to leave school?
5. What would you say is the primary factor that caused your child to leave school?

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Name :

.....

Address :

.....

Telephone Number :

.....

Birth Date :

.....

Number of children in family :

.....

Position in family of origin :

.....

Income of family :

.....

Occupation of father :

.....

Occupation of mother :

.....

Last grade attended (before dropping out of school):

.....

Highest grade attained (father) :

.....

Highest grade attained (mother) :

.....

Description of house :

.....

Marital status of parents :

.....

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Introduction

The researcher introduces herself.

Purpose of interview

The researcher states the purpose of the interview.

“We are here today to talk about the causes why some children dropped out of school. This interview is part of the research that I am undertaking towards the completion of my M. Ed (Psychology) degree.

I would like you to tell me your perception of how the participants in this study experienced school, your feelings about them leaving school, and your feelings about the school’s level of intervention.”

Procedure

“I will proceed by asking you some questions. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you think and feel, and to remember that there are no right or wrong answers.

The interviews will be audio-taped. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. Everything that we talk about will be treated as confidential – no one but my research supervisor and I will have access to the audio-tapes and subsequent transcriptions.

Each interview will last approximately 1.5 hours.

Interview questions

School experiences

1. Did the learners attend school regularly?
2. If no, what would you say were their reasons for absenteeism?
3. How did the learners interact with their peers?
4. Were they involved in activities at school, for example sports, cultural activities?
5. How would you describe the learners’ school performance?
6. How did the learners relate to the teachers?
7. How did the learners react when reprimanded?
8. Did you know about the learners’ intentions to leave school?
9. What did the school do to keep the learners in school?

The family

1. What do you know about the family life of these learners?
2. Were the parents involved in school activities?
3. Who did the parents go to for help when they were concerned about their child's school performance?

Friends

1. What do you know about the learners' friends?
2. Were most of their friends still in school, or were most of their friends young people who dropped out of school?
3. How did their friends react when they learned about their leaving school?
4. How many of their friends finished high school?

Personal Perceptions

1. Do you think that the school tried hard enough to keep the learners in school?
2. What would you say influenced their decision to leave school the most?
3. Who did the learners go to for help? Who did they talk to before or when they made the decision to leave school?
4. How do you think the teachers' expectations of the learners' school performance contributed to them dropping out of school?
5. How would you describe the learners who dropped out of school?