

A social realist analysis of learner agency and access to education: the case of Grade 11 learners in public secondary schools in the Makana District, Eastern Cape

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTERS OF EDUCATION

Of

RHODES UNIVERSITY

HALIMA NAMAKULA

March 2013

DECLARATION

I, **Halima Namakula**, the undersigned, hereby declare that the contents of this dissertation constitute my own original work, which has not previously been presented to another institution, either in part or as a whole, for the purposes of obtaining a degree. Where use has been made of the work of others, this has duly been acknowledged and referenced.

Signature Date.....

ABSTRACT

The South African government has shown enormous commitment to the achievement of “Education for All” (EFA) through its policies premised on the right to basic education for all which is enshrined in the constitution. Central to the South African constitution, is a fundamental right of all citizens to basic education, equity, redress, and the improvement of quality of schooling. Further, pro-poor funding policies such as school fee exemptions, social grants and, most recently, the designation of 60% of all schools as ‘no fee’ schools, have made it possible for even the poorest learners to attend school. This has affirmed South Africa’s commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

In light of Notwithstanding the progress made in South Africa in universalising education, there are concerns regarding learner access to quality education, especially in poor provinces such as the Eastern Cape where this study is situated. Thus, the purpose of this study is to further understanding of the interface between learners’ agency and access to education in two township public high schools in Makana District in the Eastern Cape Province. In doing so, the research addresses the current under-representation in the literature of the voices of learners about their experiences of access to education. Drawing on Margaret Archer’s social realist approach to the relationship between structure and agency, the study explores learner agency with the aim of understanding how learners exercise their agency as they struggle to negotiate and overcome difficult and challenging circumstances in order to access education.

The data collection was carried out during the academic year 2011, using a qualitative case study approach. Multiple methods of data collection were used. First, data was collected through questionnaires administered to learners. This questionnaire asked for basic information about the schools (for example, subjects, resources and teachers), parents (their education, employment, qualification etc.) and learners’ aspirations (their role model; where they see themselves in 5 years; which university they would like to attend; and what they would like to become in future). Secondly, observation method was used to collect data that would inform an assessment of the school’s structure and cultural practices and the impact these have on learners’ access to education. The focus here was also on classroom interaction between learners and teachers, as well as classroom participation, participation in extra-mural activities and voluntary activities, and interaction with peers and others in a variety of school settings.

Thirdly, interviews with learners, educators, principals, and parents were used to provide insight about how participants construct their social worlds. In this study the primary data was collected through semi-structured individual and focus group interview. And finally, document analysis was used to analyse the attendance and performance of learners on attendance registers.

Findings from this research have enabled new themes and areas for reflection about learner agency to emerge. These themes reflect current and ongoing constraints and enablements towards learners' educational experiences. In particular, themes such as the following have surfaced: learners changing their lives; the desire to succeed; shaping the future; the value of education; family pride; aspirations and careers.

This study addressed these developments by examining agency as temporally located reflexive deliberations of learners upon their future goals and present social environment. This allowed for the identification of individuals' future goals in relation to access to education and the strategies that they intend to pursue to achieve them, in relation to their personal and social contexts.

The findings show the choices and decisions learners are prepared to make and the strategies they use as they engage with socio-cultural environments. Archer's nuanced approach to agency and structure offers tools to help make sense of learners' equally nuanced way of engaging with various social structures and making considered decisions about their social environment. Key findings of this research suggest that despite the constraining social structures in their homes, communities and schools, learners make decisions and choices that enable them to navigate social contexts to their advantage. Put differently, for learners, social structures provided the impetus for the projects they created, and to this extent enabled rather than constrained their courses of action.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of three phenomenal women: my late mother **Marjorie Namusisi Nsubuga**, my late grandmother **Bitamisi Kayuba**, and my late aunt **Beatrice Nanyondo Mugenyi**.

I owe my deepest gratitude to you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the guidance and the help of several individuals who in one way or another contributed and extended their valuable assistance in the preparation and completion of this study.

First and foremost, my utmost gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Jean Baxen, for giving me the chance to do this research, for believing in me, her encouragement, overwhelming academic and non-academic support, and professional guidance. Above all, I express my gratitude for her patience, which enabled me to complete my work. I am grateful to you, Prof.

Special thanks to my friend Fortunate, for her support, encouragement, assistance, love and emotional support that have gone deep into my heart and will always linger in my mind. I cannot forget my other great friends: Mrs Batyi and Phoebe, Akhona, thank you for being there when I needed you and for encouraging me to keep going.

My sincere thanks go to all the research participants who gave me the opportunity to conduct the research and the entire staff of the two schools for their continued support in providing information.

I am profoundly grateful to Rhodes University for awarding me the Andrew Mellon Scholarship, which gave me full scholarship support to pursue this degree. Without this it would have been only a pipe dream. This research also formed part of a collaborative research project between Rhodes University and Michigan University, from which I obtained additional financial support.

Last but not least, I acknowledge my family and the one above all of us, the omnipresent God, for answering my prayers by giving me the strength to plod on despite my constitution wanting to give up and throw in the towel, Thank you so much dear Lord.

I am grateful to my brother, Nicholas, for his words of encouragement and wisdom. Nicholas, your words “quitting is not an option” have stood with me to the end.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANC:	African National Congress
EFA:	Education For All
FGI:	Focus Group Interviews
GER:	Gross Enrolment Rate
LoLT:	Language of Learning and Teaching
MDG:	Millennium Development Goals
NER:	Net Enrolment Rate
NGOs:	Non-governmental organizations
RDP:	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SGB:	School Governing Body
SMT:	School Management Team
SSA:	Sub-Saharan Africa
STATSA:	Statistics South Africa
UPE:	Universal Primary Education
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF:	United Nations Children Education Fund
UN:	United Nations

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	xi
TABLE OF FIGURES	xii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
1.1 Background and Rationale	1
1.2 Context of the Study	3
1.3 Statement of the Problem	5
1.4 Research Goals	7
1.5 Main Research Question	8
1.6 Organization of the Study	8
1.7 Summary	9
CHAPTER 2 DOMINANT DISCOURSES ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION	10
2.1 Introduction	10
2.2 Dominant Discourses on Access to Education.....	10
2.2.1 <i>Human Capital Discourses on Education</i>	10
2.2.2 <i>Discourse on Education as a Human Right</i>	15
2.2.3 <i>Discourses on the Capabilities Approach to Education</i>	17
2.3 Discourses on Quality Education	21

CHAPTER 3	USING A SOCIAL REALIST FRAMEWORK TO EXAMINE THE INTERFACE BETWEEN LEARNER AGENCY AND THE SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS THAT SHAPE PERSPECTIVES OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION	28
3.1	Introduction	28
3.2	Archer’s Social Realism	28
3.2.1	<i>Analytical Dualism</i>	30
3.2.2	<i>Mediation between Structure and Agency</i>	31
3.2.3	<i>Internal Conversations</i>	34
3.2.4	<i>Role of the Internal Conversation in the Mediation between Structure and Agency</i>	36
3.3	Summary	39
CHAPTER 4	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	40
4.1	Introduction	40
4.2	Methodological Orientation	41
4.3	The Research Process	43
4.3.1	<i>The Pilot Study</i>	43
4.3.2	<i>The Main Study</i>	44
4.4	Data Collection Strategies	46
4.4.1	<i>Questionnaires</i>	47
4.4.2	<i>Observations</i>	49
4.4.3	<i>Interviews</i>	49
4.4.4	<i>Documentary Analysis</i>	52
4.5	Data Analysis Process	54
4.6	Verification of Data	56

4.7	Ethical Issues	56
4.8	Limitations	57
4.9	Summary	58
CHAPTER 5 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS		59
5.1	Introduction	59
5.2	Structural Conditions shaping Learner Educational Experiences	59
5.2.1	<i>Community and Family</i>	59
5.2.1.1	Geographic Location and Apartheid	60
5.2.1.2	Apartheid, Poverty, and Material and Social Conditions	61
5.2.1.3	Household Size, Single-Parenthood, and Family Headship	67
5.2.1.4	Parent Employment Status and Level of Education	70
5.2.1.5	Chores before and after school	73
5.2.1.6	Poverty, Crime and Substance Abuse	74
5.2.1.7	Poverty and Teenage Pregnancy	78
5.2.1.8	Poverty and Basic Needs	80
5.2.2	Schools	81
5.2.2.1	Nkosi Secondary School	82
5.2.2.2	Rainbow Secondary School	91
5.3	Cultural Conditions shaping Learner Educational Experiences	99
5.3.1	<i>Attitude towards Education</i>	100
5.4.2	<i>Motivation to Learn and Become Somebody</i>	103
5.4.3	<i>Aspirations</i>	104
CHAPTER 6 LEARNER AGENCY AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION		107
6.1	Introduction	107
6.2	Learner Agency, structural and cultural conditions, and access to education	108
6.2.1	<i>Learner Agency and Changing Living Conditions</i>	108
6.2.2	<i>Learner Agency and Desire to Succeed</i>	113

6.2.3	<i>Learner Agency in Shaping the Future</i>	115
CHAPTER 7	ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	117
7.1	Introduction	117
7.2	Value of Education	118
7.3	Learner Aspirations to Change Lives.....	120
7.4	Aspirations and Careers	123
7.5	Aspiration to Change Home Situations.....	124
7.6	Learner Agency and Family Pride	126
CHAPTER 8	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	129
8.1	Introduction.....	129
8.2	Summary of the Study	129
8.3	Summary of Findings	130
8.4	Recommendations	132
8.5	Suggestions for Further Research	134
8.6	Limitations of the Study	134
LIST OF REFERENCES	135
APPENDICES	155

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Racial and gender demographic profiles of learners and teachers	61
Table 2: Learners' mode of travel to school	66
Table 3: Distance walked to school	67
Table 4: Employment parents are involved in	71
Table 5: Learner Aspirations	105

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Phases of Archer’s morphogenetic cycle of structure, culture and agency	33
Figure 2: Types of dwelling in Grahamstown East	62
Figure 3: Access to water services by race	63
Figure 4: Percentage of people who pay learners fees.....	69
Figure 5: Parent/guardian employment.....	71
Figure 6: Highest level of education in the family	73

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Background and Rationale

Access to education is regarded as a major instrument in the improvement of the social, political, and economic aspects of societies in developed and developing countries (Rolleston, 2011; Tarabini, 2010; Onsomu, Muthaka, Ngware, and Manda, 2006; Unterhalter, 2007; Chimombo, 2005; Ozturk, 2001). Many countries ensure development of the education sector in order to compete globally. Stewart (1996:331) asserts, "... for both developed and developing countries, education (and training) has become the key to global trading success." The 2009 Education for All Global Monitoring Report (EFA GMR) makes the link between education and economic growth, income distribution and poverty reduction and proposes that education needs to be at the centre of any economic growth plan. This report argues that education provides people with the "knowledge and skills they need to increase income and expand opportunities for employment. This is true for households and for national economies" (UNESCO GMR, 2009: 29).

Not only is the need to be globally competitive an incentive, but also the aspiration to eradicate poverty through widening access to education (Lewin, 2007). As a result, many developing countries have embarked on ambitious transformative initiatives campaigning for the massification of education as a way to alleviate poverty, achieve equality and equity, and advance a social justice agenda (Wedgewood, 2007; AL-Samarrai and Zaman, 2007; Lewin, 2007; Lewin and Akyeampong, 2009). Birdsall, Levine and Ibrahim (2005: 25) state,

... educating the poor is particularly important for triggering broader social change. Education has a special quality: the human capital acquired through formal education cannot be expropriated. In that respect, it is different from land or financial assets. Education is an asset that enables its owner to earn more and to communicate and obtain information more successfully.

Some also argue that access to education leads to social benefits such as reduction in population growth due to lowered fertility rates and through promoting good health (Unterhalter, 2006; Hargreaves and Boler, 2006; Ahmad, 2003). The argument is that education especially for women and girls has a positive impact on their knowledge about contraceptives and other prevention measures. This, according to Ahmad (2003), leads to improved standards of living and reduction in mortality. Frequently, these benefits to a society are extensive when female education in particular improves (Schultz, 1999: 7 & 10).

Thus, the idea that access to education will potentially empower people and as a result, lead to social and economic development, has framed many government's education and social policies. The upshot has been an increase in enrolments in school globally, regionally (Africa and Southern Africa), with South Africa being no exception.

Discourses on access to education¹ have not been limited to development agendas alone. In recent years, there has been a shift in the way access to education is viewed in society. Not only is it viewed as a developmental goal through which poverty might be eradicated, but also as a basic human right and the foundation to achieve social justice. This in turn has placed emphasis on the provision not only of access but also more specifically, of *equal and meaningful* access to reasonable and quality education particularly in developing countries. Lewin & Little (2011: 333) explain this point further,

Not only should all children participate in a full cycle of basic education, but their opportunities to learn and benefit should also be equitably distributed. Participation alone is not sufficient to realise a right to education if what is on offer is highly unequal in quality, effectiveness, and cost. Growth in educational participation, just like growth in an economy can be accompanied by greater or lesser inequality.

Thus, shifts are traceable from discourses that foreground massification through universal education to those that emphasise the quality of education once children are in school. Put differently, discourses on access to education have shifted from those that emphasise the need to *create* access because it is a basic human right, can alleviate poverty, and has economic benefits to those that question the *quality of access in school* (prompted by high failure and repetition rates and issues of retention (Lewin, 2007).

Increased access to education is well documented and its efficacy not in dispute here (EFA GMR, 2009, 2010). The EFA GMR (2010) though, suggests that high enrolment figures, particularly those in developing countries, mask the increasing gender disparities on the one hand and disparities within and between regions on the other hand. The cause of low enrolment, dropout, high attrition, and low retention rates is attributed to various factors, which often are diverse and interconnected. For example, children living in poverty-stricken areas often receive poor education and few of them manage to complete school (UNDG, 2010: 1; EFA GMR, 2010). Thus, while there is an increase in enrolment internationally, regionally, and locally (including South Africa), unequal access to education related to geographical location and social class still pose major constraints.

¹ Chapter 2 includes a full discussion of discourses on access and education.

Countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia especially grapple with low retention and poor quality education (UNDG, 2010). According to Lewin and Akyeampong (2009: 143), sub-Saharan Africa is still below par in terms of achieving access to education compared with other regions in the world. With over 25-million children at the primary and 75-million at secondary levels respectively not enrolled in school, these regions still have a long way to go to achieve universal education (Lewin, 2007). Several reasons contribute to the large number of children not attending school in this region. These include, among others, socio-economic challenges such as school costs (direct and indirect costs), child labour, migration, civil wars, HIV/AIDS, gender inequalities, and poverty.

Related to the above, the surge in primary enrolment has created high demands for secondary education, especially in low developing countries. Lewin (2007: 1) asserts, "... the great majority of secondary age African children remain excluded from good quality secondary schooling. Increasing numbers are graduating from primary schools where enrolments are rapidly growing as a result of successful EFA programmes." It is estimated that fewer than 30% of children enrolled complete secondary education. Transition from primary to secondary education thus remains a challenge (Lewin, 2007, 2009, Akyeampong et al. 2007; Motala, Dieltiens, Carrim, Kgobe, Moyo and Rembe, 2007; Lewin 2008; Chimombo, 2009).

South Africa is no different in its experience of high levels of access at the primary school level and a decrease as children progress through the school system. The phenomenon of unequal access and lower numbers of children at the secondary levels of school militates against this country's educational transformation ideals that are premised on the need to redress the past and accord every individual an opportunity to access education regardless of race, gender or socio-economic status.

1.2 Context of the Study

The turning point in the history of South Africa was the transition from a separatist, apartheid system to a democratic state in 1994. Prior to 1994, South Africa was a racially divided nation with different education systems catering for different sectors of the population. Education was provided along racial lines, which led to discriminatory practices that excluded the majority not only from access but also from *equal* access to *quality* education. The result of unequal access to education at all levels of the system created vast disparities

between population groups, regions, and provinces in the country. These disparities have had a long-lasting impact on the quality of education in this country, particularly in provinces such as the Eastern Cape where this study is located.

The post-apartheid era saw a transformation from a racially divided education system to a single non-racial system (Motala, 2001; Motala, Dieltiens, Carrim, Kgobe, Moyo and Rembe, 2007:2). The current government's imperative to transform the education system has been driven by a need to overcome injustices created by apartheid, and to provide an education system that enhances democracy, human dignity, equality, and social justice. South Africa's efforts to increase and improve educational access are traceable through budget allocations as well as by the plethora of policies and initiatives geared towards redress of the imbalances created by the apartheid system². These policies embody South Africa's commitment to widening participation in education and to meeting the EFA and MDGs goals (Fleisch and Shindler, 2007). The effect has been increased access to education in the last seventeen years, especially amongst population groups previously marginalised.

Education has been made accessible to ensure that it is not viewed as a privilege that only some people enjoy. It is viewed as an equal opportunity for everyone regardless of their race, colour, gender, or social economic background (Lake and Pendlebury, 2009). According to South Africa's National Department of Education [NDE] (2011), 99% of children are enrolled in school from Grade 1-9; meaning that participation in education at this education level is near universal.

According to the NDE (2010), South Africa spent 18% of its fiscal budget on education. Yet, such increased funding in this sector has not managed to expunge inequalities in the system. Most children in rural and township schools are still disadvantaged in terms of quality education (Dieltiens, 2006: 5; Motala, *et al.*, 2009: 253). Despite the efforts of the South African government to address these inequities through policy reforms³, research points to persistent inequalities in the education system that disproportionately affect the black majority in this country (Letseka, *et. al.*, 2010). The deficiencies in the education system have left many South African children at a disadvantage in terms of educational opportunities.

² Policies include the South African Constitution, South African Schools Act (1996), White Paper on Education and Training (1995), National Education Policy Act (1996), Language Education Policy (1997), and the Higher Education Framework (1997).

³ Such as Norms and Standards for School Funding; no-fee schools and school-fee exemptions; the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP); special needs; Grade R and occupational specific dispensation (OSD) for educators

Recent studies and reports have highlighted the unequal access to quality education in South Africa (Sayed and Ahmed, 2011; Smith, 2011; Gilmour & Soudien, 2009; Motala, *et. al.*, 2007; Nelson Mandela Report, 2005). Reasons put forward range from economic factors and social class to those that blame the legacy of the apartheid past that persists within the present education system. In his article entitled "The 'A' factor", Soudien (2007) discusses the impact that apartheid still has on South Africa's education system. He argues that education policy-makers underestimate the influence of apartheid, which is largely still ingrained in most black schools. Huge backlogs such as insufficient resources, poor infrastructure and under-trained teachers inherited from the apartheid government still prevail in some South African schools, especially in provinces that inherited homelands (Godden, 2005: 8; Pendlebury, 2010: 26; Letseka, *et. al.*, 2010). Despite government efforts, the desired outcomes are not evident. The majority of black learners still attend schools that have few resources (Bloch, 2009; Jansen, 2009). There has been a drop in matric exemptions which would allow learners access to higher education: from 18.6% in 2003 to 17.6% in 2009 (Motloun, 2009; Bloch, 2009).

In particular, rural provinces such as the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Mpumalanga continue to underperform compared with more urban provinces such as the Western Cape and Gauteng (Bloch, 2009). This is attributed mainly to mismanagement, corruption, and poor infrastructure at both provincial and district levels. Such deficiencies have also been ascribed to the legacy of apartheid because these provinces incorporated former poor homelands (Motala, 2001). It is said that schools in these provinces still grapple with providing quality education because they lack the resources and person-power required to equip learners with the necessary knowledge and skills (Gibbon, 2010).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite being the province with the highest enrolment figures, the Eastern Cape registers some of the lowest matric results in the country. Statistics in South Africa place the Eastern Cape⁴ second only to Kwazulu Natal in the number of schools per province (Department of

4 The Eastern Cape is a relatively underdeveloped region with high poverty and unemployment rates. Rural areas such as Ciskei and Transkei are pointed out as the most deprived and poorest parts of the Eastern Cape Province. According to the (...) only 21% of the total Eastern Cape population is employed, 25% are unemployed and 54% are not economically active. The province has one of the highest rates of dependency on social grants (pension, child, and disability grants) as a means of income. In a report on Rapid Assessment of Service Delivery carried out by the Fort Hare Institute of Social and Economic Research (FHISER) & Development Research Africa (DRA), in 2006, it was estimated that the unemployment rate was 29.6% in the province. It further indicates that three in four informal settlement

Education, 2010; Annual Schools Survey, 2008). Set against the national proportion of schools to learner numbers, the Eastern Cape appears to be relatively well served (Hendricks, 2006). However, many of the schools (34.8%) in the province fall within Quintile 1⁵, compared with other provinces such as the Western Cape, where only about 6.5% of schools are in Quintile 1 (Hendricks, 2006; DOE, 2010). Thus, despite the province having many schools and a high number of teachers, the reality is that there are backlogs related to resources, infrastructure, enrolment, and quality education (Hendricks, 2006).

The Nelson Mandela Foundation's (2005) research into rural schools paints a grim picture of what is happening in schools in this province. This report, together with other research, shows that many learners are affected by poverty, hunger, and HIV/AIDS, all of which mediates their access and success (NMF, 2005; Dieltiens, 2006: 22; Motala, *et. al.*, 2007). Added to this, the majority of black children still lag behind in terms of performance in matric examinations compared with other race groups (see Appendix A) (Bloch, 2009; Bhorat and Oosthuizen, 2008). Teachers are seen to lack content knowledge, have inadequate teaching and learning resource materials, and are poorly trained to implement the new curriculum (Patton, 2006: 24; Bloch, 2009: 102; DoE, 2008; Gibbon, 2010: 77). This is an indication that wide access and participation in education does not necessarily result - and indeed has not resulted - in meaningful access to education, particularly for black children in South Africa (Gilmour & Soudien, 2009: 281).

Thus, while South Africa's achievement in universalising education cannot be denied, issues concerning the quality of education children receive once they have access, have taken centre stage. In an interview with the Daily Star (2007), Motala acknowledged that despite learner persistence to stay in school, "many of them suffer 'silent exclusion', being in classrooms but learning very little." According to Jansen (2009), about 50% of learners who enrol in schools do not succeed in completing school, a factor that illustrates that increased enrolment figures does not necessarily result in meaningful access and completion of school. Language barriers,

households had an income of less than R1500 a month and that this was largely spent on food. Due to high poverty and unemployment rates, a large number of young people are emigrating to other provinces in search of better employment and better lives.

5 Quintile is a pro-poor policy/system implemented by the government of South Africa under the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSF), in an attempt to redress and redistribute resources in the education sector. The quintile rank of a school is based on the poverty level of the community in which it is located. This score is calculated using national census data: weighted household ratio (or unemployment rate), and the level of education of the community (or literacy rate). It ranks from quintile 1 to 5 with 5 being Ex- Model C schools

poor school management, poor quality teaching, age of learners, and teachers' attitudes are some of the factors affecting access to education at the micro-level (CREATE, 2009; Gilmour & Soudien, 2009; Motala, *et. al.* 2009). These factors coupled with overcrowded classes, lack of textbooks, under-qualified teachers, dilapidated infrastructure with no electricity, toilets or running water, and lack of learning and teaching materials all act as hindrances to quality education (Mboya & Mwamwenda, 1994; Samuel & Sayed, 2004; Borat & Oosthuizen, 2008).

In part, responses to the questions this study poses are known. I argue though, that this is only part of the story because, despite the circumstances revealed in the research articulated above, some children persist and remain in school for its duration. Many of the arguments on access focus either on the structural aspects (e.g. poor infrastructure, lack of resources) that shape school experiences or on teachers (e.g. knowledge, pedagogy, or competency). Few take account of learner experiences once physical access is achieved. In particular, few studies take account of the ways in which learners use their reflexive ability to respond to and mediate the structural and cultural conditions related to their educational trajectories.

This study poses questions on the role and position of learners by examining the complex interplay between learner agency and social structure and cultural conditions that enable or constrain their school experiences. In particular, this study poses questions on ways in which learners make meaning and act on the conditions (cultural and structural) to mediate access to education.

This study draws on Margaret Archer's social realist theory as theoretical framework. The significance of this theory is that it foregrounds agency, while at the same time acknowledging the social and cultural contexts in which agents make meaning of their lives.

1.4 Research Goals

Drawing on a social realist framework, this study sought to gain insight into the interface between learner agency and social structures and cultural conditions shaping access to education in selected schools in the Grahamstown District.

1.5 Main Research Question

The following research question framed the study:

What is the interface between learner agency and the social structures and cultural conditions shaping access to education for a sampled group of Grade 11 learners in selected schools in the Grahamstown District?

Sub Questions

1. How do social structures and cultural conditions enable or constrain learner agency in relation to access to education for a sampled group of Grade 11 learners?
2. What social structures and cultural conditions shape learner perspectives of access to education?
3. What are learner responses to the structural and cultural conditions they confront in relation to access to education?

1.6 Organization of the Study

The thesis is organised into eight chapters. *Chapter 1* introduced the study by stating the motivation, relevance and purpose of the study. This chapter also outlined the research goals and questions that frame the study.

Chapter 2 introduces the conceptual framework by analysing major discourses on access to education. It begins with a brief historical analysis of the dominant discourses on access to education to locate the study.

In *Chapter 3*, I present the theoretical orientations that framed the study. I begin with a rationale for the theoretical orientation and how it is applicable in the study. I proceed to explain how Archer's theoretical framework shaped the research process.

In *Chapter 4*, I provide a rationale for the methodological orientation and the use of a case study design. I proceed to explain the site, sample, research techniques, and the research process followed. This chapter also includes decisions on the data analysis, ethical considerations, and a discussion on the verification and reliability of the data. I conclude with a discussion on the limitations of the study.

In *Chapter 5*, I present a descriptive account of the research findings framed within social realist ontology with the focus of analysing the interplay between structure, culture and agency and how they interact to shape learners' access to education. The chapter adopts Archer's analytical dualism to analyse the data. Analytical dualism allows the researcher to isolate cultural, structural conditions in order to examine their causal powers and emergent properties.

Chapter 6 is a continuation of the presentation of results. The main focus is results that foreground learners and their responses to the structural and cultural conditions in which they mediate access to education. The chapter presents data that illuminates how learners use their reflexive powers (internal conversation) to respond to structure and cultural conditioning that shape the situations in which they find themselves.

Chapter 7 presents the analysis and discussion of the main findings of the study in relation to the conceptual and theoretical analysis in Chapters 2 and 3.

Lastly, in *Chapter 8*, I present an overview of the study by summarizing the key findings and reflecting on how my study contributes to the education field and towards discourses on access to education in South Africa. I also provide recommendations for future research. I describe the limitations of my research and conclude with personal reflections.

1.7 Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the study, providing rationale and background.. The chapter briefly introduced the theoretical as well as the methodological orientation shaping the study. I presented the context, problem statement, main and sub-questions guiding the study. This chapter concluded with an overview of structure of the study.

The next chapter discusses orientations and dominant discourses on access to education.

CHAPTER 2 DOMINANT DISCOURSES ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION

2.1 Introduction

In keeping with the social realist ontology of Margaret Archer, this chapter presents discussions on discourses on access to education over time in order to generate an understanding of the emergence of structural and cultural mechanisms that have contributed and influenced past and current thinking about access to education. The emphasis in this section is on the complex and contested grounds in which discourses on access to education have been and still are situated. This review seeks to highlight some of the strengths and limitations of this work, and in doing so, locate this study.

2.2 Dominant Discourses on Access to Education

This review focuses on three dominant discourses relevant to the study, which include the human capital, human rights and capability approach. These are explored with the aim of understanding how ideas, theories, beliefs, and related values contribute to understanding access to education internationally and within South Africa. Given South Africa's historical past, these discourses have had an influence on the transformation of education but, as I argue, are limited in enabling us to understand the complexity of the education environment that learners interact with in the decisions they make about school. I begin with an overview of the human capital discourse and follow this firstly with a discussion of discourses on human rights and then with a review of the capability approach to education and development. A focus on discourses concerning quality education follows. I thereafter summarise the discussion to highlight the theoretical limitations.

2.2.1 Human Capital Discourses on Education

The value of education to economic development is acknowledged widely in the literature and South Africa is no exception. Education is frequently placed at the heart of South Africa's social transformation and economic development. In the decade since the establishment of EFA and MDGs, international policies, the South African government's policies and strategies, and researchers have rallied and campaigned for universal education, proffering the conviction that universalising access to education would help to eradicate poverty, achieve gender equality, and bring about social cohesion (Tikly, 2011).

These policy and education frameworks were born out of human capital discourses, which view education as an investment (Tikly, 2010; 2011). The human capital approach has been (and by and large still is) the dominant approach in debates concerning the role of education in eradicating poverty and development (Tikly, 2011; Robertson, Novelli, Dale, Tikly, Dachi, and Ndibelema, 2007). International funding agencies (such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), OECD, the G20 and European Union, as well as UNESCO) embrace this ideological perspective and link universalising education with economic gains and a transformed society (Lanzi, 2006; Christie, 2008; Robertson, et al., 2007; Tikly, 2010, 2011).

The human capital approach is mainly associated with Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964) (Robertson, et al., 2007; Robeyns, 2006). It is premised on the principle that investing in education (which has now extended to quality education) contributes to economic growth and development. Scholars though have argued that years in schooling do not always lead to learning (Tikly, 2010; 2011; Robertson, et al; 2007). Hanushek and Wößmann (2008 as cited in Tikly, 2011: 5) argue, "... there is a statistically and economically positive effect of the quality of education on economic growth that is far larger than the association between quantity of education and growth." They make the point that quality is more closely associated with economic growth than is the length of time spent in school (Tikly, 2011).

Human capital approach discourses have contributed to creating enabling conditions that led to the emergence of mass education in many countries during industrialisation. According to Jones (2007: 4 as cited in Tikly and Barrett, 2011), the assumption that education leads to economic growth "prompted a shift in political commitment from cost-sharing to free primary education." This has also extended to include secondary and post-basic levels of education and training, with the view to ensuring skilled nations that can participate in the global knowledge economy.

Embedding education within economic and developmental agendas pushed governments, together with international donor agencies, to formulate educational policies and strategies with the aim of making education a priority. Nowhere is this more evident than in developing countries (Lewin, 2007, Tikly and Barrett, 2009). Developing countries such as those in sub-Saharan Africa have rapidly expanded access to education, particularly primary education, as a pathway to social and economic development and growth. Access to education, especially secondary education and including attainment in this instance, is being used by countries as a

primary mechanism for development. Whatever the argument, emphasis is placed on those who access and complete education and on the benefits that come with that, including (among others) improved standards of living, increase in income generation and a reduction in mortality.

Access to secondary education has become increasingly important as a major determinant in reducing poverty for individuals (Lewin, 2007:3). Further, Wils, Carrol and Barrow (2005 as cited in Tikly, 2011) argue that from a human capital perspective, countries with wider inequalities also have low national growth rates. Against this backdrop, scholars, researchers, educationists, international donor agencies, and governments have used and embraced human capital discourses to rationalise their focus on expanding access to (particularly) primary education. In particular, such arguments have been used to emphasise expanding education through Universal Primary Education campaigns and girl-child education, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

The influence of human capital discourses in South Africa is observed through its government policy frameworks introduced after 1994, aimed at creating what Lewis (2001) terms “economic inclusion.” This established the need not only to create sustainable economic growth but also to contribute towards an equitable and just society (Christie, 2008; Malcolm, 2001: 203; Lewis, 2001). The new government had to create an economy that would address issues of poverty as well the social economic inequalities that affected mainly black people (Christie, 2007). In response, the ANC-led government introduced policies such as the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) and the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) frameworks (Christie, 2007:91; Motala and Pampallis, 2001; Lewis, 2001). These policies, aimed at redressing the huge backlogs and structural imbalances, were established with the view to creating a more equitable society (White Paper on Reconstruction and Development, 1995). Motala and Pampallis (2001: 60) state, “... the RDP aimed at stamping out poverty and promoting equality between races and genders, in addition to redressing the social ills from the past.” The challenge was to provide equal and quality education that was in line with economic development while at the same time dealing with global issues such as technology advancement and the need for skilled labour). Addressing injustices became a priority for the new government, with the primary way being through restructuring the education system. As Christie (2008: 90) points out, the RDP and GEAR provided a foundation for understanding “... education provision in South Africa, and for

assessing the performance of South Africa's education system in terms of conventional development indicators.”

While the impact of a human capital approach on universal access to education over the past decades is undeniable, it has garnered criticisms over the years for its lack of a credible framework to understand the impact of quality education on economic development (Tikly, 2011: 5). The main criticism of human capital theory and other instrumentalist discourses on education is that it assumes a “one size fits all” approach to education and ignores the various structural, cultural, and agential factors that either constrains or enables different groups of people to access and succeed in education (Tikly, 2011). According to Tikly (2011: 6), the human capital theory is

(...) problematic to assume a linear relationship between inputs, processes and outputs of education that is often implied by an input–output model. Rather the inter-relationships between learner characteristics, enabling inputs, educational processes and outcomes are complex, multi-dimensional and vary according to context.

The human capital approach has also been criticised for its simplistic correlation between access and economic growth and development and its over-reliance on years of schooling (length of time) and the use of standardized test to measure quality as well as economic development and growth (Vegas & Petrow, 2008; Hanushek and Wößmann 2007; Tikly, 2011). In addition, Unterhalter (2007) and Christie (2007) criticize the human capital approach for reducing education to a functionalist argument and, in a way, undermining issues concerning gender, race, and location (e.g. education of girls and women). Arguably, it is important that various structural and cultural factors be considered regarding access to education beyond the first step of physical access. Thus, to avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach, it is important to consider each country’s context because this would determine the kind of education people would receive and the results from such education (Tikly, 2011). Lewin (2007) makes the point that in some countries, an increase in enrolment in schools has not been followed by surges in economic development, thus casting further doubt on a human capital argument. Focusing on education with the aim to achieve economic returns is not sufficient, especially in a country like South Africa where the inequalities still persist in historically disadvantaged schools. Ron-Balsera (2011: 284) echoes Lewin’s (2007) view by stating,

Investments in human capital are investments that are naturally pro-poor’ (2007:22). But in reality education is not always profitable in terms of economic returns or results in measurable poverty reduction. Following the human capital logic, certain population groups can be excluded from access to good quality education.

Although the relationship between education and economic development cannot be denied, nevertheless, as the criticisms above indicate, concerns have grown regarding the quality of education once physical access is secured. These concerns have prompted a shift away from human capital discourses to those that foreground *equality* and *quality* education. Proponents of this new shift argue that emphasis on enrolment alone is insufficient and that questions should be posed on what actually happens after children have been enrolled (Hanushek and Wößmann, 2007, Lewin, 2007). For example, research carried out by Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) and Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) both reveal that factors such as overcrowded classrooms with insufficient learning materials and under-qualified teachers have consequences for the outcomes of schooling (Alexander, 2008).

Despite access to education being viewed as a means through which inequalities can be addressed, particularly in South Africa, it is also a medium through which the worst social stratifications can be manufactured. Nowhere is this more evident than in South Africa where in the past education was used to subjugate and entrench social and economic differentiation, to serve the needs of the ruling party. The legacy of apartheid and its impact on the school experiences of learners is still rife in rural and township schools. The inequalities in educational attainment in this country have translated into differentials in employment, occupation, income, residence, and social class. To quote Porath (2012: 29), “ [A] purely economic focus does not provide a sound basis for equalizing educational access, or even for justifying the demand that all receive an appropriate education.”

It is clear from the foregoing arguments that focusing on education as an instrument to alleviate poverty and achieve economic growth are of limited value since it underplays (a) what happens after enrolment, (b) the social and cultural conditions that shape learner experiences after enrolment, and (c) learners agential potential to reproduce or transform the status quo. The importance and usefulness of this perspective notwithstanding, such an approach to access has limitations, as already mentioned. To recap, this approach:

1. Universalises access to education and the concomitant measurement tools. Put differently, this approach ignores the specificity of context and issues that mediate access at the local level.
2. is simplistic in that it presupposes a direct relationship between access to school and economic growth. In addition, it assumes a smooth transition in school without paying

attention to what happens in school that may adversely affect teaching, learning and progression.

3. Underplays the social context (and issues like gender, race, location, class) and in so doing, ignores the impact of social structures and cultural conditions within which access is mediated.
4. Presupposes a passive agent who is reactive rather than responsive to structures and cultural conditions. By downplaying the role of the agent, such an orientation does not account for differences in learner experiences of access.
5. Silences the voice of the recipients of access by not accounting for their experiences.
6. It is evident from the foregoing discussion that human capital discourses lean towards conceptualising access to education as an economic good with economic returns. The human rights discourse on the other hand, focuses on the right to education: namely, on the premise that every individual, regardless of where they come from, has a right to education.

I now turn to the second approach, a human rights discourse that also impacts education decision-making and in some ways extends the overall discourse on access to education.

2.2.2 Discourse on Education as a Human Right

In contrast to the human capital approach, the human rights discourse acknowledges people's rights to access to education as significant in broadening each individual's horizons in terms of human dignity, empowerment, fairness, equality, and equity in a range of contexts (UNESCO, 2007). A rights-based approach was adopted by education sectors, governments, and bilateral agencies to ensure that access to education was treated as a major global issue that needed to be addressed urgently⁶. Unlike the human capital approach that underplays the complexity of classroom process, the rights-based approach advocates for "learn-centeredness and democratic school structures" (Tikly, 2011). According to UNESCO (2007: 7), "[T]hese treaties establish an entitlement to free, compulsory primary education for all children; an obligation to develop secondary education, supported by measures to render it accessible to all children, as well as equitable access to higher education; and a responsibility

⁶ Declarations and treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and treaties such the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981) among others (UNESCO, 2006; Christie, 2007)

to provide basic education for individuals who have not completed primary education.” Such an approach assumes that the role of education is to promote personal development, as well as to “strengthen respect for human rights and freedoms, enable individuals to participate effectively in a free society, and promote understanding, friendship and tolerance” (UNESCO, 2007: 7).

Within South Africa, the rights-based approach can be traced back to the struggle against the apartheid education system. For example, the 1976 student revolt was targeted “[against the] unequal and racially segregated education system, against having to learn in Afrikaans, against racist and authoritarian curricula and against corporal punishment and the sexual harassment of female learners and teachers. Students’ organisations argued for learner centred approaches and for democratic participation in decision making” (Tikly, 2011: 90).

While the outcomes of education from a human rights perspective are different to those underpinned by human capital discourses, they both still emphasise physical access to education by focusing on the number of children in school (Kgobe, 2006: 8). Research from human rights perspective was also preoccupied with the number of children in and out of school, with little attention to what happened in schools and classrooms. Put differently, this research paid little attention to the quality of education and school experiences once children had physical access to schools.

Like the human capital approach, the rights-based approach has attracted criticism. The main criticism points to a limited understanding of rights and of how quantitative increase in enrolment has impacted the quality of education provision. As Motala, Dieltiens and Sayed, (2009) propose, the right to education does not end with getting children into schools; rather it includes quality and relevant education as well. These scholars advance a discourse that references quality as an important criterion in any deliberations on access. To them, enrolment is intertwined with discourses on quality to ensure that those entering school acquire meaningful education ([see section 2.3](#)).

Such a shift has led to research that focuses on aspects *in* schools and classrooms (for example: the curriculum and its impact on learning; teachers’ content and pedagogical knowledge; the quality and relevance of the knowledge and skills learners are exposed to) (Pillay, 1994). The shift has thus been from discourses focused on mere enrolment to a focus

on quality education in order to secure rights to education, rights in education and rights through education (Subrahmanian, 2002; Unterhalter, 2007 as cited in Tikly and Barrett, 2010).

From a development perspective, scholars have argued for (quality) education indicators that go beyond those that privilege economic growth and development as a desirable outcome, as I discuss in the section that follows.

2.2.3 Discourses on the Capabilities Approach to Education

Departing from the human capital and rights-based approaches, discourses on the capabilities approach describe it as a tool and framework for evaluating inequalities and human wellbeing (Robeyns, 2009). The emphasis from this perspective is on people's capabilities⁷ (what people are able to do and to be) and functionings⁸ (see Wright, 2012; Tao, 2009; Walker and Unterhalter, 2007; Robeyns, 2005; EFA, 2002). To emphasise this point, Robeyns, Unterhalter, (2006; 2003 as cited in Trani, Bakhshi and Nandipati (2012: 348) explain:

The capabilities approach gives intrinsic value to education, which the human capital framework omits. It also goes beyond the human rights framework, which entitles all children to education but fails to make operational these rights. As a result, they often remain only formal, legal or limited to providing material conditions to reach universal access without considering the other factors that restrict some children from learning.

This contrasts the capabilities approach from the approaches already described that focus on universal access to education as a development tool and reduction in gender disparities in education. Pioneered by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, the capabilities approach was introduced to offer an alternative perspective to understanding international development by placing the emphasis on human development (McCowan, 2011; Wilson-Strydom, 2011).

The application of the capabilities approach in education offers a different perspective for understanding access to education, with the emphasis on people's potential to achieve what they value rather than only on potential economic benefits. The approach emphasise show education can enhance people's freedom to do and be what they reason to value McCowan

⁷ Capabilities are 'the alternative combination of functionings that are feasible for [a person] to achieve'; they are 'the substantive freedom' that a person has 'to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value' (Sen, 1999: 87). Capabilities as defined by Sen are a "person's or group's freedom to promote or achieve valuable functionings" (Alkire, 2002b, p. 6). These capabilities are what allow people to perform certain functionings to "lead the kind of lives they value — and have reason to value" (Sen, 1999, p. 18).

⁸ Functionings' are defined as the valuable activities and states that make up people's well-being, such as having a healthy body, being safe, or having a good job. They are related to goods and income, but they describe what a person is able to do or be as a result – for example, when a person's need for food (a commodity) is met, they enjoy the functioning of being well-nourished.

(2011). Hart (2012: 276) states that the capabilities approach offers an alternative paradigm for thinking beyond universal access to education and for considering the potential for individual freedoms both in and through education. The approach recognises that, contrary to the emphasis of the human capital and rights-based approaches, not all people with access to education gain the same benefits from it, as.

Unterhalter (2003) and Raynor (2007 as cited in Hart, 2012) explain that universal education has not necessarily been beneficial to all learners and some educational experiences reinforce existing social inequalities related to, for example, gender, social class and ethnicity. Sen (2009 as cited in Hart, 2012: 278) explains,

the capabilities approach allows us to think about the role, process and content of public education in innovative ways and to broaden strategic horizons beyond the constrictions of standardized testing, neoliberal discourses and quantitative policy directives (especially in relation to enrolment figures and years of schooling). It offers a set of conceptual tools for reflecting on ways of reducing the present injustices in our education systems and wider society rather than waiting for a consensus on what constitutes perfect justice (Sen, 2009).

Scholars like Unterhalter and Brighouse (2007: 73) point to the need to assess aspects of education deemed valuable for consideration, including, for example issues around the distribution of resources and around class, gender, race and ethnic inequalities. A capability approach makes it possible to evaluate such issues. This approach deviates from aspects of both the human capital and rights-based approaches in significant ways, primary of which is its emphasis on what the benefits of education are for individuals and collectives beyond the economic benefit countries often put forward as reasons for investment in education. Emphasis is thus on people's wellbeing; freedoms, with the benefit of improving economic production and influencing social change (Otto and Ziegler, 2006; Unterhalter, 2003). Cameron (2012: 300) views the capabilities approach as a paradigm with the ability to combine both the human rights and human capital understanding of the role that education plays in human wellbeing. These advocates argue that the approach offers a wide scope for evaluation and assessment of what school can do for learners in terms of emotional, rational, and deliberative development.

Further, Maguire, Donovan, Mishook, Gaillande and Garcia (2012) explain that the capabilities approach has tools that can be used to assess and evaluate human well-being and inequalities in society, because it focuses on human individual opportunities and freedoms rather than on gains from accessing education. Its advocates thus see it as an important framework that allows for the conceptualisation and evaluation of education and takes

account of issues that militate against successful progression through school (see also Walker, 2003; Robeyns, 2005; Otto and Ziegler, 2006; Vaughan and Walker, 2007).

Importantly too, as Cameron (2012) notes, the application of the capabilities approach in education can act as an assessment tool for understanding education beyond what the human capital and human rights-based approaches offer in terms of analysing education as an economic gain and a right. Unterhalter, Vaughan and Walker (2007: 20) assert, "... the capabilities approach offers a robust framework which incorporates notions of social justice in thinking about education within very different and unequal social settings, and which future conceptual and empirical work will help to illuminate."

For disadvantaged groups, education is a means of fighting poverty and transforming society economically, socially, and politically. Thus, for it to achieve these objectives it cannot be limited to physical access and completion; we must also take into account its content, delivery and quality in and throughout school. Hart (2012: 276) puts it this way,

The capabilities approach offers an alternative paradigm for thinking beyond access to education and for considering the potential for individual freedoms both in and through education. The capability approach recognizes that not all individuals will participate or benefit from education in the same way, nor be able to convert the resources afforded by education to generate the same or similar advantages in life.

The extract captures the fundamental premise of the capabilities approach: universal access to education must impact not only on development but also on people's capabilities and aspirations (their ability to think and reason, to build up self-respect, as well as respect for others, and to think ahead and plan their future). Maguire et al., (2012: 370) note that this perspective allows for deeper analysis and understanding of people's choices and desires, the social structures in existence that mediate the decisions that people end up making, and the contexts from which people emerge. As Kelly (2012) sees it, the focus is on the freedom individuals have to pursue their own values and interests. The emphasis is not solely on how people function, but on them having the capability (and practical choice) to function in ways they regard as important. Thus, viewing education within the framework of a capability approach offers lenses to help understand education as a capability in itself: a capability that expands other capabilities such as gaining skills, gaining opportunities, critical thought, respect, and empathy (Tao; 2009).

From this vantage point, discourse on the capabilities approach foregrounds the need to evaluate policies that focus on what people are able to do and be, on the quality of their life,

and on removing obstacles in their lives so that they have more freedom to live the kind of life that upon reflection they have reason to value. In relation to the above, the UNESCO EFA Report (2002: 32) suggests that policies should be “judged to be successful if they have enhanced people’s capabilities - whether or not they have also affected income, growth, and other important means to this end”. Separating itself from other discourses ([section 2.2.1](#) and [2.2.2](#)) on education, the capabilities approach assesses policies not on the basis of their impact on income, but on whether or not they expand the real freedoms that people value. Education is central to this process” (UNESCO 2002: 33).

The capabilities approach is significant in its insistence that the enjoyment of education involves not just a formal entitlement to schooling, but all the conditions (economic, cultural and so forth) necessary for having access, being able to meaningfully engage in learning and converting that learning into opportunities. Attention must be paid not only to the capability to have access to education of quality (which corresponds to having rights to education and within education), Education must also be seen as a conversion factor for other capabilities (that is, rights and values are gained and supported through education. As Unterhalter states,

[W]e should look not just at inputs like teachers, hours in class, or learning materials or outputs, earning from a particular level of education . . . or preference satisfaction – what is best for the family as assumed in human capital theory. Evaluations should look at the condition of being educated, the negative and positive freedoms that sustain this condition and the ways in which being educated support what each and every individual has reason to value. (2007: 75)

Thus the capabilities approach draws attention to the importance of the wider moral imperative of providing a quality education, and the importance of communities, as well as the state, in developing and realising this imperative through their own commitments and actions (Tikly and Barrett, 2011: 10–11)

Regarding the equality of education, the capabilities approach also takes a wider view on equality of education. As a basic capability, the value of education also includes bridging the social barriers (UNESCO EFA Report; 2002). Sen (1992) (as cited in Wilson-Strydom, 2011) asserts that the equality of education entails offering learners the same opportunities to study as ‘one of the substantive freedoms’ or the capabilities to choose a life one individual has reason to value (Sen, 1992). The approach has the merit of being comfortable with explicitly combining human rights and human capital understandings of the role of schooling in human well-being.

This view has practical consequences for South Africa in terms of effective access to quality education. First, the approach offers tools for South Africa to evaluate its education system with the view to offer adequate education to citizens so that they expand their capabilities, i.e. have the agency to convert education opportunities into chosen ‘functionings’ or ‘the actual living people manage to achieve’ (Sen, 1992: 52). In this regard, education is not merely a legal right, but an opportunity provided to all children, with adequate resources allocated towards it. For instance, opportunities in terms of teachers, books, changes in social norms and values and infrastructures, should all be availed to benefit people (Mitra, 2006; Sen, 2009; Terzi, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Trani, Bakhshi, Bellanca, Biggeri, & Marchetta; 2011).

Thus, whilst capabilities in education may indeed include outcomes such as literacy and numeracy and basic scientific knowledge, they are not reducible to these. For Sen, education also potentially has a redistributive effect (for example in relation to the role of girls’ education in closing the gender gap in employment and income) and an empowering effect through contributing to the realisation of democratic freedoms. ‘In short, education in the capability approach is an unqualified good for human development freedom’ (Walker, 2006: 168). Whilst recognising the potential benefits that can flow from education in terms of promoting the freedoms and capabilities of individuals and groups, we are also deeply mindful of the role of the processes of schooling in reproducing inequalities and denying basic freedoms, for example, in relation to gender inequality (also see Unterhalter, 2007).

I now turn to the discourses on quality access to education and show how each orientation produces different conceptualisations of quality education and quality in education.

2.3 Discourses on Quality Education

Debates about quality education vary, with the term meaning different things under different circumstances. Some raise questions pertaining to improved retention and throughput once enrolment is secure. For the most part, these discussions focus on quality in relation to the curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment. The three dominant discourses already discussed above offer a glimpse into how complex and contested the concept of quality in education is (Sayed and Ahmed, 2011).

Sayed (1997), argues, “the concept quality in education is elusive and ... frequently used but never defined”. He continues to discuss how its multiple meanings reflect “different

ideological, social and political values”. He further highlights, “[Q]uality in education does have a bottom line and that line is defined by the goals and values which underpin the essentially human activity of education.” This bottom line must be the starting point for our understanding of the notion of quality in education so that we do not “reify the practice of education ... [and] reduce education to a technical activity that is static and unaffected by contextual and contingent circumstances.”

The human capital approach conceptualises quality in education based on its contribution to economic development and argues for investment on these grounds (Hanushek 2003 as cited in Sayed and Ahamed, 2011). Human capital advocates such as Hanushek and Wößmann (2008 as cited in Tikly, 2011) realise that quality education is important to economic growth beyond the quantification of education. Their argument for quality education is that “student achievement in terms of standardised tests correlates more strongly with economic growth than simply years spent” (Tikly, 2011).

Further, Hanushek & Wößmann (2008 as cited in Tikly, 2011) suggest that to improve quality education three key areas have to be considered: (1) creating greater choice and competition between schools; (2) encouraging schools to improve outcomes; and (3) greater school autonomy in order to encourage the following: decision-making; fiscal decentralisation; parental involvement; and accountability through the publication of school performance data the use of external examinations and benchmarking, including participation of countries in international tests.

However, the human capital approach has been critiqued for proposing that a market-led strategy be applied to quality education. For example, it clearly associates quality with the results of standardised test scores. This is simplistic in that it does not take into account other aspects that might affect learners and hinder their performance - factors such as gender, race/class, and ethnic inequality.

Whilst the focus of the human capital approach to quality education is viewed in terms of standardised tests as a way to improve economic growth, the human rights approach, mostly championed by movements such as EFA and international organisations such as UNICEF and UNESCO, views education as a basic right that a learner is entitled to. Tikly (2011) lists various characteristics of quality education viewed by advocates of this approach that include

rights such as: protection from abuse; celebration and nurturing of learner creativity; use of local languages in schools; and learner participation in democratic structures and debates. This approach also pays attention to teaching and learning dynamics in the classroom and advocates for learner-centred teaching approaches and democratic school structures (Tikly, 2011). Such a view of quality education has compelled governments and institutions to work towards creating conditions for a quality education for all (Sayed and Ahmed, 2011: 104). Sayed and Ahmed (2011) explain, "... processes like learner-centred pedagogies and democratic school structures that facilitate and maintain the development of these rights are also highlighted" (p.104).

The capability approach on the other hand, focuses on individual capabilities, or opportunities that individuals and groups have to realise different 'functionings that they may have reason to value and that contribute to wellbeing (Sen, 1999, 2009); a way of understanding and assessing quality education very different to the above.

Presently, discussions on quality in education and quality education are being channelled to focus on access to education together with issues of retention, throughput and high attrition and their impact on development (See Lewin, 2007; CREATE, 2011; Ankomah, Koomson, Bosu and Oduro, 2005). The argument is that achieving universal education coupled with quality is fundamental to human development. A number of studies in the literature show that education accelerates economic growth, national productivity, political stability, and social cohesion. However, there is grave concern regarding the quality of education that children receive and the impact this has on economic growth.

The 1990 World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), and the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action identified quality as 'the heart of education' - a fundamental determinant of enrolment, retention, and achievement and an essential part of achieving educational equity (UNESCO, 2005). The sixth goal of the Dakar Framework committed nations to the provision of education 'of good quality' at all levels. This goal embraced improvements in all aspects of educational quality so everyone can achieve better learning outcomes, particularly in literacy, numeracy and life skills (Chimombo, 2009; Dakar Framework for Action, Article 7, World Education Forum 2000). It was acknowledged that expanding access alone would be insufficient for education to contribute fully to the development of the individual and society. For this reason, emphasis was placed on assuring an increase in children's cognitive

development by improving the quality of their education (UNESCO, 2005). UNESCO (2004) explains, “[I]mproving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills” (UNESCO, 2004:28).

Similarly, Lewin (2007, 2011) describes the importance of ‘meaningful access’, whereby learners can gain sustained access to education of quality, rather than simply be enrolled in schools where little learning takes place. This reflects that enrolment numbers are proving to be insufficient in defining the quality of education in low-income countries. It further reflects the poor quality teaching and learning that comes with high numbers of learners due to widening access to education; poor quality education that is leading to subsequent low levels of skills and knowledge among school leavers (Nikel and Lowe, 2010).

Although progress has been made in terms of widening access to education and reducing gender inequality in education, it is reported that this success has been marred with high dropout rates and a lack of student proficiency in numeracy, literacy and essential life skills after completing schooling, particularly among the most disadvantaged (Nikel & Lowe, 2010). The concern under focus in this discussion is the role of *teaching and learning processes* and the impact this has on quality improvement (UNESCO 2005a; Barrett, Lowe, and Nickel 2006; Barrett et al. 2007 as cited in Nickel and Lowe, 2010).

Further, Ankomah, Koomson, Bosu, and Oduro (2005) argue that debates on quality education at the international level centre on three principles much needed to understand quality education, comprising: (a) content relevance, (b) access and outcome, and (c) observance of individual rights.

A plethora of studies have shown that quality of education is important for the effectiveness of increasing and widening access to education (see Ankomah, Koomson, Bosu and Oduro, 2005; Galabawa and Alphonse, 2005; Barrett, Chawla-Duggan, Lowe, Nickel, and Ukpo, 2006; Tikly and Barrett, 2009; Nickel and Lowe, 2010; Barrett; 2010; Chigisheva, 2010; Somerset, 2011; Sayed, 2011). These studies also show that there is great concern regarding the quality of education learners receive after they enter schools.

There is evidence in a number of studies that countries around the world have made impressive progress in terms of providing access to education to the masses of people. It is estimated that the number of children not attending school has fallen by 33 million (UNESCO 2010; Soudien, 2011). In sub-Saharan Africa, enrolment rates have increased, with most children completing a full cycle of primary education. Similarly, South and West Asian countries have increased enrolment and reduced the numbers of dropouts (Soudien, 2011). In addition, significant strides have been made to ensure the gap between girls and boys is narrowed (UNESCO 2010).

However, despite all the achievements made in getting children into schools, persistent challenges regarding the quality of education provided in school are of great concern. It is argued that the ultimate measure of any education system is not how many children are in school, but what – and how well - they learn. There is growing evidence that the world has been moving more quickly to get children into school than to improve the quality of the education offered there (UNESCO, 2010: 7). The focus has therefore shifted from merely getting children into schools towards attending to the kind of education children have access to once enrolled (UNESCO 2010; Soudien, 2011). Thus, enrolment alone is becoming an insufficient measurement of quality or success.

Low-income countries in particular realise that access to education coupled with quality is pivotal to reducing cycles of poverty, increasing equity and transforming the developmental prospects of individuals and nation states. What this alludes to is the kind of education made available to learners.

The quality of education is generally lower in rural schools than in urban ones. This has been attributed to the absence of efficient and effective leadership and management along with inadequately qualified teachers, lack of teaching and professional competence, irrelevant school curricula and poor enrolment of girls. Ankomah, Koomson, Bosu and Oduro (2005) contend that

... the achievement of universal participation in education will be fundamentally dependent upon the quality of education available. A plethora of studies have shown that how well pupils are taught and how much they learn, can have a crucial impact on the effectiveness of school education they get (p.2).

The Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) (2011) has adopted an expanded vision of educational access that includes such concerns as:

attendance as well as enrolment; progression at the appropriate age; achievement of learning goals; equitable access to opportunities to learn; and availability of an adequate learning environment.

South Africa is applauded for being one of the few countries in the sub-Saharan region to make tremendous progress in ensuring access to basic education for every child regardless of who and where they come from. However, research shows that achieving meaningful access to education (involving regular attendance, appropriate achievement, progress on schedule, and successful completion) is becoming an elusive dream (Motala et al, 2007). Studies show that South Africa is faced with a challenge of quality education, as many learners perform below average⁹. Several factors are cited for the low levels of academic attainment in South Africa, including: the poor quality teaching; teachers' poor subject content knowledge; limited pedagogical abilities; and low productivity (DoE, 2007:6; NPC, 2011:15 as cited in CREATE Policy Briefs, 2011).

Few, if any, studies focus on learners' experiences of access to education. However, studies done by Fataar (2012) on *'Students' bodily carvings in school spaces of the post-apartheid city'* and Czerniewicz, L., Williams, K., and Brown, C. (2009) *'Students make a plan: understanding student agency in constraining conditions'* do give a glimpse into how learners' agency shapes their experiences of access to education.

It is thus to an emerging body of literature that this study seeks to contribute. In particular, it aims to contribute towards an understanding of how learner agency mediates access to education, from the perspective of the agent - namely, learners.

With increased interest in the *quality* of education once physical access has been secured, it makes sense to focus also on discourses that begin to highlight perspectives of those experiencing the outcome of physical access: namely, learners. How do they experience the conditions that are usually put forward as inhibiting access and participation in school? How do some learners manage to remain in school for the full duration despite conditions that suggest the contrary would occur? How would an understanding of this achievement shape discourses on access to education and quality education? What theoretical resources can we

⁹ (see studies such as SAQMEC, PIRLS, and TIMMS).

draw on to understand the interface between social structural and cultural factors and access to education?

It is in response to these questions that this study draws on the work of Margaret Archer. In addition, the study is premised on the notion that these structural and cultural conditions do not always only constrain. While I acknowledge the pervasiveness of their constraining power, my study seeks to contribute to emerging scholarship that begins to illustrate that often, these conditions become the impetus for transformation, and mostly so at the agential level.

CHAPTER 3 USING A SOCIAL REALIST FRAMEWORK TO EXAMINE THE INTERFACE BETWEEN LEARNER AGENCY AND THE SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS THAT SHAPE PERSPECTIVES OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

Margaret Archer's social realist theory is proposed in this study as a framework to examine learner agency in response to factors that enable or constrain access to education from their perspectives. Such an orientation allowed one to explore the underlying structural and cultural condition from the agent's point of view, beyond discourses that only account for conditions that constrain access to education in the first place.

In trying to understand the interface between learner agency and the structural and cultural conditions, my intention was to find out how learners perceive and respond. In this instance, the aim was to understand how these factors operate within an open system where social reality is complex, stratified and differentiated. The use of social realist ontology accorded me the opportunity to understand how pre-existing structures (in particular, poverty, and social class) manifest and how they interact to shape learner experiences of access to education.

3.2 Archer's Social Realism

Central to the social realist theory is the emphasis that social structures and cultural factors are mutually independent, with generative powers, and these powers can act as enablements or constraints. In this stance, the two concepts of constraints and enablements themselves imply agential powers. Therefore, Archer (2003) puts emphasis on mediation between structure and agency from an agent point of view. The importance is to treat structure and culture, and agency as independent entities with causal powers which are irreducible to the causal powers of society or culture in order to examine their interplay.

Key to Archer's social realist theory is the notion that society consists of 'parts' and 'people' (structure and agency) and accords both causal powers and emergent properties to influence each other (Archer, 2003; King, 1999). She argues, "[P]roperties and powers of some strata are anterior to those of others precisely because the latter emerge from the former over time"

(Archer, 1995: 14). Emergence takes time since it derives from interaction and its consequences, which necessarily occur in time (Archer, 1995).

Archer distinguishes between structural emergent properties (SEPS), (for example, roles, organisations and institutions), cultural emergent properties (CEPs), which include values, beliefs, norms, theories and ideas, and people's emergent properties (PEPs) which includes the ability to exercise agency (Archer, 2000).

Archer suggests that 'parts' and 'people' should be treated as two separate entities in order to examine how their causal powers and emergent properties interact (Archer, 1995). For this reason, she is against any explanation that collapses either structure into agency or agency into structure or merges the two, resulting in what she calls *upwards, downward or central conflation* (Archer, Sharp, Stones and Woodiwiss, 1999; King, 1999). To Archer, structures are not reducible to agency and vice versa, or to the duality of structure, as Giddens's structuration theory suggests. Thus for analytical purposes, Archer disputes approaches that conflate structure and agency because this precludes the possibility of analysing them and exploring the influence of each aspect.

Archer therefore instead proposes 'analytical dualism', suggesting that to understand the interplay between structure and agency it is necessary to separate them analytically. She proposes that both have 'causal powers' and that each make 'autonomous contributions to social outcomes' (2003: 2).

Social realist theory accords social structures, cultural systems and human agents causal and emergent powers, which have to be considered when analysing social phenomena (Archer, 1995; King, 1999; Wikgren, 2005). To social realists, structure, culture and agency possess distinct properties and powers. Social structures and cultural systems are pre-existing features into which people are born. They are relatively enduring and possess powers of enablement and constraint (Archer, 1995). People possess powers relevant to agency- for example, reflexivity, self-consciousness and intentionality, among others - enabling them to develop plans and have aspirations. They are capable of finding ways to modify or strengthen the appropriateness of social arrangements in pursuit of their own interests (Carter and New, 2004).

According to Scott (2000: 3) “the essential ontological relation which educational researchers need to examine is the relationship between structure and agency or enablement and constraint’. Similarly, Cruickshank (2007) argues that ontological hypotheses regarding structure and agency are significant in shaping data collection. The interplay between influences of structure and culture on learners’ experiences of access to education and the power of individual human action (agency) is of primary interest in this study.

Important as the use of the morphogenetic approach is for understanding Archer’s social realist theory, it is beyond the scope of this study, which seeks to foreground learner responses, focusing mainly on the reflexive ability of learners as social actors. Thus Archer’s notion of reflexive ability is more strictly relevant for the purposes of this study.).

3.2.1 Analytical Dualism

While Archer (1995, 2003) is against the conjoinment of the concepts structure, culture and agency, she agrees that they are intertwined in real life. For this reason, she proposes ‘analytical dualism’ in which structure, culture, and agency can be understood as separate entities for research purposes because they all have causal powers to influence social reality (1996: xv). Analytical dualism as a methodology is based on two premises: (i) a stratified depth ontology in which the emergent properties of structures and agents are irreducible, but can be separated analytically; (ii) the assertion that structure and agency can be distinguished in terms of time in order to explore methodologically the interplay between them and explain changes over time.

Analytical dualism allows for examination of the emergent powers and generative mechanisms – the SEPs, CEPs and PEPs (Archer, 1995). This distinguishes it from other perspectives (such as individualistic, collectivistic and elisionist perspectives¹⁰, which either

¹⁰ The collectivists’ tradition accords structure primacy over agency. Therefore, structures in this paradigm become the focus of investigation. Thus, human behaviour is primarily determined by the social relations people encounter in their surroundings. These either enable them or constrain them in achieving their goals. Archers refers to this as *Downward conflation*

The individualists’ tradition, privileges agency over structures: recognising its power to shape and influence social structures. In this case, emphasis is placed on agency and its power to influence structures. Archers refers to this as *upward conflation* of agency into structures (1996:46-71). Consequently, individuals are viewed to be the only effective cause and as such social scientific research should base their focus of investigation there. The elisionist tradition treats structure and agency as ‘mutually constitutive’ which precludes examining the interplay between them (Archer, 1995, 1996 Scott, 2003; Lipscomb, 2006; Hoel, 2010). The two concepts are intertwined with structures shaping agency and vice versa. An example of Elisionist tradition is Giddens’s’ theory of structuration which sets out to understand structure and agency as both mutually dependent and internally related.

commit *upward, downward or central conflation*, hence precluding the researcher from analysing structure, culture and agency separately. This in Archers view strips these concepts of explanatory powers that would help to illuminate the phenomenon under investigation. Archer then proposes the application of analytical dualism to better understand the relationships between social structure, culture and agency.

Within the context of this study, learners are born into a complex social structural context that they have no control of. They are positioned in a complicated, differentiated, and structured social world in which various structural, cultural and agential factors interact. Thus what constitutes the structures and culture is not only the existence of agents (learners, teachers, SGBs, principals, parents) but rather the interdependence and relationship among them. The stratified ontology allows for the examination of learners' agency and how that shapes their experiences of access to education. In this case, the aim is to investigate and understand the deep-rooted generative mechanisms that act as constraints or enablements to learners' access to education and to reveal the underlying social structural, cultural and agential causal mechanisms that generate these experiences.

3.2.2 Mediation between Structure and Agency

As human beings, we are born into complex contexts or situations not of our own making, but rather created by our predecessors (e.g. parents, teachers, governments) (Archer 1996: xxv). While we are capable of transforming those complex situations or contexts, strategically or unintentionally, the structural constraints and enablements we face are frequently the results of past interaction, not only our present endeavours (Hoel, 2010). For this reason, Margaret Archer offers a framework based on the idea of mediation that can help examine the interplay between learner agency and social structural and cultural conditions. Understanding the relationship between agency (the capacity of an individual to act independently and to exercise choice) and structure (patterned arrangements in society such as norms and institutions) is a central debate of social theory (Archer, 2003), characterized by dichotomies - human agency versus social structure, voluntarism versus determinism, meaning versus structure, and micro versus macro.

The framework Archer provides is a way to examine the interplay of structure, culture and agency through agents' reflexivity. As a process, 'morphogenesis' refers to the complex

interchanges that produce change in a system's given form, structure or state ('morphostasis' is the reverse), the end-product being termed 'elaboration'. This theory rests on an understanding that there is always structural, cultural and agential change, which occurs in three phases. The first phase (T^1)¹¹ consists in the structural or cultural contexts into which human beings are born; contexts which are not of their own making but which condition their actions (Archer, 1995; McAnulla, 2002). The morphogenetic analysis of the structure-agency interplay starts at T^1 by identifying the structural conditions (systemic proprieties or consequences of past actions) which are present before the interaction we are interested in takes place.

The second phase is the social interaction, which happens from T^2 to T^3 and in which agents exercise their agency influenced by T^1 (structural conditioning or cultural conditioning) that acts as a constraint or enablement. This stage (T^2 to T^3) investigates how agents respond to this conditioning using internal conversation. In this stage, strategies of action are created and executed. Whether change or reproduction results from the social interaction depends on the interplay between structural/cultural and social integration. T^4 represents the outcome of the social interaction between structural conditions and agency in which actions are either transformed or reproduced. This change, whether intended or unintended by actors, produces a social context with emergent characteristics (morphostasis or morphogenesis). This is the beginning of a new T^1 and thus forms the conditioning influences of the next cycle of morphogenesis (Archer, 1995: 90). The structure is modified, and the cycle returns to structural conditioning at T^1 (Archer 1995; Archer et al. 1998). Figure 1 below represents the phases of morphogenetic cycle.

¹¹ T^1 : T stands for time

Figure 1: Phases of Archer’s morphogenetic cycle of structure, culture and agency

Structure	<p>_____ Structural conditioning _____</p> <p>T¹</p> <p>_____ Social interaction _____</p> <p>T² T³</p> <p>_____ Structural elaboration (Morphogenesis) _____</p> <p>[Structural reproduction or Morphostasis] T⁴</p>
Culture	<p>_____ Cultural conditioning _____</p> <p>T¹</p> <p>_____ Socio-cultural interaction _____</p> <p>T² T³</p> <p>_____ Cultural elaboration _____</p> <p>T⁴</p>
Agency	<p>_____ Socio-cultural conditioning of groups _____</p> <p>T¹</p> <p>_____ Group interaction _____</p> <p>T² T³</p> <p>_____ Group elaboration _____</p> <p>T⁴</p>

(Source: Archer, 1995, p.193-4)

The morphogenetic cycle above illustrates that social structure and agency are separate phenomena; each possesses distinctive powers and emergent properties, but each is “essential for how the other will be moulded” (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen, and Karlsson, 2002: 181). In this case, social structure can either enable or constrain agency and agency can either reproduce social structure or transform it. The figure illustrates a cyclical process in which after every end of a cycle (T⁴), a new social structure “emerges” because of the interplay between social structure and agency (Danermark *et. al.*, 2002: 182).

Danermark *et. al.* (2002:182) argue that although conflation (upwards, downward and/or central) may be important in the social fact and agency paradigms, for analytical purposes structure and agency should be delinked in order to study the interplay between them.

Mediation is a mechanism that Archer proposed to foster the link between structure and agency. She explains both how important it is for social theory to explore the phenomenon of internal conversation and also that internal conversation and the external social structural factors are connected and separated from each other through mediation, which consists of the reflective deliberations of social agents.

She states that “only if the ‘internal conversation’ can be upheld as an irreducible personal property, which is real and causally influential, can the exercise of its powers be considered as the missing mediatory mechanism that is needed to complete an adequate account of social conditioning” (Archer, 2003: 16). Therefore it is clear that for Archer, internal conversation plays a central role in the individual's social life, and as such must be studied and examined as a personal and private property which performs distinctive tasks.

Structure (social systems such as gender, social class, race, and poverty), culture (values, beliefs, norms, theories and ideas about education), and agency (participants’ capability to navigate through these social structures and systems) all have causal powers and are not reducible to one another. This is important in a study such as this, which aims to gain insight into (a) the interface between social structural and cultural factors and learners’ agency and (b) learner experiences in relation to access to education. This with the view to understanding the kind of structural properties (factors that shape access to education), and cultural properties (values, beliefs, ideas about education) that exist and how agents (participants) use their agential powers (reflexivity) to reproduce or transform their existing circumstances.

3.2.3 Internal Conversations

As aforementioned, this study focuses on examining the role of learners’ agency in shaping their access to education. In doing so, I also draw on Margaret Archer’s (2000, 2003, 2007) work on reflexivity and internal conversation as the mediating power between structure and agency. Reflexivity is defined by Archer as “the regular practice /exercise of the mental ability, exercised through the internal conversations we all hold about our personal concerns (what we care about most)” (Archer, 2003, p. 9). In Archer’s terms internal conversation refers to the conversations human beings have with themselves, silently and internally, rather than with others in the external world. This conversation involves mental activities such as day-dreaming, fantasising, reliving past events, rehearsing for future encounters, planning for future possibilities, clarifying where we stand, confirming our understandings of a situation, taking stock of our lives (Carrigan, 2012). Margaret Archer (2003) points out that

only if the ‘internal conversation’ can be upheld as an irreducible personal property, which is real and causally influential, can the exercise of its powers be considered as the missing mediatory mechanism that is needed to complete an adequate account of social conditioning” (p. 16).

According to Archer (2007), reflexivity is a natural ability that all individuals possess. This ability operates within and throughout the internal dialogues that social actors have with

themselves, when they consider their own social position, identities, action and thoughts in relation to other social actors

Thus, through the application of reflexivity, people can “design and determine their responses to the structured circumstances in which they find themselves, in light of what they personally care about most” (Archer 2007:11). The causal power of structural and social properties has to be activated by agents (in this case, learners) through social action. Archer (2007:13) argues that the “deliberative process involved ... is emotionally charged rather than being a simple exercise in instrumental rationality, because ... our emotions (as distinct from moods) are commentaries on our concerns.”

Archer identifies four modes of reflexivity: 1) ‘communicative reflexives’, which refers to those whose internal conversation requires completion and confirmation by others before resulting in a particular course of action; 2) ‘autonomous reflexives’, meaning those who sustain self-contained internal conversations leading directly to action; 3) ‘meta-reflexives’, referring to those who are critically reflexive about their own internal conversations and critical about effective action in society; and 4) ‘fractured reflexives’: those whose internal conversation intensifies their distress and disorientation rather than leading to any purposeful course of action (Archer, 2007: 93).

By employing Archer’s theoretical framework in this study and recognising reflexivity as a distinct human power, this research treats learners as active agents rather than passive agents, who can exercise some governance in their own lives. Archer’s account of reflexivity as the mediating power between structure and agency is applied in order to understand how the learners in this study navigate structural and cultural conditions that sometimes, but not always, restrict possibilities for a better social reality. Archer links internal conversation with the wider idea of society. She proposes that society cannot be possible without the reflexivity, and reflexive work, of its component members,

This study embraces Archer’s concepts of analytical dualism and reflexivity as methodological and analytical tools. Through agential reflexivity, an active role is given to the individual agent, who exercises reflexivity as human power in decision-making and in action. In this section, key elements of Archer’s analytical framework will be outlined, with a more detailed engagement appearing in the later discussion of the study’s findings.

3.2.4 Role of the Internal Conversation in the Mediation between Structure and Agency

The theoretical approach offered here aims to give recognition to the roles of both structure and agency in the mediation process. The approach also considers how social structure influences human action. The notion of how agency is conditioned by structure has been largely neglected, and consideration needs to be given to both the objective impingement of structures, and the subjective response to this from the individual agent (Archer, 2007: 10).

Social theory has accounted somewhat for the objective side of this conception, outlining the following: how structural properties shape the situational context that individuals find themselves in; how they enable or constrain various opportunities and actions; and how various interests in certain actions, as well as the resources to undertake them, can be differentially distributed. However, these structural accounts do not, generally, explain how people in similar situational contexts can act, or react, in different ways (Archer, 2007:10-11). Similarly, discourses on access to education ([see chapter 2](#)) account for a range of structural factors that are more likely to constrain learners, but there has been little exploration of how learners react to these structural factors. It is argued here that this is largely the result of inadequate conceptualisations of agency within the literature.

Additionally, agency is frequently defined in opposition to structure, and this contrast is often taken to mean the following: that structure is systematic and patterned, while agency is contingent and random; that structure is constraint, while agency is freedom; that structure is static, while agency is active; that structure is collective, while agency is individual (Hays, 1994: 57 as cited in King (2010)). However, such a contrast denies the exploration of the interaction between structure and agency, as it does not put into consideration how individuals are able to actively reproduce or transform their social contexts (King, 2010).

The argument presented in this chapter so far is underpinned by an assumption that agents possess some degree of autonomy over the actions they undertake, although the range of possible courses of action will be determined by the distribution of various structural properties within the social context. It is argued here that explanations of agency need to be able to account for how individuals decide upon particular courses of action from a range of

possibilities. Also, there needs to be linkage between such an explanation and the objectives that individuals hold – this can be found in the work of Archer (2003, 2007).

Further, explanations which account for agency need to show explicitly how individuals actively seek to alter their socio-structural context. Archer identifies three stages entailed in the process of mediation between structure and agency (the objective and subjective components), as follows:

1. Structural and cultural properties *objectively* shape the situations which agents confront involuntarily, and possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to
2. Agents' own configurations of concerns, as *subjectively* defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality – nature, practice and society.
3. Courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of agents who subjectively determine their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances (Archer 2003: 135).

Archer suggests that the third stage is crucial to the process of explaining social outcomes because the role which objective structural and cultural powers play in shaping social action is mediated by the reflexive activity of the subject (agent). This final stage is conducted through the internal conversation, combining agential concerns, projects and practices (2003:133). She writes:

This final stage of mediation is indispensable because without it we can have no explanatory purchase upon what exactly agents do. Deprived of such explanations, sociology has to settle for empirical generalisation about 'what most of the people do most of the time'. Indeed, without a real explanatory handle, sociologists often settle for much less: 'under circumstances x, a statistically significant number of agents do y'. These, of course, are not real explanations at all.

For Archer (2003), structure and agency are different entities with irreducible powers that require human reflexivity to allow mediation between them. Further, Archer describes human reflexivity as 'the missing link in mediation' and argues that an account of how structures influence agency is entirely dependent upon the proposition that our human powers of reflexivity have causal efficacy – towards ourselves, our society and the relations between the two (2003:16).

In this study, Archer's account of reflexivity as the mediating power between structure and agency is applied to understand how learners use their agential power to respond to the

existing structural and cultural conditions that either constrain or enable them in their quest not only for education, but to remain in school .

Through agential reflexivity, these learners can either transform or reproduce the structural and cultural conditions and as such, be constrained or enabled. Individuals reflect upon their social situations in the light of their personal concerns – asking themselves “what should I do?” and answering their own question’ (Archer 2003: foreword).

Stage 1 of the mediating process is presented in [Chapter 5](#) in which I address structural and cultural emergent properties that shape “our situations such that they have the capacity to operate as constraints and enablements” (Archer 2003:132). This chapter focuses mostly on stage two and three which show ways in which “...agents, in virtue of their reflexivity ... deliberate about the circumstances in relation to their own concerns. Agential subjectivity reflects upon societal objectivity” (Archer 2003:133). The process of mediation allows for the examination of the objective circumstances in which we find ourselves and which are “not of our choosing”. Archer notes that

...we consult our projects which were deliberately defined to realise our concerns; and we strategically adjust them into those practices which we conclude internally (and always fallibly) will enable us to do (and be) what we care most about in society.... This final stage of mediation is indispensable because *without it we can have no explanatory purchase upon what exactly agents do*. Deprived of such explanations ... [we have]... to settle for empirical generalisations about ‘what most people do most of the time’.... (Archer 2003:133)

For this reason, Archer (2003) cautions against discourses that offer simplistic explanations about phenomena, contending that these are not sufficient due to the open and contingent nature of society (Czerniewicz, Williams and Brown; 2009). In terms of the present study, such deterministic explanations underplay the generative powers of the socio-ecological (structural, cultural and agential) factors that either constrain or enable learners’ experiences of access to education (Czerniewicz, Williams and Brown; 2009). Archer explains that “... structural and cultural emergent properties retain their generative powers to exert constraints and enablements were anyone or groups adopt a project upon which they would impinge. Thus, it’s important to ...*distinguish between the existence of structural properties and the exercise of their causal powers*” (Archer 2003:7 *Italics original*).

The process of mediation as stipulated by Archer (2003) is helpful in this study because it provides a way of understanding and examining how learners’ use of their reflexive deliberation to create courses of action is based on the objective circumstances they find

themselves in (Czerniewicz, Williams and Brown; 2009). For Archer, some individuals may have more internal conversations than external ones e.g. those living alone, the isolated elderly, those performing solitary occupations or only children without close friends. However, such conversations are part of all our daily lives (Carrigan, 2012). Through internal conversation an individual subjectively determines their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances. For example, an individual deliberates on the situation they confront, as well as their own desires and concerns, before deciding on a course of action. According to Archer,

“only if the internal conversation can be upheld as an irreducible personal property, which is real and causally influential, can the exercise of its powers be considered as the missing mediatory mechanism that is needed to complete an adequate account of social conditioning” (Archer, 2003:16).

As agents, learners possess emergent properties different from those related to social forms. Using the internal conversations, learners can think, believe and intend, which are features applicable to agents but not to structures (Archer 2003). Thus, this research concentrates on learners’ reflexive ability and how they seek out social action as a way of responding to structural and cultural factors that impinge on their projects.

3.3 Summary

In this chapter I presented the theoretical framework that has not only framed the study but importantly has also served to provide methodological and analytical tools to guide the research process and analysis. The chapter discussed the key tenets of social realism, particularly Archer’s theory of morphogenesis. This framework included a discussion on analytic dualism and human reflexivity that provided this work with the methodological approach needed to study the interplay between structures, culture and agency as experienced by Grade 11 learners in selected schools in the Makana district, Grahamstown.

The chapter that follows outlines the research design of the study.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented Archer's social realist theory with a particular focus on the mediation between agents and social and cultural conditions. This framework shaped the methodological decisions I made in this study that I describe in detail below.

I begin by describing the methodological orientation of the study. I continue the discussion with a brief description of the pilot study that furthered the development of the overall research process and enabled me to refine the data collection instruments. The learning from this initial process resulted in the strengthening of the main study. The instruments and process of data collection in the main study mirrored what was done in the pilot study. Hence the data gathering section is described once only. The final section of the chapter includes an account of the strategies for data collection, ethical considerations, and data analysis process.

This study was concerned with examining the inter-relationship between socio-ecological factors and access to education in selected schools in the Grahamstown District with particular reference to Grade 11 learners. I focused on this grade for two reasons; firstly because they are in the process of making decisions about their future, and secondly because I was unable to work with the matric learners who were preparing for the final examination and thus unable to participate in the research. The study responded to the following research question; "What is the interface between learner agency and the social structures and cultural conditions shaping access to education for a sampled group of Grade 11 learners in selected schools in the Grahamstown District?"

Sub Questions

4. What social structures and cultural conditions shape learner perspectives of access to education?
5. How do social structures and cultural conditions enable or constrain learner agency in relation to access to education for a sampled group of Grade 11s?
6. What are learner responses to the structural and cultural conditions they confront in relation to access to education?

4.2 Methodological Orientation

According to Sayer (1992) as cited in Voster (2010), the object of the study is to be congruent with the ontological, epistemological and methodological stances of research. Thus, as mentioned earlier, social realism provided the ontological basis for understanding and interpreting the phenomenon under study. Given the assumptions and context of this study, reality was assumed to be beyond the researcher and participants' experience, yet accessible primarily through the latter's account and representation of the phenomenon. As a result, analytic dualism (a stratified ontology: structure, culture and agency) was used as a tool to identify and uncover structural and cultural mechanisms and their causal factors or powers that enable and constrain learner's access to education. The starting point was to understand how participants view, experience, and understand social reality (in this instance, the experiences in relation to access to education).

At the outset, the study sought first to identify and illuminate the views and experiences of those experiencing the phenomenon under scrutiny. Interpretive qualitative methodology was used to do so. While the main focus was on learner experiences, the study also sourced the perspectives and experiences of principals, teachers, SGB members, and parents. According to Merriam (2002: 38), an interpretive qualitative study "would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences." The use of interpretive qualitative research assumes that phenomena are studied in natural settings and that it attempts to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Such an orientation allows researchers to gain access to individual points of view - their representations of reality rather than reality itself; thus it enables researchers to generate rich data or 'thick descriptions' (Geertz cited in Stake 2000: 439) of such meanings. Furthermore, interpretative qualitative research affords researchers the opportunity to gain insight into participants' attitudes, behaviours, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture, or lifestyles and to make sense of the meaning they assign to each. This provides the researcher with different views about reality from the participants' points of view.

This study adopted a case study approach. Case study research is recognised for dealing with research questions that probe *why*, *how* and *what* (Hosein, Tarek, Kumar, 2007). According to Stake (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 447), case study researchers seek out the particular

more than the ordinary. However, the end product of the research regularly portrays more of the uncommon, drawing from the nature of the case, particularly from its activity and functioning, the following: historical background; physical setting; other contexts (including economic, political, legal and aesthetic); and other cases through which this case is recognised, as well as informants through whom the case can be known (Stake in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 447).

Yin (1994: 13) argues, "... the case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as individual life cycles, organisational relations and the maturations of industries." Thus a case study is useful in situations where contextual conditions of events being studied are critical and where the researcher has no control over the events as they unfold.

This requires the researcher to use different specific techniques for collecting and analysing data, using theoretical assumptions. Stake (1993) distinguishes three types of case studies namely: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. The intrinsic case study deals with a unique case, which is not representative of others. This kind of case study is not about building a theory but is about its intrinsic interest. An instrumental case study on the other hand is mainly used to provide insight into, or to further develop, an already existing theory. Stake (1993: 237) asserts "the case is often looked at in depth, its context scrutinised, its ordinary activities detailed because it helps us pursue the external interest." Lastly, the collective case study involves instrumental characteristics and extends to more than one instance.

Yin (1993) distinguishes three types of case studies in a different way, identifying exploratory, casual and descriptive case studies. The exploratory case study starts with collecting data and analysing it before drawing on theories or formulating research questions. The causal case study is about looking at causal regularities (cause and effect relationships) and searching for an explanatory theory of the phenomena. Lastly, the descriptive case study starts with a theory, which acts as a foundation for the research. In this case the theory influences the methodology. Yin (1993, p.22) argues "the theory should be openly stated in advance and be the subject of review and debate and later serve as the design for the descriptive case study. The more thoughtful the theory, the better the descriptive case study will be."

In this study, a descriptive case study as explained by Yin (1993) was chosen because of its congruence with the theoretical position of the study. This study was framed by a social realist philosophy which focuses on *why* and *how* a phenomenon happens, rather than merely on what participants say about a phenomenon, with no focus on the complexity of social, cultural and individual contexts underlying participant perceptions. This type of case study was also chosen because it allows the researcher to examine the historical, social and cultural influences on learner access to education in schools.

4.3 The Research Process

The research was undertaken in two phases; the pilot phase and the main study. The former aimed to enable me to gain insight into schools, pilot and review instruments and draw lessons from the proposed methodology. This phase informed the decisions made in the main study. I used the same data collection strategies described in 4.5.1 below during the pilot phase of the research.

4.3.1 The Pilot Study

Before embarking on the research project reported in this thesis, a pilot study was undertaken. The aim of the pilot study was threefold: firstly, to allow for the data collection instruments and the research processes to be trialled and tested, and if necessary improved and developed prior to undertaking the main research study. Secondly, the pilot study would enable me to learn about the participants' awareness of and attitudes towards the phenomenon under investigation. Thirdly, the pilot study was to simulate the actual study and, in doing so, explore a way for collecting and analysing the data for the proposed research study.

Location and Sampling

The location for the pilot study was selected for easy access and for the historical background; socio-economic status and educational characteristics of the school as well as the community ([see section 4.4 for details](#)). Some of these criteria were also used to help in selecting the appropriate sample for the main study. Selection of this sample, as with the sample for the main study, was based on convenience, but care was taken to ensure that participants were selected to represent the various dimensions that are important to the study in terms of subject area taught (teachers), involvement in the school (principal, deputy principal and SGBs), gender (learners). The pilot comprised a sample of 4 teachers, 1 principal, 1 deputy principal and 6 Grade 11 learners. Teachers were selected according to the

subject they teach, in this case Science, Mathematics and English. These subject teachers were selected because emphasis has been laid on these subjects by the National Department of Education in recent years

Data Collection

Various instruments were employed in the pilot to gain a more in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions and understanding of the phenomenon of access to education.

Data collection for the pilot consisted of three instruments namely: observations, interviews and questionnaires (see section [4.4](#) for a detailed description of instruments). Classrooms were observed three times for each subject. Individual interviews were carried out with the principal and deputy principal. Focus group interviews were carried out with the teachers and learners, using the semi-structured interview approach described later in this chapter.

The pilot study experience afforded me some useful learning and developments that I applied to the main research project, including some subtle revisions of the research instruments, reflections on the importance of clarity of definition, particularly with regard to sampling, and a growing confidence to implement the main research project in other selected schools. These outcomes are reflected throughout this chapter of the thesis.

4.3.2 The Main Study

The purpose of this phase of the study was to gain a big picture. It involved a few changes to the instruments, namely to the questionnaire, interviews and observations. During the pilot process it had become apparent that using a range of research tools in this way would allow for a degree of triangulation or 'comparing [many] sources of evidence' (Bush 2002: 68).

Site and Sample

There are seven public high schools in this area. The choice of sites selected for the study was based on their geographical location, socio-economic status, and educational quality. The reason for selecting the three high schools was that these schools are located in historically disadvantaged areas, characterised by low social economic status which shapes learners experiences of education. For example, one of the many challenges that face these schools is

their performance with respect to graduating students that can enrol for degree programmes at Rhodes and other Universities. On average, the seven historically disadvantaged schools produce 45 University degree entrance passes annually, compared with two local ex Model C schools that produced a total of 121 university entrance passes between them

Since the study focused on examining how socio-ecological factors enable and constrain learners' access to education, the schools selected were historically disadvantaged public high schools with low matric. pass rates, high dropout rates and low retention rates. In addition, the schools were selected on the basis of their accessibility and availability. They are located within Grahamstown East, an area which comprises historically underprivileged communities. Since it would be impossible to include all schools and all learners in selected schools, a few schools and a limited number of learners were selected to provide depth. One school was included in the sample because of its diversity in terms of learner enrolment. This school catered for both coloured and black learners.

Sampling Participants

In this study, purposive sampling was used to select participants. According to Patton (2002: 230), "purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study". In this study, purposive sampling was used to select participants with a wide range of experience related to the phenomenon. As I will describe later on in the data collection section, I used the results of the questionnaire to select the schools and participants. As Neuman puts it:

Purposive sampling is an acceptable kind of sampling for special situations. It uses the judgment of an expert in selecting cases or it selects cases with a specific purpose in mind. A researcher uses this method to select unique cases that are especially informative (Neuman 1997: 198).

According to Patton (2002, p. 230), "purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study." The sample included Grade 11 learners, principals, School Governing Bodies (SBGs), Grade 11 teachers, in three selected schools of which one was used for pilot study purposes. Criteria for the selection of participants included, but was not limited to, their experience and knowledge of their respective schools (e.g. length of time at the school or in the teaching profession) and communities.

Grade 11 Learners

The two schools have six grades each (Grades 8-12). I selected Grade 11 learners for two reasons: (a) they are in the process of making decisions about their future and (b) learners in matric are preparing for the final examination and would thus be unable to participate in the research. The sample included 12 learners - six girls and six boys from each school - who volunteered to take part in the study. The four learners tracked were selected from the 12 learners participating in the focus group interviews. There were no criteria for selecting learners to track except their willingness to participate in the study.

Principals and Deputy Principals

The selection of school principals was due to their position in the school and also their knowledge about the school's surrounding areas. As principal they had first-hand information on the school environment and factors that impact on learners' access to education

SGB Members

The sample included two SGB members: one from each school. Nkosi secondary school¹² had not had a functioning SGB team for a year. The school had only one SBG member. Rainbow Secondary, on the other hand, had a functioning SGB and the chairman works as a volunteer teacher at the school. SGBs were selected because they are members of the community, in order to gain a better understanding of the social context and possible reasons for learner dropout.

Grade 11 Teachers

Criteria for the selection of teachers included, but was not limited to, their experience and knowledge of their respective schools (e.g. length of time at the school or in the teaching profession) and communities. The selection of teachers was also based on their duties, such as classroom teacher, head of department in the school, and/or the subject they teach. Seven teachers altogether were selected from the two schools. Teachers selected taught English, Mathematics and Science (physical and natural science). The selection of these subject teachers responded to focus on these subjects nationally.

4.4 Data Collection Strategies

Since this study was framed within social realist ontology, my interest was in exploring structural, cultural and agential conditions that give rise to socio-ecological factors that

¹² For the purpose of confidentiality the school has been given a pseudonym

enable or constrain learners' access to education. A social realist ontology advocates for the use of multiple methods due to the nature of reality. Archer's (1995) theory of morphogenesis was employed in the study to examine socio-ecological factors that enable and constrain learners' access to education and by so doing, to trace the continuous structural changes of socio-ecological factors. I needed multiple sources of data to gain insight into experiences of the socio-ecological factors shaping access to education by the selected Grade 11 learners. What follows below is an outline of the data collection strategies applied. Other than the documentary analysis, the same strategies were used for the pilot and the main study.

4.4.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are widely used data collection tools. They can reach a large number of participants and provide richly descriptive of information (Munn & Drever, 2005 Gilham, 2000; Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). This study's objectives were to investigate learners' experiences of education, factors that shape their access to education and factors that manifest within the school and the community to shape their access to education. Given the specified objectives above, I thought it would be appropriate to include questionnaires as part of my data collection tools in order to gain insight into these phenomena by drawing on a larger group. I therefore developed a questionnaire that would help in capturing participants' views and perceptions about the phenomena under investigation. This questionnaire (see appendix A) asked for basic information about the schools (e.g. subjects, resources, teachers etc.), parents (e.g. their education, employment, qualification etc.) and learners' aspirations (their role models; where they see themselves in five years; which university they would like to attend; what they would like to become in future). These were distributed to Grade 11 learners in 3 schools (including the pilot school). About 300 questionnaires were issued and 166 of these questionnaires were returned from the two schools for the main study.

Questionnaires contained both open-ended and closed questions, in order to obtain quality data from the participants. The baseline data gathered from questionnaires, together with the results from the documentary analysis enabled me to identify topics that I could explore further in individual and focus group interviews. The questionnaire was used to seek learner's opinions in order to obtain:

- A detailed comprehensive picture of access to education for a larger group of learners in these schools;

- A description of in-school and out-of-school factors (in terms of home background, parents' education, employment, and qualification) that would help in contextualising the issue of access to education within these three schools;
- A picture of learner attitudes to education and experiences of education in terms of aspects such as subject preference extramural activities. These would help elicit themes/topics to be covered in the interview phase of the research study.

To obtain these trends and patterns, Gray (2009) suggests that questionnaires must be accessible in terms of their contents and language and must also be motivating for the respondent to answer. Since the questionnaire was intended for learners, I made sure that I incorporated all the issues listed above. Language was the main consideration because English is a second language for these learners. I made sure that the language of the questionnaire was accessible and clear, to ensure that learners would understand the questions. I was also careful to balance the type of questions included in the questionnaire. For instance, the first section of the questionnaire dealt more with closed ended questions, which did not require much thinking.

Furthermore, the question of sequencing was carefully considered, to help learners continue with answering the questionnaire until the end. For example, I tried to follow the three stages stipulated by Cohen et al (2007, p.3) which involve starting from non-threatening factual questions and proceeding through semi-structured to unstructured questions. In order to make the questionnaire more easily accessible to learners, I decided to divide it into 4 sections.

The first section of the questionnaire dealt with learners' demographic profile. This section included questions about their age, sex, who they lived with at home, how they came school etc. The second section focused on the parent profile. This included questions on parents' income, level of education and employment. The third section looked at learners' aspirations and included questions designed to elicit information about what they wanted to become, who was their role model and why, their current school, and where they saw themselves in five years' time,. The last section of the questionnaire dealt with academic aspects. In this section, I tried to look at subject choice, teachers, homework, school activities and so forth.

In Rainbow High School, 200 questionnaires were issued and 106 were returned. In Nkosi Secondary school, 100 questionnaires were handed out and 54 were returned.

4.4.2 Observations

Observations enable the researcher to get beyond participants' opinions and interpretations of their attitude and values concerning a phenomenon under investigation (Gray, 2009:397). According to Gilham (2000:45), observations have "...three elements and these include watching what people do, listening to what they say and sometimes asking them to clarify". Commenting on the advantages of observations, Cohen, *et al.* (2007:396) explains that "the observation as a research process... offers an investigator the opportunity to gather 'live' data from naturally occurring situations". Yin (2009:102) also highlights this vigour of using observation in research, since it covers events in real time and context. Gillham (2000) identifies two main types of observation; these include participant observation, which requires the researcher to be involved, and non-participant or detached observation, where the research uses a structured timetable to observe specific events from a distance. In all these instances I recorded field notes and chatted to the participants to clarify certain information observed in the classroom and school environment as well.

To assess the school's structure and cultural practices and their impact on learners' access to education, observations focused on classroom interaction between students and teachers, frequency and quality of classroom participation, participation in extra-mural activities and voluntary activities, and interaction with peers and others in a variety of school settings. Classroom and school observations were carried out for two weeks. I observed the same class in all subjects (Maths, Science and English) for a week, following the same group of learners. Field notes were collected on the themes mentioned above. Informal chats were held with teachers and learners after classroom observation, in order to shed light on what was emerging from the observations.

4.4.3 Interviews

Interviews were held with the following people:

- School principals and deputy principal/HOD.
- Teachers
- Learners
- SGB members
- Parents

According to Arksey and Knight (1999: 34) qualitative interviews allow the researcher to “explore ... things in depth (and to learn) about the informants’ perspectives and about what matters to them”. Interviews enable participants (both the interviewee or interviewer) to explicitly make their perceptions, feelings, preferences, knowledge, attitudes and understanding about reality or the world more clear (Cohen, *et al.* 2007, Arksey and Knight 1999: 34 quoted in Gray, 2009). Given the (explanatory) nature of my research, interviews provided insight into about how participants construct their social worlds and the ways in which they convey these constructions in particular contexts (Silverman 1993, cited in Freebody 2003: 137).

In this study the primary data was collected through individual and focus group interviews using semi-structured interviews (see the sections below on each). According to Gray (2009, p.373) semi-structured interviews allow the researcher “to probe participants’ views and opinions where it is desirable for respondents to expand on their answers”. The interviews helped me to probe ‘institutional norms’, rules, structures, procedures and culture in respect of learners’ access to education. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with key participants in each of the case study schools. Emphasising the importance of key participants, Yin (2003: 90) states that “such persons not only provide the case study investigator with insights into a matter but also can suggest sources of corroboratory or contrary evidence – and also initiate the access to such sources”. These key participants based on their involvement or experiences in the context where the phenomenon under investigation occurs, are aware of some of the issues related to the phenomenon. Commenting on the importance of data generated through interviews, Gillham (2000: 7) states that interview data allow the researcher to apprehend “how people understand themselves, or their setting – what lies behind the more objective evidence”. This issue will be explored further in the data analysis section to give more insight into how participants viewed the impact of the phenomena on themselves.

Individual Interviews: School Principal, Deputy Principal and School Governing Body member (SGBs)

To explore the data from observations and questionnaires further and also to allow for the emergence of any additional relevant data, individual interviews of 30-45 minutes were conducted with the principals, HOD and SGBs. This was to gain full understanding of their

view on learners' experiences of access to education and factors that shape access to education. Individual interviews were conducted with two principals from two schools. The core purpose of individual interviews with participants mentioned above was to develop the institutional context and to ascertain or corroborate particular information that was arising from questionnaires, observations or document analysis. Thus, for example, these interviews developed understanding of institutional priorities, policies, procedures with regard to providing access to education.

Lessons from the pilot project were particularly valuable in helping me to reformulate some of the questions: responses from pilot respondents allowed me to modify questions and terminology so that they would be clear and meaningful to learners in particular.

It is important to note that in keeping with a social realist study, these informants provided their personal opinions about the phenomena under investigation experienced within their context. According to (Gray, 2009) people's opinions about a phenomenon are influenced by the beliefs and values that they hold. Therefore, by exploring the personal opinions of the research participants you are also exploring their beliefs and values and these are important in understanding the interplay between structure, culture and agency.

Focus Group Interviews with Teachers and Learners

Focus group discussions or interviews were also held with different groups of respondents from the 3 schools (that is, including the pilot study school) with 18 randomly selected Grade 11 learners (6 from each school, including the pilot school) and 12 teachers (four from each school including the pilot school). This was to obtain views of learners and teachers regarding the three research questions. I decided to use focus group interviews with learners and teachers because I wanted to gauge their opinions on how they conceive and experience the phenomena (Kruger and Casey, 2000). Kruger and Casey (2000: 12) also explain, "focus groups work particularly well to determine the perceptions, feelings and thinking of people about issues, products, services or opportunities". Focus group interviews helped me gain insight into how these different participants felt, viewed, understood and thought about the underlying issues concerning access to education. These sessions also helped to give meaning to the quantitative data derived from the document analysis and questionnaires.

I tape-recorded and transcribed all interviews myself. Since data analysis is an on-going process, I decided to transcribe all the interviews so that I could get familiar with the data and also start on the process of analysis. All transcribed data or interviews were referred back to the participants for member-checking and review, to ensure accuracy and also to clarify on some of the unclear issues that arose out of the data. Interviews come with some limitations, such as researchers' biases and subjectivity, which might crop up during the interview process; these have been cited as major problems (Bell 1999; Cohen *et al.* 2000; Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Gray, 2009: 376). In my case, a limitation was experienced when some of the teachers did not respond to my questions during the interview process. There were also some interruptions during the interviews when teachers had to leave the group in order to answer cell phones.

Informal Interviews with Parents/Guardians

Informal interviews were conducted with parents of the four learners who were tracked. These were seen as essential for gaining an understanding of the learners' home setting and their parents' ways of seeing and understanding the phenomenon. Two learners from each school were visited in order to develop understanding of how structural, cultural and agential conditions in the home interact with those at school to shape their experiences of access to education. The aim was to find out how parents think about their children's education and what their aspirations for their children are.

4.4.4 Documentary Analysis

The research commenced with the collection of documentation to enable investigation of the 'given social situation from the standpoint of the material' (Corbetta 2003: 234). The documents analysed included the following: school historical records; policies on teacher and learner conduct; school rules; policies on teenage pregnancy; lesson plans; EMIS data on school enrolments. Information obtained from these documents enabled me to structure research problems and pose relevant questions for the study. The reason for selecting these documents was to understand structural, cultural and agential constraints and enablements that shape learners' experiences of access to education. These documents were also used to complement and strengthen data obtained through other methods, namely observation and interviews. The reason for reviewing a variety of documents from different sources was to compare and contrast information in order to make sure that information obtained was

reliable. According to Yin (2009: 103) the most important use of document analysis is to “corroborate and augment evidence for other sources”.

Patton (2002: 293) on the other hand argues that document analysis offers a “behind-the-scenes look” at how a system operates. The intention in this study was to investigate how much the documentary data verified information from the interviews, because “such data can illuminate the stories that people tell, providing additional perspectives on the holistic context in which sense making takes place” (Musson, 1998: 16-17). In addition to verification, documents were also used most importantly to facilitate identifying some structural, cultural and agential mechanisms at play in enabling or constraining access to education in the selected case study schools. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007: 201) argue that document analysis is advantageous for various reasons: it can enable the researcher to reach inaccessible persons or subjects; it has potential to show how situations have evolved over time; many documents written ‘live’ and ‘in situ’ may catch the dynamic situation at the time of writing; and some documents, particularly letters and correspondence, may catch personal details and feelings that would not otherwise surface.

Merriam (1998, as cited in Ary, et al., 2006: 483) says that there are “four categories of documents and these include public records, personal records, and physical material and researcher-generated documents”. In this study, I used public records such as the EMIS data on the demographic profile of schools at national, provincial and district level. According to Patton (2002, p. 293) document analysis can offer a “behind-the-scenes look” at how a system operates. The data was used as the first baseline analysis for the research, that is, to gain an initial picture of what is happening in schools.

This data was also used to understand and establish the trends regarding the total number of learners enrolled in schools, as well as the enrolment according to gender and race group. Essentially it was needed in order to establish how many girls and boys enrol each year, how many complete, and how many drop out.

This initial document analysis served to frame the main part of the research and shape questions to be posed in the interviews as well as shape the observational tools. However, it is suggested that whilst documents may provide potentially ‘factual’ data, such data may also be unrepresentative and deceptive (Lincoln and Guba 1985, cited in Cohen et al. 2000: 147). Cohen, et al. (2002) caution researchers to consider that analysing documents has a double

hermeneutic; they are attempting to interpret a world that is already interpreted by the participants. These are documents reflecting people's opinions, which are also interpreted.

4.5 Data Analysis Process

This section of the chapter explores techniques employed in dealing with data analysis in the study. In reality, the data analysis was an on-going process throughout the research (Litchman, 2010). Gray (2009) and Bernard and Ryan (2010) acknowledge that data analysis begins at the initial planning stages of the research study because data gathering and analysis are interlinked. Thus, in this study data analysis began with literature review, sampling, developing questions and forms of methodology, data collection tools. This process included the use of judgment, evaluation and interpretation to make decisions about the appropriate information and material that would be used in the whole research process. This approach influenced the kind of data envisaged for this research project.

Cohen, et al. (2007: 461) describe the process of data analysis as "...involving organizing, accounting for and explaining the data; ... making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities." Furthermore, they admit that "there is no one single or correct way to analyse and present qualitative data; how one does it should abide by the issue of fitness for purpose" (Cohen, et al., 2000, p.461). The steps described below were used in analysing data.

The first stages of analysis involved typing all field notes from observations into electronic format. This was followed by full transcription of all recorded oral interview data into written form to facilitate analysis. After making transcriptions and typing all field notes, the next step was to start reading through the data, making sense of it and noting emerging themes. A software package, Epi Info, was used to organise, manage and analyse questionnaire data. Epi info is a software program mainly used in epidemiology that allows researchers to manage data in terms of data entry and analysis. This software package was chosen partly because of its availability, but also because it is designed to 'help the analyst examine features and relationships in the texts' (Gibbs 2002: 11), enabling the analysis to be logically structured. In particular, it helped with the management of relatively unstructured qualitative data

All data from questionnaires were imported into Epi info software for analysis. This whole process was daunting for me in terms of going through the data and organising it into

manageable units so that I could enter it into the software packages. Epi Info required me to create a mask into which all the questions had to be typed and variables had to be created.

After all the interview and observation data had been transcribed and entered, the next step was to code. Coding involved searching the data in order to: identify linkages, trends and patterns; locate key words or phrases; sort and store information; categorise and classify data; and make comparisons (Bernard and Ryan, 2010). This gave me the opportunity to recognise the ways in which participants chose to translate and articulate their experiences, behaviours and thoughts about the phenomena.

Furthermore, qualitative data is known to be complex. Arksey and Knight (1999) note this is due to the vast methods it employs, pointing further to the “embedded difficulties with knowing what it is that the data could plausibly be said to mean”. In the context of this study, several methods were used to collect data. This added some difficulty to the analysis because I had to search all the relevant data and pick out what was deemed important. In other words, as Stake (1995: 71) articulates, data analysis in research is the process of unlocking information hidden in the data gathered. In doing so, the researcher transforms the data into meaningful and useful information. During the analysis process, attention was given to the terminology that participants used when expressing their views about issues concerning access to education and these were examined to expose how the respondents created meaning and interpreted their perceptions. The data was sorted and sifted through (Litchman, 2010) to identify common themes, patterns, ideas, differences, and similarities and create categories accordingly (Bernard & Ryan, 2010: 109). The data was colour coded to assist me in making sense of it and to identify discourses, themes and patterns (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell, 2005).

Qualitative research aims to generate meaning related to the phenomenon under focus and according to Merriam (2002: 5) the main objective of data analysis is to strive for “depth of understanding”. In order to interpret structure and synthesise and develop meaning from all the data collected, it was necessary to start from the beginning (that is, from the relevant literature, research questions, theoretical and methodological framework that underpinned the study).

The process indicated above resonates well with Archer's social realist research, which emphasises the use of various methods which would allow for the exploration of structure, culture and agency at different levels. Archer's (1995, 1996, and 2004) concept of analytical dualism (that is the separation of structure, culture and agency) was employed as an analytical tool to examine structural and cultural conditions that enable or constrain learners' access to education.

4.6 Verification of Data

The concept of validity refers to the plausibility, credibility and trustworthiness of data and thus to whether the data can be defended when challenged. Winter (2000 as cited in Cohen, et al. 2007: 133) states that validity can be achieved through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data, together with the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or degree of objectivity of the researcher. In this study, I applied mainly triangulation, member checking and the use of rich and thick description to ensure the credibility and reliability of my research (Cohen, et al., 2007). Firstly, I used different methods to examine learners' experience of education, the availability of resources in classes, the teaching and learning dynamics, policy documents and how these policies shaped learners' access to education. Since different data collection methods were used, there were opportunities for triangulation, described by Cohen, et al. (2007, p. 233) as an attempt to map out and explain fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint.

Furthermore, member checking was used to verify the accuracy of responses from participants. In this study, data collected from interviews was shared with participants for member checking purposes. This was done to improve the accuracy, credibility and validity of the study. This process allowed participants to check for errors and make clarifications, to avoid misinterpretations and misrepresentations of their views (Maxwell, 2005). This proved to be problematic, especially with teachers, as they kept postponing feedback. In terms of rich and thick descriptions, this was done by transcribing interviews verbatim (see section interviews) and also through direct quotations of participants' responses.

4.7 Ethical Issues

In this section of the chapter, I explain the processes that I went through to collect data for the study. The research process started with an informal visit to the selected case study schools. The purpose for this visit was to negotiate issues of accessibility with school administrators

and management and to familiarise myself with the school environment and research participants before embarking on the research process. On these visits, I firstly met with the principal as part of a shared preparation process, to establish jointly the desired outcomes, and negotiate for access to the research site. Secondly, after meeting with the principal, I was introduced to the teachers who were involved in my study and I explained details of the research and what I would need in order to achieve my research goals.

I thereafter negotiated with the teachers and learners at the particular school, to arrange a visit in which I could explain more about the purpose of my study. I visited each school to build relationships and thus, as Cohen et al. (2000: 54) proposes, to establish ‘access and acceptance’ through ‘goodwill and co-operation’. At this visit I discussed the potential processes, ethical issues, and access within the schools with participants’ Further, letters of request and consent forms (see Appendix B) were sent to respective participants inviting them to engage in the research process. The consent documentation contained brief information about the research project and the research expectations. At the beginning of each interview, I explained the process and format we would follow and also detailed how issues of confidentiality were to be addressed. Effort was made to ensure confidentiality of the data and to protect privacy and anonymity of all participants and the schools. I substituted names of individuals in the research with pseudonyms. All participants were accorded the right to withdraw from the research project if they felt so inclined. The ethics statements were stated clearly in the letters of consent (see Appendix C), and drawn to the attention of all respondents.

4.8 Limitations

Since the study is a case study method, this inhibits generalisation to other situations. Case studies are known for their lack of generalisation because their focus is on specific cases and cannot be transferable to other situations or contexts. In addition, each individual experiences a phenomenon differently therefore, applicability to other contexts might be difficult. However, I hope the findings from the study will be of significance to the wider field of education.

4.9 Summary

In this chapter, I described the methodological framework and the specific methods that I used in the research process. In the chapters that follow I present and discuss the research findings, drawing on Margaret Archer's social realist framework.

CHAPTER 5 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the research methodology adopted in conducting this research. In summary, the chapter focused on the processes undertaken in collecting data according to the chosen research design and data collection methods. Results from the data are presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5, the present chapter, focuses on the structural and cultural conditions identified, while Chapter 6 looks at learner agency in response to these conditions.

The data are presented in two different chapters due to the ontological nature of the study. Analytical separation of culture, structure, and agency enables one to dig below the surface features of social interaction to inquire into social structure and its relationship to social transformation and reproduction. Archer explains that for analysis purposes, structure and agency have to be separated to avoid the fallacy of conflation. The remainder of the current chapter is divided into two sections. The first, [5.2](#), contextualises pre-existing social structural factors within the community, school and at home that either enables or constrains learners in their quest for education. Thus, the section that follows includes a contextual profile of the community in which the case study schools are situated. I complete this with a description of the structural conditions in the two participating schools. The second section, [5.3](#), focuses on the cultural conditions shaping learner educational experiences. This section focuses on the school structure, policies, and systems in place that shape learners agency in terms of school experience. Each section comprises a number of themes and categories of description.

This chapter serves as the backdrop for understanding how existing structural and cultural factors interact with the school factors to shape learners access to education. Further, this chapter also illustrates that factors do not act in isolation but rather that different eco-systems interact in complex ways to shape learner experiences of access to education.

5.2 Structural Conditions shaping Learner Educational Experiences

5.2.1 Community and Family

As already mentioned, the focus in this section is to identify or establish pre-existing *structural conditions* that shaped (and continue to shape) learner educational pathways. This

section is in two parts. The first is a contextual profile of Grahamstown East/Rhini and communities - the location of the two schools in this study - and the second is a more specific profile of each of the two participating schools. I have divided the section thus in order to provide an overview of the structural conditions in and out of school that shape learner experiences of access to education.

It was difficult to develop this comprehensive contextual profile of Grahamstown East and the communities without drawing on secondary data and previous research pertaining to the region. Thus, the following section outlining the structural conditions draws on data from previous research, document analyses, learner questionnaires, interviews, field-notes kept during home visits, and observations. These include consideration of the influence of the following:

- Apartheid and geographic location;
- Apartheid, poverty, and material and social conditions;
- Household size, single-parenthood, and family headship;
- Parent employment status and level of education;
- Chores before and after school;
- Poverty, crime and substance abuse; and
- Poverty and basic needs.

5.2.1.1 Geographic Location and Apartheid

Grahamstown East (Rhini), from which learners and schools in this study are drawn, is situated about three kilometres away from the city centre. Its development started in the 19th century in response to the increasing demand for housing by black¹³ people and also as part of the apartheid government's 'separate development' policy (Møller, 2007, Lemon, 2004). Due to the influx of black people into the city, the apartheid government of the time was compelled to create space where it could place 'them' and thus limit their participation in the life of the city (Møller, 2007). Grahamstown East comprises various African black and 'coloured'¹⁴ townships and settlements. These include Fingo Village (including the old municipal location and Victoria Road); Joza (including Makaanaskop and Extensions 1-5,8,9); King's Flats (including extensions 6 and 7); Tanti, Lingelihle; Vukani, Eluxolweni; Hlalani;

¹³According to the old system of Apartheid, 'black' referred to indigenous African populations. In the case of this study, 'black' refers to indigenous black and coloured.

¹⁴ In the South African, context, the term 'Coloured' refers to an heterogeneous ethnic group who possess ancestry from Europe

VerGenoeg; Hoogenoeg (commonly known as coloured area); and Zolani (Davenport, 2008; Møller, 2007).

Grahamstown East currently has a population of approximately 100,000 (Kelly & Ntlabati, 2007). Largely, the demographics in each of these settlements still reflect the separatist structures put in place by the apartheid government. Similarly, the demographic profiles in each of the participating schools remain relatively unchanged as Table 1 below indicates.

Table 1: Racial and gender demographic profiles of learners and teachers

School	Learner Racial Profile		Teacher Racial Profile		Teacher Gender Profile	
					Male	Female
Nkosi Secondary School	White	None	White	None	None	None
	Coloured	None	Coloured	1	1	None
	Indian	None	Indian	None	None	None
	African Black	424	African Black	22	8	14
Rainbow High School	White	None	White	3	1	2
	Coloured	276	Coloured	21	11	10
	Indian	None	Indian	None	None	None
	African Black	775	African Black	9	None	9

While the learner profile in one of the two schools shows an increase in the intake of African blacks, the teacher profile remains stable and reflects the racial categorisation imposed on schools prior to the democratic government of 1994.

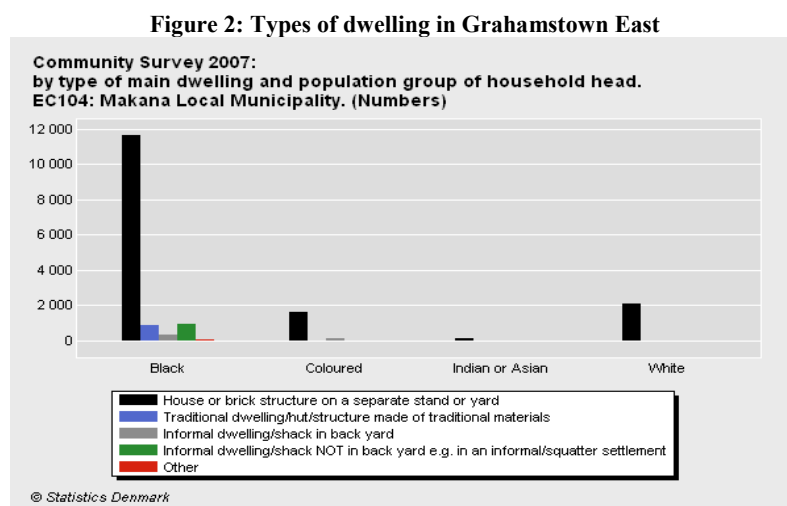
5.2.1.2 Apartheid, Poverty, and Material and Social Conditions

Grahamstown East is characterised by high levels of poverty and unemployment due to limited economic activities available in the area. Different sections of this part of Grahamstown epitomise different levels of living conditions and social economic status as I discuss in more detail below. For example, teachers and blue-collar workers and a greater population of the employed live in extensions 4 and 5 whereas the mostly unemployed and less educated live in extension 1, 2,3 and from 6-9. All the participating learners stayed in one of the latter extensions, where differences in the types of services available to people continually rewrite poverty on the lives of the participating learners.

Resources and Living Conditions

Data presented in Appendix D and E is derived from the Community Survey (STATSA, 2007) and provides an overview of Makana municipality including Grahamstown East's access to basic services such as housing, water, electricity, sanitation, communication

services, transport, and health care facilities. This illustrates how differentiation in services shape experiences of poverty. Figure 1 below illustrates types of dwelling in Makana region based on race



According to Cramm & Nieboer (2011), social capital and socio-economic status determines the type of dwelling for people living in Grahamstown East. Kelly & Ntlabati (2007) in their research on *Marketisation of Municipal Services, Daily life and HIV in South Africa: A case study of Grahamstown*, found that 83% of houses surveyed in Grahamstown East were owned by a member of that household and that 67% of those houses are made of bricks or concrete. The high percentage, in this case, has to do with the large population of African black living in this municipality and does not necessarily indicate better living conditions compared to other racial groups. Further, in their research Kelly & Ntlabati (2007) also found that 20% of the households lived in informal settlements, illegally. They describe these houses as two-roomed, cramped, with no kitchen or bathroom. Shack dwellings and the bucket system still characterise life in some parts of these communities. As the graph in Fig 2 above indicates, the majority of the Black population still live in shacks especially, in extension 8 and 9 in Grahamstown East

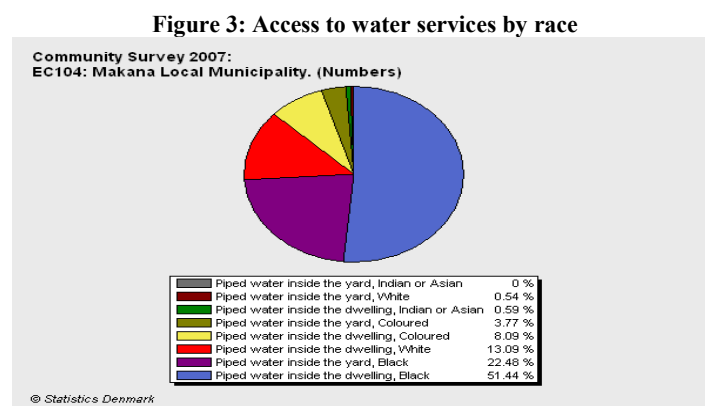
Basic Services and Amenities

Grahamstown East and some surrounding smaller urban areas are served by Makana Municipality, which is responsible for providing basic services such as water, electricity and sanitation services. It is estimated that 87% of households in Grahamstown East have electricity and own a radio and/or television. However, there are still challenges regarding electricity provision as households are faced with inadequate fuses in meter boxes, blackouts,

slow response to repairing electrical connections, and electricity being too expensive (Kelly and Ntlabati, 2007). Some people still use paraffin, fuel wood and candles as sources of energy (Møller, 2007; Kelly & Ntlabati, 2007).

In terms of basic amenities such as water, waterborne sewage, access to health care facilities, communication, transport, emergency services, and security and recreation services, Grahamstown East still struggles to provide its people with such basic needs, which also reflects in schools in this study. Persistent water shortages are rife in the eastern side of town, due to constant water cut offs (Kelly & Ntlabati, 2007). It is not uncommon for many schools in this area resort to sending learners home due to sporadic water supply.

Those struggling most are families and households supplied by the municipality where they have limited access or occasional access to water. Kelly & Ntlabati, (2007) explain that for most families in Grahamstown East, water access is a problem as the only access to water is through the yard tap. To illustrate, Figure 2 below shows water access by different racial groups in Makana Municipality.



While the chart above shows that most black people (51.44%) have access to water, this might also be explained by the fact that a large percentage of the population in Makana is black as compared to other racial groups.

The material conditions experienced in these communities cannot be underplayed. This was evident as I walked to schools during the fieldwork. The streets reflected neglect. This notwithstanding, the four learners whose homes I visited reflected a more nuanced picture of the structural conditions and their intersection with agency. Choices made by individuals in

the respective families present a different reality to the ‘expected’ despite the social and material circumstances described above. I describe each household visited during the fieldwork briefly to illustrate the point.

The first learner, Xoliswa, lived in a three bed-roomed brick house, with her mother and four brothers. The mother is a cashier at a local bakery and is the primary breadwinner since the father passed away. The family has running water in the home. They have television and Xoliswa has a laptop that her father bought her before he passed away. One of her older brothers had dropped out of school. The remaining three who are younger than her, were still in primary school.

The second learner, S’bu, used to live with his mother in Peddie. His father passed away in 2005. His mother asked him to move to Grahamstown to look after his grandparents because they are old and had no one at the time to look after them. His mother comes occasionally to ensure that all is well. S’bu lives in Tanti location in a two-bedroom house with seven other people who include his grandparents, his sister, nieces, and two cousins. They had running water in the yard. . They have a television in the house. The household depends on the grandmother’s pension because the mother is not working.

The third and fourth learners lived in RDP¹⁵ homes. Andile lived in a two roomed RDP house with his parents, two brothers and a sister. They had a television, DSTV and a landline telephone. Andile also owned a laptop that his father bought for him. Both his parents have been unemployed for some time. His father used to work as a clerk for a local business and his mother used to work as a domestic worker.

Andile’s sister used the lounge/kitchen as her bedroom, while the three boys shared a room. During an interview, the parents revealed that they decided to quit their jobs because they were not being paid enough. Since then, the father has been doing odd jobs like cutting grass around the area to provide for his family. When I interviewed the learner about how they managed to sustain the family, he had this to say,

Researcher: If your parents are unemployed, how do they manage to pay school fees, buy stationery and provide you with other basic necessities at home?

¹⁵ RDP Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is a South African socio-economic policy framework implemented by the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994 to address socio-economic problems, such as alleviating poverty and addressing the imbalance in the economy.

Andile: Well, I got my uniform in 2010 and they were unemployed then. Well, my father got unemployed in 2009.

Researcher: What was your father doing then?

Andile: He was a Clerk at NASUA (Grahamstown).

Researcher: And how have you managed all these years to survive?

Andile: He has been doing part-time jobs like cutting grass but now he sits at home doing nothing

Researcher: What about your mother; what is she doing?

Andile: My mum was a domestic worker. She also resigned because the money was too little and the job was stressful.

...

Researcher: How does that make you feel to see that your parents are unemployed and cannot afford to provide you with everything?

Andile: It puts a lot of pressure to study hard. But, it is hard for me to concentrate on school work while I know the situation at home. It's like, I am busy focusing on the situation at home than what is happening at school. It's difficult to understand in class [because] of the situation at home. At home where I live is my primary situation and school is secondary; and if I get distracted ... if I do not cope well in the primary situation then I won't perform well in the secondary situation. If they do solve the problem in the primary situation then I get to cope better at school

Researcher: Is your school aware about your situation?

Andile: No, maybe 1% of the school. But the SMT doesn't know. The principal is a very busy man. He hasn't asked me.

Researcher: Have you tried to talk your teachers or principal?

Andile: No. the principal is a busy guy because every time I go there he is always busy. The secretary tells me he is busy.

Researcher: What about the deputy principal?

Andile: Yoh, the deputy principal is quite strict. The female deputy principal is nice (Interview, 09/10/2011).

The fourth learner Zandile, lived with his parents and two sisters in a two-roomed house. His mother works at Rhodes University in the catering department and his father is a taxi driver. They have a television and DVD player as well as a radio. Zandile shares the one bedroom with his two sisters and sometimes stays at his grandmother's house. He said that his grandmother's house is always full because his cousins and uncles also stay there.

What emerges is a picture that is more complex and nuanced. While the broader context is one of poverty and lack, the four learners whom I interviewed and whose homes I visited reflect a different reality in that guardians and parents made choices and exercised agency to create a different lived reality for their children, indicating a larger agential project by learners and families that I detail in the next chapter.

This notwithstanding, the broader structural conditions I describe above were further exacerbated by household size and headship, employment status, distances from school as I highlight below.

Commute to School

Kelly and Ntlabati (2007) state that the poor road infrastructure (with many potholes) in Grahamstown East acts as a daily challenge to the residents, especially during rainy seasons. During the months of June and July 2011, the local independent newspaper, Grocott's Mail (2011), reported that heavy rainfalls affected residents, destroying their properties. It was also reported that learners in township schools such as Rainbow Secondary School, could not make it to school due to heavy rains that had flooded the roads.

Table 2 below indicates the survey results concerning travel to school. Over 80% of the learners in the two schools reported that they walk to school, with only 6.1% reporting that they use public transport and 6.7% travelling in their parents' car.

Table 2: Learners' mode of travel to school

Travel to School	Frequency	Percentage
Walk	132	80.0%
Public transport	10	6.1%
Parents Cars	11	6.7%
Missing	10	6.1%
Total	165	100.0%

The high percentage of learners walking to school might explain why there is low attendance in school during the rainy season. For example, during my observation, half of the English class in Grade 11 at Rainbow Secondary School could not come to school because of flooded roads. Those who managed to come to school were sent home before the end of the school day because of continued floods. During the focus group interviews with teachers at Nkosi Secondary School, the English teacher explained that such a scenario was common when it rained and during the winter season. She said, “[Y]ou see, for the first three-four months, the attendance is normally good. And then you pick up problems when you get to the 5th and 6th months onwards, which is winter and during rain seasons (Focus group interview, 01/06/2011). Another teacher during the same focus group interview stated, “[Y]ou see the attendance becomes much gradual (less) when we get closer to winter season and this is when it also rains a lot. The rate of drop-out towards [the winter] season (focus group interview 01/06/2011).

When it came to distance that learners walked to school, 29.9% learners reported that they walked for a kilometer to school, whereas 21.8% and 20% reported that they walk between 4-

5 kilometers and 2-3 kilometers to school respectively. The missing data are those who say they travelled using other means, as Table 3 indicates below.

Table 3: Distance walked to school

Distance to school in KM	Frequency	Percent
0-1	44	29.9%
2-3	30	20.4%
4-5	32	21.8%
6 or more	15	10.2%
Missing	22	15.0%
Total	147	100.0%

Learners expressed the consequences of walking to school. A learner at Nkosi Secondary School lamented, “[S]he wakes[s] up very early in the morning [and] walk[s] long a distance to school every day... but only to arrive to school late and the school gate closed.” This learner felt discouraged because she walked to school every day and sometimes did not make it to class. It was also evident during my observation that many learners did not make it to school on time, especially during the rainy season, because sometimes roads were flooded and they could not get to school on time.

Not only was walking to school a factor that shaped learners’ access to school, but also single parenthood and household size as I explain below.

5.2.1.3 Household Size, Single-Parenthood, and Family Headship

A household survey of Grahamstown East by Møller (2007) found that there were at least four to six people in one household, with a higher proportion of these households headed by women. Similarly, Kelly & Ntlabati (2007) found that no fewer than five but as many as 13 people lived in one household. This result was also reflected in the living conditions of the four learners whose homes I visited. For the most part, the number of people outnumbered the number of bedrooms or living space available. The principal from Rainbow Secondary School confirmed that the size and number of people occupying a household had an effect of learner’s education. He said,

Then when you get to the homes of these people and realize ‘how do you expect learners to do their homework?’ They are so stressed in the house. Sometimes the homes are overcrowded. There is no privacy for young girls to grow up. Sometimes there is no example in the homes and for some of these learners, there is no food. The learners would say, ‘I had to go and look for food. My clothes were dirty because there is no soap to wash no washing powder’. (Individual principal interview, 12/10/2011).

The trend of female headship in South Africa is shaped by geographical and historical factors. apartheid policies and practices dictated how black people should live and work; forcing men to leave their homestead in search of employment leaving women in charge of homes (Schatz, Madhavan and Williams, 2011; Coovadia, Jewkes, Barron, Sanders and McIntyre, 2009).

According to STATSSA (2010), the Eastern Cape is second after Limpopo in terms of having the highest number of female-headed households. Despite government's effort to develop rural areas and townships, the legacy of apartheid continues to affect people living in these areas (Coovadia *et.al*, 2009). Grahamstown East is no exception. For example, women headed two of the four households visited in this study. Two were pensioners and the third a cashier at a local bakery in the city centre. The two principals attested to this phenomenon. The principal of Nkosi Secondary School said,

I would say most of the homes have no father figure and once there is a lack of father figure, that boy at that home with a mother. Even that is much prominent when you call meetings. There are very few fathers; most of them are mothers [who come to meetings]. Even in the SGB and school leadership. Once there is no father figure, this boy will see that 'I am a father'. The boy will take control of a home and a mother will have no control over him and all that. That will actually come and spill over to school. (Principal Individual interview, 06/06/2011).

The principal from Rainbow Secondary School put it this way,

Some [learners] are, for example, are staying with their grannies; others do not have fathers and [still] others parents are deceased. They are staying with their grannies and you find that even those who are staying with the grannies find it difficult to do their homework. They have no one to assist them at home. (Principal individual interview 12/10/2011).

The teachers in the two schools also shared similar views regarding the absence of one or both parents, especially fathers in children's lives as well as in their education. In a focus group interview with teachers, one from Rainbow Secondary School said,

The other reason is that most of these learners are orphans. They do not stay with their parents; so there is nobody behind them who says you must go to school - who encourages them to go school. They do as they like and even with their home works. That is what is happening. (Teacher 1 Focus group interview, 01/06/2011),

A teacher from Rainbow Secondary School put it this way,

It boils down to what we have been saying that these learners have no role models because I believe your first role model is your parent. I believe [parents are] the ones that groom you. So you find that some of these learners have no have fathers; they stay with grannies and their mothers. As a result, you feel that something is lacking that mothering and parenting. (Focus group interview, 11/10/2011).

Teachers further described the phenomenon of absent fathers and lack of models. Lonwabo from Nkosi Secondary School commented, "[S]ome learners are not living with their

parents; they are living with their grannies and all that. Some of them are living with their brothers and sisters and some of them they are I would say, are managing homes [child-headed household] (Focus group interview with teachers, 01/06/2011). Xabiso from the same school attributed learners' ill-discipline to this phenomenon. He said, "[A]lso, there is a type of learner that has no parents. [They are] brought up by the grandparents. When you get all the cases of ill-discipline, it is those learners that actually who misbehave in our school (Teacher 4 Focus group interview, 01/06/2011).

The deputy principal of Nkosi Secondary School had the following to say about single parenthood,

I find it [a] true problem because we always hear [about] single parent families and I personally have come across some of the young learners... who are not able to cope with the situations at homes. There are so many cases where they were struggling with the worries [saying] 'my father is not around'. I did have one boy and a girl from the same family and the girl was doing better and the boy was [also] intelligent but in Grade 12, he dropped [out of school] and later I came to know that boy had no father. He had a mother but there was nothing So, this girl's mother who is his aunt [his mother's sister] became kind on him and took him to her family. Then the boy complained [his aunt] does not love him; she loves the girl more. So you see, it is this kind of situation. [This boy] failed miserably yet he had the potential to come and have a very nice result. These are things and these kinds of things are not one case it continues it is a lot (Individual interview, 04/06/2011).

Not only was there an issue of single-parenthood, the principal of Rainbow Senior Secondary also acknowledged that there were child-headed families in the community. He said, "You have learners who are heads of houses; who have brothers and sisters to care of because there are no parents or there are no fathers in the homes" (individual interview, 23/08/2011).

The consequences of single parenthood (mostly mothers), child-headed households, or learners staying with grandparents (mostly grandmothers) were also reflected when learners responded to questions on school fees. Figure 3 below shows that 42.5% learners indicated that only their mothers paid school fees, while 27.4% indicated that fathers paid their school fees.

Figure 4: Percentage of people who pay learners fees



Ability to pay school fees was also linked to parents' employment status, as I highlight below.

5.2.1.4 Parent Employment Status and Level of Education

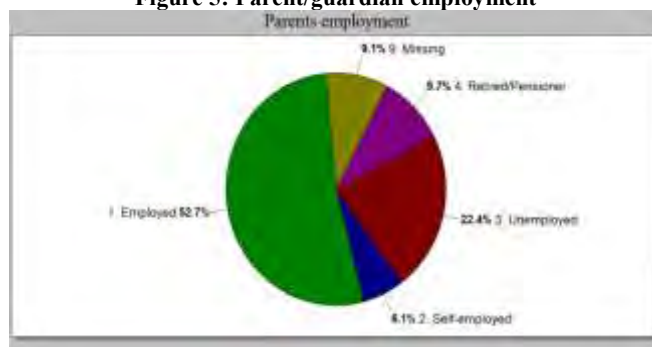
Grahamstown East is marked by a lack of commercial development, small houses, pot-holed roads and relative lack of street lighting. By comparison, Grahamstown West has gracious colonial buildings, treed suburbs, a growing commercial centre, and excellent urban infrastructure (Kelly and Ntlabati, 2007:11)

Estimates are that approximately 70% of the population in Grahamstown East is unemployed. Møller's two large-scale surveys of Grahamstown East in 1999 and 2007 reveal that the median household income was R558 in 1999 and R1100 per month in 2007 (Møller 2000 and 2008). The studies also found that 44% of households depend on social grants with dependence on child support the highest, followed by old age pension and disability grants. Seti, 2003 (cited in Davenport, Gambiza and Shackleton, 2011) reports that the main employment sources for people in the area are Rhodes University, public schools, the high court, and other service related industries. The principal of Nkosi Secondary School shared similar views about employment opportunities in Grahamstown. He commented:

[T]here is also poverty particularly here in Grahamstown. You see from your own information 75% of Grahamstown residents are absorbed by Rhodes University. If that university could close it would be a serious problem. So I am trying to say that there are no factories in Grahamstown (individual interview, 06/06/201).

The results from the learner survey reflected in Figures 5 and 6 below to some extent, do not reflect the statistics above in that there was (a) a larger number of employed parents, (b) more educated parents and (c) fewer learners on social grants amongst this cohort. Therefore, while they resided in Grahamstown East, this cohort of Grade 11 learners did not necessarily reflect the overall employment status and experience amongst the Grahamstown East population. For example, Figure 4 below reflects that 52.7% of parents/guardians are employed while 22.4% are unemployed.

Figure 5: Parent/guardian employment



Related to the above, from the cohort of 166 learners who responded to the questionnaire, only four had parents who were in professional jobs, such as doctor, nurse, lawyer, teachers, or work in the police force, three indicated that their parents are self-employed. This reflects on Table 4 below.

Table 4: Employment parents are involved in

Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Professional job (lawyer, teacher, doctor, policeman/woman, pilot, nurse)	4	13.8%
Skilled Worker (driver, tailor, catering/chef)	2	6.9%
Self-employed (farmer, business owner, artist)	3	10.3%
House helper	5	17.2%
Other	2	6.9%
Missing	13	44.8%
Total	29	100.0%

While Alebiosu (2005) found that the majority of black people who reside in Grahamstown East are unemployed or have occasional access to employment in the informal sector, this trend did not reflect in the questionnaire results. In some way, this result may provide a partial explanation for this cohort of learners still being in school.

The principal at Nkosi Secondary School linked the unemployment status with parent's inability to pay the meagre annual school fees. He said, "... for instance one thing that you can see is that there is high unemployment in Grahamstown and most of the parents around here have got kids in this school and some of them are actually unable to pay school fees that is expected which is as minimal as R80" (Individual interview, 06/06/2011).

The principal of Rainbow Secondary School shared similar sentiments regarding the problem of unemployment in Grahamstown, linking it instead to the educational status of parents and the consequences this has for learner support at home. He stated, "[I]t is again a case of high

unemployment rates amongst our community members and when your community members are not literate themselves... because most of them are not really educated; you do not know [how to deal with the issue of] homework in...” (Principal Individual interview, 23/08/2011).

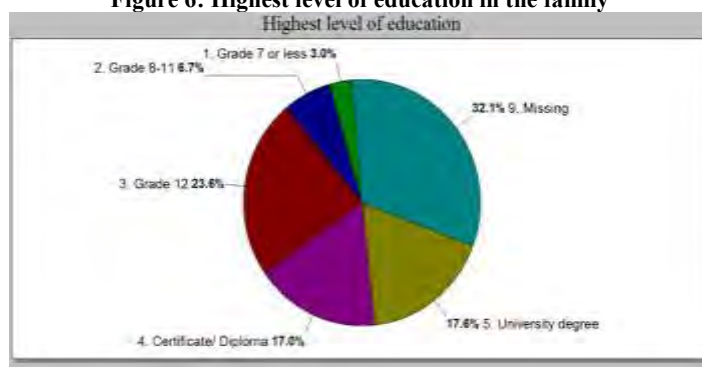
While parent unemployment amongst the larger cohort of learners did not follow the overall expected pattern found in large-scale studies briefly discussed earlier, learners in the focus groups and during individual interviews expressed the view that their parents’ employment status had material effects on their education and had implications for their ability to remain in school. Thabo, a learner at Rainbow Senior Secondary stated, “[B]oth my parents are unemployed and they are struggling. Maybe if I want something for school, they struggle [with] how they will find money for me to get that”). Andile from Nkosi Secondary School shared his views as follows, “[M]y father is unemployed. He has been doing part-time jobs like cutting grass; but now he sits at home and my mum was a domestic worker. She also resigned because the money was too little and the job was stressful (focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

The problem of unemployment in Grahamstown East was also linked to low educational levels and/or absence of employment opportunities in the area. This might explain why there was a high dependence on social grants especially child support grants, old age pension and disability grants (Møller, 2008).

In terms of education level and although 32% of the learners did not respond to this question, the survey data indicates that 23.6% of parents have an education level of Grade 12, followed by 17% with a university degree, diploma or certificate respectively. Thus, linking unemployment to low levels of education in this study does create a contradiction.

Figure 5 below shows the highest level of education obtained by learners’ families for example their parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters etc.

Figure 6: Highest level of education in the family



What emerged is that parent's employment and education cannot be explained as a structure that constrains learners' access to education. From the survey data, it appears that learners' families are educated with 17% of learners reporting that their parents have university degrees or diplomas.

Parent's education and employment were not the only factors that shaped learners' access to education. Chores before and after school contributed to this phenomenon as explained below.

5.2.1.5 Chores before and after school

Of the 166 learners that responded, 41.6% reported doing nothing before going to school in the morning. A quarter of the sample reported that they fetched water every morning before going to school and 15.7% of learners reported fetching water after school.

The focus group interviews and the four learners whose homes were visited showed a very different picture in that most learners did chores before and after school. For example, S'bu who was sent to live with his elderly grandparents did all the work at home. He cooked, cleaned, and fetched water from the yard tap. In the mornings, he would make breakfast for his grandparents before going to school. During break-time, he went home to ensure his grandparents were fine and to see if they needed anything before heading back to school.

The learners in the focus group interviews confirmed too that they did chores that often kept them from completing school assignments and homework. Anelisa from Rainbow Secondary School stated, "[W]ork is a lot, because every time you come to school teachers want their assignment, [yet] we cannot finish all the work because we have to do our own chores at home, like cooking and cleaning (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011). S'bu from Nkosi

Secondary School said “[B]efore I sleep I make sure that the house is clean so that when am back to school I do not have much work to do (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011). He continued, “... straight after school, I eat and then do chores that are there... like washing dishes, sweeping the floor or if we have to cook outside and chop wood. Then I have time to myself.” Rosie, a learner at the same school confirmed that he too had chores to do after school. He said,

I do the same chores as S’bu does because at home there is no one. My brother is at school and my mother is work. [Therefore], when I get home, I have clean up the mess we left in the morning. I wash the dishes, cook and when I have finished cooking, I go and read my books. When my mother arrives, we eat. (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

The deputy principal at Rainbow Senior Secondary also acknowledged that children completed chores before and after school that had consequences for their participation in school. He commented,

Many of them find it difficult [because] they have lots of responsibilities these days. The other day a Grade 12 boy was sleeping in class and I asked, ‘Are you okay, you look tired?’ and he said ‘no, it is because my mother has been hospitalized.’ He has a younger brother to look after whom he has to collect from school and take care of him and do all the work at home” (individual interview, 12/10/2011).

During a focus group interview, a teacher at Rainbow Secondary School reported that girls carried a greater burden of chores around the home. She mentioned that this not only held them back in terms of their education, but also shaped how they viewed themselves and their future. She put it this way,

[M]any girls are expected to do chores at home, [as] some of them would come to school just not to be home even when they don’t want to come to school. When they go back [home] they have to look after children, cook, and clean house. Some of them think that is the way it is (life) so they don’t care and then others probably feel they will never be better. Other girls what keeps them back is when they reach that stage (puberty) of being noticed by guys they become so stupid that they think, especially when a guy comes to them. They think they can keep the guy by having baby and a lot of them fall pregnant and immediately everything changes because now their lives has to revolve around [a child] and I think that is what keeps them back (Focus group interview, 11/10/2011)

In addition to the conditions already discussed, crime and substance abuse emerged as major structural conditions that shaped learner experiences of access to education in the two case study schools, as discussed below.

5.2.1.6 Poverty, Crime and Substance Abuse

Crime is rife in Grahamstown East, as is alcohol and drug abuse. Poverty, unemployment and the lack of basic recreational services (as discussed briefly above) are blamed for the surge in criminal activities such as robberies, stabbings, and rape, to mention but a few. By way of

illustration, Appendix F indicates the crime statistics for Grahamstown, highlighting the type of crime committed and the number of times it was committed over a period.

Schools in the township like Nkosi School are located in the vicinity of taverns, commonly known as shebeens. Marijuana and cigarettes were easily accessible to learners, making it difficult for educators to control learners who used such substances. For example, I noticed during my fieldwork that during break time, learners in both schools went out of the school premises to buy snacks without supervision; making it possible for them to have access to cigarettes and alcohol. It was not surprising that during the period of my fieldwork at Rainbow Secondary School, five girls were suspended from school because they were caught smoking behind the classrooms. Both principals and deputy principals at the participating schools acknowledged that there was a problem of alcohol and drug abuse in their schools and surrounding areas. The principal at Nkosi Senior Secondary stated, “... *and then also the problem of alcoholism around the school because people bask the sun doing nothing so they get all these concoctions; liquor and yeah drugs also is also part (Individual Interview 06/06/2011)*. The deputy principal at the same school said that crime, alcohol and drug use had negative effects on the school and its functioning. He put it this way, “*There is a high rate of crime outside the school because people are not at work. It affects the school in many ways because all those are parents of these learners who are here. Sometimes those things actually bring them to school (Individual Interview 04/06/2011)*.”

The principal of Rainbow Secondary School on the other hand linked crime and substance abuse to the socio-economic status of people in the community. He said,

[P]eople lack jobs and even crime that is part of socio-economic problem, which is also affecting our learners. You hear cases that learner A has stolen books from learner B. When you call the parents and try to dig deeper, you realize that this learner has nothing to bring to school and so stealing is the only way. Some of the learners you will only see the police coming with some cases. All those problems they have something to do with social-economic status; they have nothing to do with others [crimes] like killing or rape. It has to do with stealing ... the learners are involved in stealing and house breaking. When I try to dig deeper they will tell you that ‘Sir, we have nothing to eat; we were trying to get these things so that we can sell them and get something to eat’ (individual interview, 23/08/2011).

The deputy principal at the same school reported that crime and drug use influenced school attendance and dropout. According to her, there was a vicious cycle of drugs leading to irregular school attendance, leading to crime and so forth. She said, *[T]here are drugs and other problems such as crime as well. Some learners are absent irregularly; they drop out and that could be because of drug related issues. We had cases where children abuse drugs*

and beat the mother (Individual Interview, 04/06/2011). She added that alcohol abuse was also a problem among teachers. She noted,

[S]ome teachers absent themselves from school without any reason and alcohol is the biggest challenge. Some of our teachers do not come to school they do not let us know where they are. Those learners sit without teachers. So you see you are sending the child to the system. Teachers being on sick leave. Absenteeism of teachers is the biggest problem. Our school is dual medium so teachers must speak both languages and learners suffer (Focus group interview 12/10/2011).

The principal at Rainbow Secondary School acknowledged that substance abuse was a problem in the school stating, "... you know when they come to school in the morning, they [learners] come to school sober; but after break when they go out to the town you smell dagga and all sorts of funny substances." He mentioned the complex interplay between substance abuse and crime by saying,

I think also [in relation to] crime, you find that these learners are used by their uncles and all that because even the home background they see nothing wrong in things that they are involved in. For example, a geography teacher discovered dagga inside one learner's book. This innocent child really, knew nothing about. If we were strict enough according to these rules, we would have followed them [but] we had to dig down. The uncle came and we could see that the guy is smelling dagga. He apologized that when he was doing [rolling a pipe] that he happened to take paper from the child's book. Unfortunately, there [were] some traces of dagga left and he was already [gone to school when] he remembered to take them out. Even stealing in the homes of these children that is how they survive. When a child steals, he sees nothing wrong because it is something done [at home]. You find that an aunt or uncle comes to call him to be a witness in some kind of burglary and that so those community social ills are really a big issue. I think it is a question of unemployment, which the government has always been promising to solve (Individual interview 23/08/2011).

Teachers involved in this study also shared sentiments about crime and substance abuse and the impact these social issues had on their schools and learners as well. Ms Yolanda, an English teacher at Nkosi Secondary School put it this way, "Drugs, alcohol abuse, crime [those are the problems]... because we do get our classes broken into. I do not know if it is the learners themselves or the people from the community but we do get vandalism happening so I do not" (Focus group Interview, 01/06/2011). Another teacher who teaches life sciences at the same school stated, "[T]he negative thing that I come across is like for example kids coming to school drunk, others coming to school smelling dagga, others coming to school with guns. We once experienced that in our school, one learner came to school with his executive case with a gun and he showed the class that he had a gun and one of the learners reported to the staff. The gun was taken from the learner and then they called him to the office and the disciplinary committee dealt with that learner (Focus group Interview, 01/06/2011).

Mr. Lonwabo from Nkosi Secondary expressed similar his concerns regarding substance abuse. He stated

[A]lso another thing that is hitting hard on our learners; the very same parents that are getting grants they are drinking a lot. So during this time you will see learners coming to me to intercept the money coming to their family member otherwise if you do not do it they will have nothing to eat. Because these old people will take the money and go and drink it and the money will be taken from them and also these people in the community called “skoppers” you see where you will have a debt without the end so they will ask permission to get that money so they get their share and they will leave the rest of the money with their parents who will be drunk anyway so that they quickly to get something to buy food otherwise if they cannot do that they will be out. So those are things that are really a challenge. You cannot have a solution overnight (Focus group Interview, 01/06/2011).

Teachers at Rainbow Secondary School shared similar views regarding poverty, crime and substance abuse in the community. Mr. Speckman stated, “[W]e had cases where children abuse drugs and beat their mother. So yeah. Unemployment, poverty, alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy these are all issues those are the main things” (Focus group interview, 11/10/2011).

Mr. Wiseman, a teacher at Rainbow Secondary School, put it this way,

(...) others even notice that their parents have a drinking problem so the learners themselves are growing in that situation of staying with parents that are drinking who do not care for their education. Even if for example a learner does something wrong here at school and then you ask that learner to bring the parent sometimes it is difficult for that learner to bring a parent coz the parent will say oh am not going there tell them that am not coming. (Focus group interview, 11/10/2011).

Lastly, Ms. Mager commented, “[T]hey will come and narrate that my father was drunk and it was a chaos. That even if the father is drunk you do not have to fight. And the learners they do also smoke, they drink” (Focus group interview, 11/10/2011).

Two of the parents of the four learners tracked for this study commented on the issue of crime and substance abuse in the school surroundings and within the school environment. Andile’s father said, “[T]here are so many kids who don’t go to school in this area and do drugs and drinking. We are worried about this area; many of the kid just sit around (informal interview 16/11/2011). S’bu’s grandparent stated, “[Y]ou see that school has a bad reputation. There is no fence (making it easy) to do drugs. The kids smoke. Recently we heard the story of a girl who was raped. The boys escape, do drugs and smoke and teachers do nothing (Informal interview, 16/11/2011).

Learners at Nkosi Secondary School acknowledged the problem of substance abuse in their school, which made them feel unsafe. Sethu commented on this as follows, “[O]k, in this school, there are some children who are using drugs. When I say drugs, I mean sort of dagga, cigarettes and all stuff. Then they are trying to make the problem in this school because even if now you can go to the toilet, you will find them (Focus group interview,

07/06/2011). Zandi linked the use of drugs with theft in school. She said, *[S]ome learners are thieves and thugs. They steal cell phones and that is why the principal said if you bring your things you should hide them (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).*

Learners reported that crime and alcohol abuse was not only a problem amongst learners. The latter was a problem amongst teachers too. Those interviewed at Rainbow Secondary School mentioned that some of their teachers came to school drunk and would end up not teaching. Others reported that on many occasions, teachers would not attend school due to their condition or misuse of alcohol. Babs, a learner at Rainbow Secondary School stated, *“Because it is corrupt school. Students and teachers spend more time smoking than study and teach. (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).* Ntosh also stated, *(...) and because he comes to school drunk and comes to class and talks about sex and harasses other girls. And then our present teacher he doesn’t come to school he hasn’t come to school ever since he is been our teacher. (Focus group interview 09/10/2011).* Sino agreed and added, *“[C]rime is very high around our school. Last year they came and broke into our school and took the computers and it was learners at this school who broke in (Focus group interview 09/10/2011).*

5.2.1.7 Poverty and Teenage Pregnancy

Evidence from the interviews reveals that teenage pregnancy is rampant in both schools. Teachers expressed concern about the rate at which girls were having babies and the extent to which this impacted their education. Mr. Lonwabo from Nkosi Secondary School had this to say about teenage pregnancy in school,

[G]irls who get pregnant they take time off to have the baby and then they lose tuition time and then they do not come to school by the time they come back there are problems and if their child is sick and they need to stay with their children. So we do get things like because some of them do not attend afternoon and morning classes because they have to look out and take care of their children (Focus group interview 01/06/2011).

Another teacher Ms Yantolo echoed these sentiments regarding teenage pregnancy by saying,

She has one day to take the child to the clinic am not sure what is happening now but it is almost the 4th day and remember she is repeating. You see for the first three-four months the attendance is normally good and then you pick up problems when you get to the 5th and 6th months onwards with the learners you see some girls would fall pregnant and some boys would stay away and not come school (Focus group interview 01/06/2011).

Ms. Jewell, a teacher from Rainbow Secondary School, also commented on the issue of teenage pregnancy. She had this to say

Also, learners like girls for example come to school pregnant and then when they deliver their babies they have to stay at home for a period of time to look for the baby. After that they come back to school and then that is also because they are losing a lot of time staying with the baby and even when they have these babies, they cannot even ask for a certain period of time to take their babies maybe to hospitals, be absent so that they can take their babies to hospitals. So we are dealing with lots of things like that (Focus group interview 11/10/2011).

Similarly, Ms. Yantolo commented on the rampant teenage pregnancy in their schools.,

[Y]es it is even though I can say it is not the super thing but there are girls who have babies. In Grade 11 I have girl it is the 4th day today. She has a child she has to see I think she is struggling to find somebody. Their performance is not good/poor. They seem committed after they have (interruption) they seem committed when they come back again. But they are not doing as much as the other learners because sometimes they are absent because of the reasons. Yes, it changes everything, almost everything. Their time... they do not have enough time to do their homework, to study, to come to school. So it changes their environment and their lives (Focus group interview 11/10/2011).

Poverty had consequences for girls in the community. The deputy principal from Rainbow Secondary School said that poverty drove learners, especially girls, to seek out relationships with older men, hence they ended up pregnant. She reported,

Around teenage pregnancy, if you think it is not now such a thing you know there are so many aspects because at the end these young girls are driven to something out of their social economic situation. We hear of a phenomenon called 'sugar daddies' and I read on the newspaper that research found that certain areas of South Africa, are number one area in terms of this sugar daddy thing. The connection is that the girls are loved, cared, and given money. So a young girl who is not taken care of at home will be going to ... (Individual interview, 12/10/2011).

Ms. Yantolo attributed girls' poor performance in science to having babies. She said, “[Y]es it is because girls tend to be lazy in life sciences; boys grasp easily more than girls. For example, I don't know ... maybe the girls are having this burden of having babies. For example, that they are thinking 'oh what am I going to do with my baby' and that burden is not more on the boys side as it is on the girls” (Focus group interview 11/10/2011).

An English teacher at Nkosi Secondary School also mentioned the problem of teenage pregnancy at their school. He commented, “[Y]ou see for the first three-four months the attendance is normally good and then you pick up problems when you get to the 5th and 6th months onwards with the learners you see some girls would fall pregnant and some boys would stay away and not come school (Focus group interview 11/10/2011).

Schools reported high rates of HIV and AIDS amongst the community and school populations. A teacher at Rainbow Secondary School stated that children's “parents die leaving their children as orphans (Individual interview, 11/10/2011). Mr. Lonwabo at Nkosi Secondary School also commented, “[T]here are so many stresses at home and they do talk

about sometimes. Like one who didn't have money to pay for the farewell the mum has AID's and she looks after the mother all the time" (Focus group interview, 01/06/2011).

5.2.1.8 Poverty and Basic Needs

Poverty had material effects on learners as it affected the way they lived at home including their social activities at school. For example, the deputy principal at Rainbow Secondary School mentioned that learners approached her for the most basic hygiene needs such as soap. She said,

You know I had two learners asking me for soap to wash. The two of them came and asked 'M'am, don't you have soap to wash my body'. I cried and it sat right here (points to chest)... I have sanitary towels that the education department/healthcare gave, so I would send them out... even with that, I try to be discreet (individual interview, 01/09/2011).

Mr Errol, an SGB member and volunteer teacher at Rainbow Secondary School noted, *"I had a Grade 12 who had to write an assessment. She has lots of potential but couldn't afford the R160 to pay. She was in orphanage in Durban at a young stage of her life. Her dad lives close to where she lived, but he didn't care. Her sister works in a hotel as a cook or something."*

A teacher at Rainbow Secondary School reported that poverty was a problem that affected learners. He stated, *"[O]ne learner for instance doesn't live with her dad. When he comes [to see her], he scolds her, shouts at her and checks to see if she is doing her work, and pays the school fees. But, she lives with her mum where there is nothing to eat at home. [Her mum] would rather buy food with that money than pay school fees"* (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011). In relation to the above, Mr Batyi, an SGB member at Nkosi Secondary School, also stated,

(...) many learners drop out. Some drop out due to frustration/desperation and poverty plays a major role in the decision that 'why must I attend school when I have nothing to eat. If I go to the street, I will earn a living somehow, I don't know how but I will. I do not have to worry about where my next meal will come from, where I will get school uniform'. It plays a major role on learners [decisions]. Like one who didn't have money to pay for the farewell [party]. The mum has AIDs and she looks after the mother all the time (Individual interview, 12/11/2011).

The principal in Nkosi Secondary School acknowledged that the biggest challenge facing the school is poverty and unemployment, with HIV & AIDS wreaking havoc in the community. He stated,

[P]overty levels play a role whether we want it or not. At the end of the day, [the question learners face is] 'do you want to study for seven or eight years and not even complete school or you rather get something to eat on a daily basis?' You hope if you can have an easy job, it doesn't matter how much you earn as long as you have some money. It is almost saying to you that it seems to me that education

is only for the fortunate. Learners who come from good homes and have access to internet at home where if they come home and say 'Mummy I need to find stuff for an assignment.' So again, I say poverty plays a major role and I say to you again, there is still the have and have-nots. These factors are definitely present. You can come with all the beautiful things that you read in the newspapers, that you read in the reports but what am saying is that I am on the ground; I know what is happening on the ground. I am speaking out of what I see and what I know and experience (Individual interview, 06/06/2011).

In sum, the problems of poverty, unemployment, crime, and substance abuse can be attributed to a certain extent to the legacy of apartheid. A lack of development is still visible in the area since the establishment of the townships in which schools find themselves. People in the community still struggle with the lack of basic services such as water, electricity, and sanitation, which impact negatively on learners' access to quality education.

The findings in the above section raise intriguing issues about the enabling and constraining conditions in which learners operate, the choices/decisions they make, and the basis on which they make their choices/decisions. As I show later on, in chapter 6, the majority of learner respondents viewed these conditions as the mechanism that propelled them to see education as a way out of a dire situation; thus we see a discursive space for transformation and agency rather than only constraining factors.

5.2.2 Schools

In the above section, I outlined the structural and cultural conditions outside of school that shape learner daily lived experiences and by implication, their education experiences. I now turn to presenting the structural and cultural conditions within schools. Schools are open systems, embedded in their wider contexts, and moreover, are socially constructed contexts which provide the conditions within which learner agency is constrained and enabled (Siskin 1994). A number of social structures emerge from relationships that are external to the school, and these can serve to reinforce the 'common technical culture' of the subject tradition (Siskin 1994: 92). Data were derived from the questionnaire, focus group discussions with a select number of learners and teachers, as well as individual interviews with principals, and the four learners whose homes I also visited. This, helped to lay the foundation for understanding how learners view or position themselves in relation to structural and cultural mechanisms in and out of school, as I explain in the next chapter.

5.2.2.1 Nkosi Secondary School

Nkosi Secondary School is located in Joza Township in Grahamstown East/Rhini, about three kilometres from the city centre. The school is currently one of seven high schools serving Grahamstown East/Rhini. The school was established in 1995 by a handful of unemployed educators and parents to cater for scholars who could not find a place in existing secondary schools. It was initially a platoon school¹⁶ at C.M. Vellem Upper Primary School, a neighbouring primary school. This, until the Department of Education secured a property to erect a building. The school officially opened in 2005. The principal, who has been there since its inception, described the early years as follows,

[I]t was a challenge. You can imagine coming to your new school with no buildings of its own, no furniture, and no human resources that is ready to take up the challenge like for instance, school managing teams today. The Head of Department (HOD) and I were the only persons who {had some} experience. But, I just told myself that am actually going to make it. Because the people that I was actually working with that I started the school with were really keen to gain experience and also knowledge and work hard and exactly that is what happened (Individual interview, 06/06/2011).

When the school was established, it had 27 volunteer teachers, 15 of whom were later appointed as permanent staff. It currently has neat buildings quite similar to other schools in the vicinity. Like most schools in the area, Nkosi draws its learners largely from surrounding areas. At R80 per annum, the school fees reflect the poverty experienced by most families in the area. The school is currently ranked in Quintile 4¹⁷ by the Department of Education. The principal noted in his interview that the school is in the process of contesting this position and asking for a recategorisation to Quintile 1, given that many parents whose children attend the school are unemployed and therefore unable to afford to pay even what may be perceived as meagre fees. He said, “... *that it is of the learner coming from the poor background. You find that sometimes they do not even have money to pay the school fees and then when they do not pay school fees, it affects the managing of the school.*”

Unlike the adjacent primary schools, Nkosi Secondary School does not have a school-feeding scheme. The principal raised his concern about learners who come to school without eating by stating “...*and also there are high levels of poverty because some learners would come to*

¹⁶ A platoon school is a school in which learners take turns using classrooms that are available

¹⁷ Quintile is a pro-poor policy/system implemented by the government of South Africa under the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF), in an attempt to redress and redistribute resources in the education sector. The quintile rank of a school is based on the poverty level of the community in which it is located. This score is calculated using national census data: weighted household data on income dependency

school not having had something to eat; sometimes, not even having something to eat the previous day. Not even supper last night (Individual interview with principal, 06/06/2011). A teacher at the same school also shared her concern in a focus group interview. She stated, "... these learners come from poor communities. They suffer a lot because they even tell you, 'Miss, I even come to school without eating anything. I didn't eat for a day.'" (Focus group interview 06/06/2011).

The deep-rooted legacy of the separatist apartheid government manifests in this school, despite it having been established in the post-apartheid era. While it may have been expected to reflect the new democratic government's ideals in terms of its structures and policies, this school still bears similarities with schools opened during the apartheid era, in terms of language and admission policies. For example, whereas the school prides itself as being dual medium (Xhosa and English), English is the medium of instruction.

Access to Resources/Amenities

In terms of size, Nkosi Secondary School is a small school. It consists of four blocks of classrooms and an administrative block. The administrative block consists of three offices; for the principal, the administrator and the deputy principal respectively. The administrative block also houses the staffroom, staff kitchen, staff lavatory and a photocopy room which also acts a sick bay. Few teachers (mainly female) come to the staff room during interval. Most use their classrooms during free periods and break time.

All the external structures of the school are well maintained. However, some classes that I visited had leaking ceilings, broken windows (due to vandalism), and broken floors. Although there are flush toilets, these are often not working. Like most schools in the area, Nkosi Secondary School has an erratic water supply. Sometimes learners are sent home before the end of the school day when the supply is off. In November 2010, Eduloan, in conjunction with Galela Amanzi (a Rhodes University Student Project), donated and installed a rainwater tank at the school. The school has electricity and a telephone in the secretary's office.

There is one computer in the staffroom that was not functional during my fieldwork and one in the administrator's office, used by the secretary. The school does not have a functioning library. When I had a discussion with the principal, he explained that they are in the process

of refurbishing a classroom in order to turn it into a library and media centre. He stated, “*I think things that we do not have here are computers which are still fighting to get and also a fully-fledged library. Nevertheless, as compared to other schools, at least we are doing well (Individual interview, 06/06/2011).*”

In contrast to this comment from the principal, teachers and learners had some difficult experiences and decided views to offer regarding the availability of resources in their school. For example, I noticed during my fieldwork that the English teacher had to write material on a chalkboard for learners about learner agency to copy because she did not have enough literature books. In life sciences classes, the teacher asked learners to bring 10-cents each so that they could buy a kidney for the class experiment. I also noticed in some classes that learners had to share textbooks. Three teachers involved in the focus group interview at the school mentioned that insufficient resources were a challenge to them being effective teachers. Mr. Lonwabo stated,

[M]y challenge is materials. I do not have enough materials for life sciences, especially Grade 11 and 12 because my syllabus changes each year. You buy textbooks for this year and next year, you must buy other textbooks and the school doesn't have enough money to buy textbooks. We do have some resources; we have a photocopier and but the funds are not enough because we cannot copy everything. We need so as to help our learners. We have different books that we use but we cannot always make copies of them so that is a restriction on our side. (Teacher focus group interview, 06/06/2011).

The Mathematics teacher made the point that teachers used the *fax* machine to photocopy. She put it this way, “*...we are struggling- even this year we do not have a photocopier we make copies from a fax machine. So it is quite a challenge.*”

Science laboratories at the school are not well equipped. The school liaises with Rhodes University's mobile laboratory that comes once in a week to help learners with practical lessons. Learners are also involved in the Khula science project run by Rhodes University Education Department. This project holds classes every Wednesday. This notwithstanding, learners expressed concern about not having science equipment and chemicals and the impact this was having on their school work and future. Learners had this to say about the lack of resources at their school. Sethu in the focus group mentioned that the only time they did experiments was when they “*used the mobile lab from Rhodes University.*” He lamented that this was not regular because “*they (the mobile laboratory) have to be booked for them to come to our school*” (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011). Babu also acknowledged the lack of science equipment that he missed as a science student. He said, “*[The classes] are missing the resources, computers and here at school for us as science students to do our*

experiments... sometimes maybe we just need to ...see to understand.” (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

Yet another learner linked lack of resources to the conditions and financial constraints (and poverty) in the home by stating, “[A]nd then to add more on resources. Here at school we Grades 10-12, the government does not give us books to write; we buy the books ourselves. It is hard on our parents because our parents do not have money but then it their jobs for them to buy the books for us (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

The lack of computers was also raised by learners as an issue. They felt that they learn better if the teacher used a computer. Babu stated, “[J]ust to add to... with a computer we understand everything that we are taught when we are taught using a computer. I think that a lot of students prefer to be taught in computers....” (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

It was clear from learners’ responses that the lack of resources was of great concern to them. Whereas some learners above had concerns about not having resources, Bete had a different view on the issue, maintaining that they are far better off in terms of resources than schools in rural areas such as Transkei and Ciskei. Bete had this to say in the focus group interview, “I don’t have complaints about resources because when I watch on TV, there are schools that don’t even have classrooms. So I don’t see a point that I must fight for resources while government is trying to improve schools that are having more problems than ours.” When probed about whether or not he needed the resources as much as the neediest schools, he responded, “I have a right to have resources but you must not put pressure or demand. You must learn to give government time to fix those problems.”

In the survey data, only 5.6% of learners out of the 54 learners who answered the questionnaire indicated that there is a need to increase or improve resources in this school. However, during my observations, I noticed that there are about 50-100 sample textbooks (left by various publishing companies) in a classroom which also acted as storage room for unwanted materials and equipment.

The main sports at school are soccer, rugby, and netball though the latter happens sporadically. As discussed earlier on, Grahamstown East faces challenges of inadequate infrastructure and resources, especially recreation facilities such as sports fields. For sports,

the school uses a community sports field. Thirty-one per cent of learners indicated in the questionnaire that they did not take part in any sport, music, dance and drama or any clubs and only 22% indicated they participated in sports. Only 13% indicated that they participated in clubs (debating, reading, rotary, and poetry). For the duration of my fieldwork, I did not see any extra-mural activities taking place at the school.

As described above, lack of resources and poverty continue to be a challenge as parents struggle to pay the R80 annual school fee. Bete in a focus group interview summarised this struggle by saying “[*W*]hat I have going to say is that the most problem is money. Our parents are struggling. Maybe if I want something for school, I know they (referring to her mother) will wake up and try to look out for how she will find money for me to achieve that or find that I want.”

Learners at Nkosi Senior Secondary School

At the time of the fieldwork study in 2011, the school had 412 registered learners: 243 males and 169 females (School EMIS, 2011). Learners were divided into 15 different classes across the five grades¹⁸. The total number of learners in Grade 8 in 2011 was 33, and 63 in Grade 9. The low numbers of classes in Grade 8 and 9 were attributed to the fact that some feeder schools retain learners up to Grade 9. The highest number of learners registered in the school was 142 in Grade 10, with 117 in Grade 11 and 57 learners in Grade 12

According to the EMIS data (2011), there were 92 repeaters between Grades 10-12 in this school. This data indicates that in Grade 10, there were 26 male learners and 10 females repeating. In Grade 11, there were 35 male and 19 females learners repeating the grade (School EMIS, 2011) and in Grade 12 there were only two learners repeating matric.

The matric pass rate for the school was 81.82% in 2007 and dropped to 77% in 2008. In 2010, 40 learners sat for their matric and the school managed to get a 56.1% pass rate.

Academic Choice

¹⁸ These were categorised/ divided using alphabetical letters across the five grades: Grade 8 had two classes (A & B); Grade 9 had 2 classes (A & B); Grade 10 had five classes (A-E); Grade 11 classes had 4 classes (A-D) and two Grade 12 classes (A and B).

South Africa has different types of secondary schools that offer different subject areas. Some offer more commercial subjects, others science subjects, and others vocational subjects. Nkosi secondary school offers commercial as well as science subjects. Academic subjects offered include isiXhosa, English, Life Sciences, Physical Science, Geography, History, Tourism and Hospitality, Commercial studies, Economics, and Business studies.

Like every learner in South Africa in Grades 8 and 9, learners at Nkosi Secondary School have to do all nine subjects prescribed by the Department of Education. Subject selection is done in Grade 10 where learners are given a choice between commercial and science subjects. At this school, the subjects are categorised in the following way: Science, Commercial Studies, and Tourism & Hospitality. From Grades 10-12 English, IsiXhosa, and Life Orientation are compulsory for all learners. For learners who choose to specialise in science, Mathematics is compulsory.

Career guidance is offered only through Life Orientation. During the focus group interviews, learners mentioned that they receive career guidance in Life Orientation classes and during the Science Festival. Learners reported to taking their future into their own hands and finding ways to access information on opportunities for further studies after matric. For example, Vusi mentioned that they obtained career guidance during the Science Festival. There they were also shown how to access information on the internet.

Subject choice is an important ingredient in considering learners' access to education, as this will affect their access to higher education as well as the type of career they choose to follow. The six learners who participated in the focus group interview were happy with their subject choice. In the focus group interview (07/06/2011), Rosie said,

"I have always focused on being a doctor. When I was still in Grade 7 or 6, I always wanted to be a doctor and then in Grade 9 where it was the last time I do Natural science. I thought 'ok my Grade 9 teachers taught me well in Natural Science that made me I like it. Then thought I would go for Physics and Mathematics again (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

Bete, another learner in the focus group interview said it this way, *"I would say South Africa is in a crisis; we do not have scientist. So if we need something we get scientist from overseas to come here and help us and so in my mind; that is that. Let me change the situation that South Africa is facing now and become a scientist. I want to help my country (Focus group interview 07/06/2011).*

It would appear from the above that learners' subject choices are influenced and motivated by careers they would like to pursue. For example, Nikiwe wanted to be a pharmacist and she stated,

[T]hen when I passed Grade 9 and went to Grade 10, my teachers decided that I have to do Physics and Maths. I didn't choose these subjects on my own my teachers did in Uitenhage. So I did Physics and Maths and as time went by I realized that I can do pharmacist because it goes with physics and Maths (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

Bete in the same focus group interview wanted to be an engineer. He chose engineering because his grandfather advised him to do so. Initially he had wanted to be a lawyer but his grandfather thought it would take him too long to finish. He said,

I wanted to be a lawyer but my grandfather advised me that if I do something that will take a period of time to achieve and will cost a lot of money; I maybe even drop out from school and university because of money. Therefore, I must do something that is for a short period and so I chose to be a chemical engineer (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

He also mentioned that his other reason for wanting to be an engineer is “[b]ut the other thing is that there are few people in that chemical engineering” (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011). When I asked him if he knew how long both degrees take, he said he didn't know and was also not sure how much it would cost.

What the above indicates is that a lack of career guidance at the school did not stop learners from seeking information and using this information to make subject choices. To some extent, it also showed that learners lacked proper career guidance.

[a]nd also from the science festival (Sci-fest) we went there and we were shown on laptops yeah. We were given a website to (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

It was evident that there is minimal parental involvement in learners' subject choice or in their education in general. Two parents of the learners whom I tracked in this study had no idea what subjects their children took at school. S'bu's grandmother stated that she was aware that her grandson was taking science subjects, but did not understand sciences so she could not help. Andile's father also mentioned that he was aware that his sons were taking “those difficult subjects” (science subjects). Xoliswa's mother also noted that when her husband was still alive, he was the one who was involved in her daughter's education and helped her with homework. She said, “I wasn't involved in the subject choice but the father was before he passed on. The father was working at the education department. He was the one helping with school and the subjects.” She acknowledged not going to school meetings

because, as she says, *“I do not have time. I have never been called [to school] because Xoliswa is well behaved.”*

Teachers had a different view regarding learners’ subject choices and parental involvement in their children’s education. In a focus group interview, they mentioned that learners underperformed in their chosen subjects and that some of them choose these subjects based on their favourite teachers or having friends in that subject class, and not on ability. Ms. Khaya a Physical Science teacher at Nkosi Secondary School said, *“I always get involved when learners choose subjects from Grade 9 to 10. What these learners do, they choose teachers not subjects; so maybe if they do not like you as a teacher they won’t choose your subject. So they lose out on the subject (they need) because of the teacher (Focus interview, 07/06/2011).”*

The English teacher also felt that learners make their subject choice based on teachers. She said, *“[I]f they like the teacher, they will select the subject not because they are good at it!”* She made the point that many learners would not choose English if it were not compulsory.

Regarding parental involvement, teachers saw lack of parental involvement as one of the major problems that schools face. Almost all teachers, principals, deputy principals and School Governing Body (SBG) members acknowledged that there is a lack of parental involvement in school activities, offering parents’ illiteracy as the primary reason. The principal of Nkosi Secondary School stated,

[L]earners’ parents are illiterate and learners do not see their parents as role models in terms of education and the lack of skills knowledge on the part of parents. They (learners) do not get that encouragement or assistance in terms of school work (like if you go to white school middle class people or whites all that you find out that they do get more support in their education from their parents).

In addition to the above, school management and governance also shaped learners’ experience of school and access to education.

Language of Teaching and Learning

According to the school’s admission policy, Nkosi Secondary School is a dual medium school (Xhosa and English). Learners are required to have some skills in using both languages as subjects as well as mediums of instruction. There were mixed reviews regarding the use of English as a medium of instruction in this school. For example, whilst learners had a positive attitude towards using English as medium of instruction, teachers seemed to

disagree with this, pointing out that the language was a challenge for learners. During the interviews, for example, one English teacher had this to say:

Hmmm ha I think I will cite two challenges because am a language teacher the problem is the LOLT11 which is somehow I don't know I will call it, it is foreign to these learners and I do not know why yeah it is a barrier to their learning. I because I found out that these learners do not read and as a result their language is far too poor (Focus interview, 07/06/2011)

In addition, the deputy principal attributed learners' lack of confidence to language problems, noting that because English is their second language learners cannot express themselves well: “[A]lso the language is a problem because it's their second language. They struggle. Confidence plays a part coz they cannot express themselves” (Individual interview, 12/10/2011). However, in a focus group interview, another teacher shared a different view regarding English as a language of teaching and learning. He commented,

[W]ell they see English as somewhat a gateway to something that is going to open up avenues for them in life. And normally I would talk about how important English is and that they should actually learn to do good when it comes to English and I would also tell them about myself because when they look at me they see me as some one who has come from an English background well that is not the case (laughs). I mean my mother tongue is Xhosa I grew up speaking Xhosa although most of the time I would use English and I insist that they too use English in class. So I would say to them look, the only way to build up your English is to have a lot of vocabulary, try to read a lot and try to get an audience so that you share with another person what you have read (Focus interview, 07/06/2011)

It appears that participants had contrasting ideas about English as a language of teaching and learning. Whereas all learners in this school are Xhosa speakers, they prefer to be taught in English because they assume it offers better opportunities in terms of their future than their own language can offer. On the hand, teachers saw the language as a constraining factor for learners. However, one teacher also noted that language is a constraint not only for learners but also for teachers. She asserted,

yeah another thing is that if it is sometimes disturbing to notice that the language that even the teachers are using in teaching the learners because you will find out that some teachers are teaching in Xhosa whereas they expect learners to respond in English which is to me doesn't make sense. Therefore if at least if all the teachers could understand that all teachers yeah maybe somewhere somehow it would be solved. (Focus interview, 07/06/2011).

Here the data offers some interesting insights into how schools' structural /cultural conditions do shape learners experiences of access to education. On the one hand we have learners struggling to comprehend the language of teaching and learning and on the other hand teachers also contribute towards structural conditions that will either constrain or enable learners' access to education.

School Management and Governance

Nkosi Secondary School has various policies put in place to ensure its management and governance. These policies include the following: the school rules and regulations policy, the admissions policy, and the Teacher and Learner Code of Conduct Policy. Admission to the school is based on learners' proficiency in both English and Xhosa, proximity to the school, their academic potential and their disciplinary record.

During the period in which fieldwork was conducted for this study, the school had 23 staff members, including the principal and deputy principal. There were nine male and 14 female teachers. In terms of their teaching experiences, the teachers that participated in this study had 50 years of teaching experience between them. All teachers mentioned that teaching was not their first career choice but due to certain constraints, mainly related to finance, they had opted for teaching. Regarding their academic qualifications, all of them had trained in teachers' colleges where they obtained a teacher's diploma. Two of them are pursuing master's degrees one in environmental education and the other in English language teaching at Rhodes University. Another holds an honours degree with a speciality in Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The school did not have a functioning SGB in 2011. One of the remaining SGB members interviewed explained that parents are not motivated to be involved in school matters. He also explained that some of them are illiterate so they find it difficult to get involved. Parent meetings take place twice a year.

5.2.2.2 Rainbow Secondary School

Rainbow Secondary School was formerly under the auspices of the House of Representatives. It is located in Lavender Valley near a settlement known as VerGenoeg, an area that is predominantly for coloured people (Lemon, 2004). It was the first junior secondary school in the Albany Road community to be established by Rhodes University Education Department as a practice school to provide workplace experience for both lecturers and students. During that time, it catered exclusively for coloured learners and became a secondary school in 1963. The school boasts a status as one of the 'top' government schools in Grahamstown East in terms of academics and sports. For this reason, the school receives approximately 200 applicants for Grade 8 each year, mainly from surrounding areas. The main requirement for admission is a Grade 7 school report. The principal confirmed that the school was highly sought after:

We are known all over the country as one of the schools with good academic records and also sports because people know when you speak about Rainbow Secondary that school is good in rugby. We pride ourselves for being disciplined. You may differ with me but I know what I am talking about (Individual interview, 23/08/2011).

The school successfully contested its quintile four position and in April 2011 was declared a no-fee paying school. Although it is now a no-fee paying school, the principal and teachers mentioned that they struggle to maintain the school in terms of resources. For example, they mentioned that the school still struggles with buying school resources for teaching and learning. Ms Jewell attributed the problem of finances to the Department of Education's delays in releasing funds. She stated

Because we are not having funds now, sometimes we end up s with machines stopping to work, the telephone not working because we do not have the money to pay the bills. There is money coming from the government but most times this money comes late. We wait for that money whilst things like the school machines for photocopying are not working for a period. We have to improvise some means to buy maybe being a teacher you have to go buy papers for photocopying out of your pocket, for example (Focus group interview, 11/10/2011).

In the same focus group discussion, Mr. Adams also acknowledged that finance was their biggest problem affecting teaching and learning. He stated

We have the problem of finances. I would say and that on its own actually hinders the school. For instance, the machines that we are actually using for photocopying and printing... some of them have broken down. We don't have finances to repair them and now we do not have (laughs)... we are using a fax machine to make photocopies, which is not right. So I don't know" (Focus group interview, 11/10/2011).

In addition, a SGB member acknowledged that even though they are a no fee-paying school, they still struggle financially. He said,

The school now is no-fee school but we struggle financially and I know being a no-fee school sounds so exciting that we won't have problems but it seems to me that we have more problems. What happens with the Education Department is that they give you a certain portion of your allocation specifically designed for let's say learner support. Then you cannot use it to pay the educators. When the school was a fee-paying school, we could use those funds and pay additional educators but now we cannot because we are no fee paying. People have this misconception that education is free but it is not. Education is not free and that is why there are a lot of challenges at this school. We do not have the financial backing, and textbooks are a problem because they are expensive. The Education Department will not supply us with books because we are section 21 schools¹⁹ meaning that we have to manage our own funds and this school has to work with the budget of R400, 000 per year. If you look at our photocopy, it is R 30,000 per month, day to day running of the school and we have to pay our own electricity and water. We do not get enough from the Education Department. They got this thing that you must fundraise. It is good to raise funds but how do you raise funds in such a poor community.

19 The South African Schools Act identifies two kinds of schools: Section 20 and Section 21 schools. Section 21 schools have greater powers and responsibilities than Section 20 schools. **Section 20 schools** receive allocations of textbooks and stationery from government. They also have their lights and water accounts paid directly by government. When something is broken at the school, the Education Department must send someone from Public Works to do the repairs. **Section 21 Schools** are allocated finances by the department and are responsible for ordering stationery, textbooks, paying water and lights accounts and undertaking their own maintenance. They can also decide on what subjects the school can offer and what sports and other extramural activities the learners can take.

These are the challenges that are faced by the School Management Team (SMT) (individual interview, 01/09/2011).

The evidence presented above illustrates that though education is perceived to be ‘free’ in this case, there is an impact of indirect costs that affects the smooth running and managing of the school. This as participants stated above, has a negative impact on learner access to education.

Learners at Rainbow Secondary School

The school draws its learners from surrounding townships, mainly from its feeder schools. Approximately 70% of learners are black and 30% coloured. The school had an enrolment of 1051 learners; 775 enrolled as English Home Language and 276 as Afrikaans First Language speakers. While this may be the case in terms of enrolment, a deeper analysis revealed that 70% of those enrolled in the former category were actually Xhosa home language speakers²⁰.

As learners progress through to Grade 12, the number of learners in that grade decreases, which can only mean that many learners who start Grade 8 do not manage to complete their schooling. For example, the Grade 12 class had 111 learners whereas data shows there were a significantly larger number of learners in Grades 8, 9, 10 and 11 classes. In the 2011 matric results, Rainbow managed to get a 58% pass rate, with only eight learners obtaining a bachelor’s degree admission.

The majority of learners live in the area and walk to school. Like Nkosi Secondary School, 75% of learners at Rainbow Secondary School in the survey reported that they walk to school every day and 31.9% indicated that they walk a distance of one kilometre, while 24.5% indicated that they walk 3-4 kilometres every day to school.

School Management and Governance

Rainbow Secondary School has policies in place that govern the school and the people there. Currently the school has 33 teachers, 21 of which are coloured, eight isi-Xhosa speakers and three ‘white’. Of the 33 teachers, 21 are females and 12 are males. The school is short of 11 teachers. The principal, deputy principal, learners and SGB member mentioned this as a problem in the school. In an interview with the principal, he mentioned that the Department of Education was aware of the problem but had not done anything in response:

²⁰ See Appendix H for a breakdown of learner enrolment by grade, gender and language of teaching and learning

But I don't know if you are aware that as we are speaking now that I am short-staffed. I am having daily meetings with the DOE; trying to resolve this and they can't understand [that I] am still running a school which is functional although I'm short-staffed. I have my ways to maintain a certain degree of discipline; it is not where I want to go but am happy. There are those who will be outside when they get frustrated; sitting there not having a teacher but the school is continuing (Individual interview 23/08/2011).

Further, he continued,

But sometimes it is very difficult due to certain circumstances. There is not enough educators but we try to assist by all means and ask parents to volunteer and to get involved and be part of the school. Parents see that the school; they are part of school. Its not them and us here but we work in hand in the interest of the learners and all the stakeholders; because we are all stakeholders 12/10/2011).

The deputy principal also shared the same sentiments regarding the problem of teacher shortage. However, she stated that teacher absenteeism was an added problem mainly due to alcoholism. She said,

We do not have enough teachers so most of the classes are without teachers. The school is paying from the money got from fundraising to pay people. That has a negative impact on learning. Some teachers absent themselves from school without any reason and alcohol [is] the biggest challenge. Some of our teachers do not come to school and they do not let us know where they are. Those learners sit without teachers. So you see you are sending the child to the system. Teachers being on sick leave. Absenteeism of teachers is the biggest problem (Individual interview, 12/10/2011).

The SGB member also acknowledged that the school doesn't have enough teachers or the money to pay for the additional teachers needed. He said, "*[We do not have enough teachers so most of the classes are without teachers. That has a negative impact on learning. You know I have a matric class I have been helping out because we do not have a History teacher]*" (Individual Interview, 23/08/2011).

In September 2011, teachers and learners took to the streets in protest for more teachers. In other instances, classes were without the requisite teachers. For example, two learners in the focus group interview narrated that they had been without a History teacher for a year. Zama stated,

The next challenge is lack of teachers and like History is my favourite subject and we do not have a teacher. It is been on and off. The first term we didn't have a teacher and second term we got a teacher but he left and now we don't have a teacher. I always tell my classmates to study what we have done and paper we are given by Ms M. and because he comes to school drunk and comes to class and talks about sex and harasses other girls. Then our present teacher doesn't come to school; he hasn't come to school ever since he is been our teacher (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).

In the same focus group interview, Babalwa attributed teacher absenteeism to alcohol abuse. She commented, "*MS J and M are trying to help us when they are free. Well the way I see it, I think the first teacher that left came to school drunk. He was always drunk (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).*

The shortage of teachers was not the only problem that the school is dealing with. Sino made the point that sometimes teachers are in school but choose not to be present in class. She said, *some teachers would be at school and not come to class. And it depends on the teacher; if you like the teacher then you would look for that teacher” (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).*

Access to Resources/Amenities

In terms of resources, Rainbow Secondary School is better resourced than Nkosi Secondary School. The school has 32 classrooms available for teaching and learning. It has an administrative block, which consists of the principal’s office, deputy principal’s office, receptionist’s office, photocopy room, staff room, (with one computer and a photocopier), sickbay, and a kitchen. The reception area also serves as a waiting room for visitors. Teachers have their own classrooms, and learners move between classes to attend lessons. There is a computer room, a technology room, a woodwork room, and science laboratories. In addition, buildings are well constructed. The school was renovated in 2004, with ten new classrooms built. Recent developments include a computer laboratory with 20 computers connected to the internet through Rhodes University. The school has a two-storey building which houses a library started by one of the temporary teachers. It has not been operational since she left.

The school experienced challenges, as my observations revealed. For example, during the time of the study, the school did not have basic amenities such as paper and toner. This was something learners complained about, including a lack of the necessary science equipment and chemicals. In the focus group with learners Nelson said,

I think mainly since we are in the science kind of field because we take Life Science as a subject; resources tend to lack. We need to see this practically- how it is done coz it is quite a difficult subject to understand. They are kind of theoretical subjects now coz we don’t have resources. I think if we had resources and equipment, then there would be no challenges. Equipment and chemicals, and yes more books [because] these books we are reading are not up to our understanding [because] they don’t give detail (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).

Teachers interviewed acknowledged the challenges they faced regarding the inadequacy of resources. Mr Erickson stated, “[M]y challenge is material. I do not have enough material for Life Science especially Grade 11 and 12 because my syllabus changes each and every year. So you buy text books for this year and next year you must buy another text book and the school doesn’t have enough money” (Focus group interview, 11/10/2012). Ms Jewell had to this to say about how the lack of resources in the school affects her teaching and learning

practices. She commented, *“Another challenge is resources, like we don’t have paper. I have to buy my own paper. It is difficult to get learners to bring paper. We do not have overheads. We have to buy transparencies”* (Focus group interview, 11/10/2012). Mrs Brockmans also acknowledged that they had problems with machines such as photocopiers not working. She said, *“...we are struggling even this year we do not have a photocopier. We do not have a copier; we make copies from a fax machine. So it is quite a challenge”* (Focus group interview, 11/10/2012). Mr Erickson also commented that although they have photocopying machines, they are not working which makes their work difficult because they need to make copies for the learners. He said,

We do have some resources we have a photocopiers...but the funds are not enough because we cannot copy everything we need so as to help our learners. We have different books that we use but we cannot always make copies for them so that is a restriction on our side. If they have one text book that is it. You must always refer to that textbook. So I personally could do with a little a bit of resources. Equipment, chemicals to work with, and a safe environment. Projectors and laptops; that’s what we need (Focus group interview, 11/10/2012).

From my observations, class sizes ranged from 35 to 40 learners. Most classrooms had burglar-proof doors. One teacher complained of overcrowding in the classroom. She said, *“Ok, space is a problem. Classrooms are over-populated. Learners have to sit on top of each other. Sometimes they are far behind or the groups are not interested in what you are saying or they cannot hear what you are saying. It is difficult for me to go around to control* (Focus group interview, 11/10/2012).

Some classrooms I observed had no posters or any other form of learning support materials on the walls. The space was crammed with desks, leaving little space for the teacher to move. There was no teacher desk in some of the classrooms that I observed. Teachers had nowhere to store books. While many of the material resources were mainly state-funded, teachers seemed proactive in that they actively sought out opportunities to expand the school’s resources. They sourced funding and had computers donated to the school by external funders.

6009806210037

Academic Subjects and Extra-Mural Activities.

The school offers a variety of extra-mural activities to its learners, such as rugby, netball and soccer. Other activities include chess, and the Upstart club²¹. The school has running water, electricity, and a flushing toilet system for both male and female learners.

Like Nkosi Secondary School, Rainbow is located within a historically disadvantaged area plagued with high unemployment, poverty, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and lack of parental involvement in school activities. The area also lacks resources such as sports and library facilities within the school vicinity. Though Rainbow Secondary School could be viewed as slightly better resourced than Nkosi Secondary School, it was evident that the two experience some similar problems, including: insufficient funds; language and discipline problems related to absenteeism of both teachers and learners; crime within the school; inadequate facilities (sports facilities, functioning libraries, science laboratories) and overcrowded classrooms.

Language of Learning and Teaching

Although schools are given the opportunity to choose the language of learning and teaching (LOLT), most opt for English as medium of instruction. In this study, data reveals contradictory interesting ideas about language as a structural condition that either constrains or enables learners. About 70% of the 1051 learner population are isi-Xhosa first language speakers yet the dual LOLTs at the school are English and Afrikaans. The majority of the teaching staff speaks Afrikaans as a first language. Learners who participated in the study at school saw English as a language of opportunities rather than a constraint.

Approximately 3% of isi-Xhosa first language speakers learn through the medium of Afrikaans and take English as their first additional language. This implies that these learners are in fact being taught in their third language. It became known that many of this group of learners could not find placements in English medium classes at primary school; hence their

²¹ Upstart is a local youth development project based in Grahamstown aimed at young people in Grades 8 to 10. Based at Grocott's Mail, the project was founded in 2008 as a way of responding to the low levels of literacy, which was evident in school performance and the poor matric. pass rate. The project aims to expand the abilities of schoolchildren on a variety of levels - including promoting a culture of literacy; developing reading and writing abilities; encouraging inter-school communication in order to break down racial, cultural and language barriers and developing leadership skills amongst the Grahamstown youth by running weekly workshops at each school. <http://www.grocotts.co.za/blogs/upstart>

learning through the medium of Afrikaans. This, on investigation, also points to parent choice, as the principal indicated:

Approximately 12% of our school is Afrikaans First Language learners doing English as a primary language and Afrikaans as a first additional language. They are taught through the medium of English and they have also been in English medium classes since they started primary school. Again, it has been a question of parents' choice. Sadly, some of the most promising Afrikaans speakers are in the English medium classes and their performance is reasonably compromised. I am sure that they will do a lot better in Afrikaans medium classes.

Finally, we have about approximately 15% of our Afrikaans First Language speakers doing Afrikaans as a primary language and English as their first additional language. They are tutored in Afrikaans and the only group at school being taught in their mother tongue. Ironically, this group is made up of the "weaker" learners at the school, the better performers having opted for English medium or migrated to ex-model C schools. In the case of many of these children, their parents had no choice. Ours is the closest school to their homes and they cannot afford the school fees charged at ex-model-C schools. In fact, some of them are not paying school fees at all (Individual interview 23/08/2011)

Learners expressed their views about English as a medium of instruction. Zama stated, *"I like it because English is universal language. It is good as a medium of instruction so you have to learn it"* McVane said that English is an international language that offers many opportunities. He said, *"It (English) is an international language. There are many opportunities that you can get [because] has influence."*

However, it was evident during my observations that learners struggled to communicate in English. For instance, during my classroom observation in an English class, the teacher asked learners to make an oral presentation on a hero of their choice. Some learners could not speak nor read what they wrote on the piece of paper. Although learners saw the use of English in teaching and learning as way to greater opportunities, some acknowledged that they had difficulties understanding some of the concepts especially in life and physical sciences. Sino encapsulated this sentiment,

[Yoh] when a teacher tries teaching something and you know that that is not the way it is supposed to be and then it is a matter of education of the teacher. My Biology teacher, when she teaches pronunciation, it is like as if she doesn't teach something right. Then you are not going to understand that thing right. You cannot mix two languages in one. We do English as a home language then she is gonna come up with pronunciations that do not make sense (Focus group interview, 11/10/2012).

Whereas learners had a positive attitude towards learning in English, teachers felt that language was a challenge to most learners. They felt that as a medium of instruction, English constrained rather than enabled (as learners perceived it). The use of English as the language of communication as well as teaching and learning was found to be a contributing factor to poor performance. Ms. Jewell said,

[Y]eah, language is problem. We are also struggling a lot because I am teaching Mathematics and Natural Sciences as well as Arts and Culture. If I try to explain something or even if I give them some

work to do, let us say a research project, you see that they can't write even a page. A learner will only write a paragraph where asked them to write about two pages. They will just write about one or two paragraphs and in those two, you will find that they do not even make sense. Because there is a language problem, it is difficult to teach those learners. I think if Natural Science and Mathematics would be taught in Xhosa and if we have text books in Xhosa, it would become easier (Focus group interview, 11/10/2012).

Similarly, Mr Adams, a teacher at the same school, commented,

[L]anguage is a big problem because we are Xhosa and Afrikaans speaking teachers and they are Xhosa learners. Sometimes you find yourself code switching. Most of the time I just to help but that is not helping them because the papers that set at the end of year are not in Xhosa and during the exam time they struggle they can even call you to ask what does this mean? What do they want here? It is a problem to both of us teachers and to the learners. It means we must not code switch all the time. We need to code switch sometimes but must maintain the language that is usually used (Focus group interview, 11/10/2012).

The principal of Rainbow also acknowledged the problem of English and the negative impact it had on learners. He said,

[T]he other thing is the question of mother tongue. It is a big issue because our learners study in English. They do Shakespeare and all these difficult things you know the Shakespearean type of learning. Now I am sitting in one class and I look at these African children and coloureds. These children are not English speaking learners; they go out of class and speak Xhosa or Afrikaans. But, they must think in English. Language my dear, will be a problem for South Africa years to come (Individual interview 23/08/2011).

The deputy principal also acknowledged the problem of language as a challenge for learners. She stated, “Also, to many of our learners, the language is a problem because it is their second language. They struggle a lot and confidence plays a part because they cannot express themselves in English” (Individual interview, 12/10/2011).

It was evident from such concerns raised by teachers that English as language of instruction constrains learners' access to education. The teachers pointed out that English is a foreign language to learners. However, it was apparent from discussions with learners that they nevertheless felt positive about using English at school and saw it as an important catalyst in their future plans.

The next section of the chapter explores the cultural conditions that learners in both case study schools experience in relation to access to education.

5.3 Cultural Conditions shaping Learner Educational Experiences

Factors shaping learner access to education are not limited to structural aspects but also include cultural conditions. This section, therefore, focuses on some of the cultural factors

identified in the data. Because Archer (1995, 1996) is against the fallacy of conflation, I decided to separate the structural from cultural conditioning for analytical purposes and for easy examination of the way culture shapes learner access to education. In this section, I explore the discourses on education in order to identify cultural properties, which shape learners agency and their experience of access to education.

Evidence from the interview data in particular showed that cultural properties with generative powers and causal influences had conditioned learners' experience of education within the school and at home. These included attitudes towards education, motivation to learn and aspirations towards a better future.

5.3.1 Attitude towards Education

An interesting finding is that learners have a positive attachment towards education. It was clear in the interviews that they based their future on education; viewing it as a way out of poverty and a means of self-improvement.

Evidence from the data showed that learners not only viewed education as important, but also had a generally positive attitude towards it. For example, learners in both schools viewed education as a way to a better life for themselves and their families. Thabiso, a learner at Rainbow Secondary School, held a holistic view of education; outlining its benefits beyond the economic. She said, *“I think education gives you the path to find yourself because we all get education for different reasons. So, I think it builds you as person, not necessarily for success (only) but as either spiritual or emotional wellbeing (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).* Destiny, also a learner at Rainbow stated, *“[I]t is the basic foundation where you could help your family like out of poverty. It is where you find yourself one day being what you want to be. It is the key driving force where it has the power to take where u want to be (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).* Zama also viewed education as a pathway to a (better) future. She stated, *“I think it is important because without education you will go nowhere and with education there is a lot you can do” (Focus group interview 09/10/2011)*

Like learners at Rainbow Secondary School, those at Nkosi Secondary School placed much emphasis on education as a means to gaining careers. They viewed education as a way of overcoming poverty, acquiring better jobs, and a step towards further education. For instance, Rosie reported, *“[I]t is very important because it helps you get a better job if you study hard.*

It is one way to a good life (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011). Nikiwe said, "I think it's very important because it helps to get a good education or else you wouldn't be able to get a good job, and not just be a paper boy all your life" (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011). Sethu saw schooling as a step towards a future career to be attained by furthering her education. She reported, "It is important for a future career and a step to tertiary. I want to complete because I want to become something in life (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

In contrast to what learners said above about education and its positive rewards, teachers thought otherwise about learners' attitudes. Teachers in both schools viewed learners as lacking motivation being lazy, and not being serious. I asked the teachers to describe their learners' attitudes towards education or schooling. Mr. Erickson stated, "[T]here are one or two (learners) who are serious; others are just stringing along. Sometimes you notice that these learners just do not want to think... that is the problem. They do not want to think; they like to memorize, and when you talk, some don't care. Attitude, defensive attitude, and some are quiet" (Focus group interview, 11/10/2011). Mrs. Brockman attributed this to lack of motivation and commitment among learners. She said, "[B]ut here learners are not so committed to what they are doing and I don't understand even if it is because of their background, I don't know. They are not motivated; not in terms of education" (Focus group interview, 11/10/2011). Another teacher mentioned that learners were incompetent and did not hold a bigger picture of what education could do for them. She reported:

They are not competent and they do not see the bigger picture that education can deliver them from whatever, that it can be a solution to problems. So, they just come to school to while away time as I see. They do not see themselves learning beyond Grade 12. They are excited when they get to Grade 12. They just want to go there in the exam whatever to the fire station to write, which is different from what we are doing. Our Grade 12's write at the fire station so they just want to experience that (Focus group interview, 11/10/2011).

Ms. Anthea acknowledged that lack of motivation and support from parents also affected learners. She stated, "[A]ctually, another thing is that learners are not motivated and supported at home by parents (Focus group interview, 11/10/2011).

Similar views were shared by teachers at Nkosi Secondary School about learner attitude towards education. They expressed concern regarding learner self-esteem brought about by the lack of motivation. Ms. Khaya commented,

It is self-respect and self-esteem. Their self-esteem is very low [and] they are not self-motivated. They do not see the bigger picture. They do not see their future in front of them. So... that is what is holding them back. They do not see themselves as being professional as being this and that in the community (Focus interview, 07/06/2011).

Mr. Lonwabo reported that they did everything to provide learners with opportunities that the learners did not exploit. He said

[T]he opportunities are there. They are not grabbing opportunities with both hands. There is nothing we can do about it; but at the end of the day when the results are poor, it reflects badly on us... because what the community says is that teachers are not teaching. It is never a focus on the learners and how committed they were and what were they willing to sacrifice for their education... so really (Focus interview, 07/06/2011).

Although learners interviewed had proposed that they went to school to learn, Ms. Nandi, claimed, “[T]hey all claim to want to learn but their attitudes are different it seems. They just take this whole thing as ‘I do because it has to be done. It is the normal thing everyone has to do... go to school (Focus interview, 07/06/2011).

Ms. Khanyisa claimed that learners did not see themselves studying beyond matric. She said,

Sometimes they do not see themselves as part of Rhodes University or any University. Can you believe there are learners who have never set foot at Rhodes University yet it is just around the corner? At the same time you tell them about the opportunities; you tell them about what is expected of them... so they can go there, yet they do not do anything. You give them opportunities-like for instance, Mr. and Mrs. M are Life Orientation teachers. They came with application forms for Rhodes. You will find the application forms inside the books that learners submit to you (Focus interview, 07/06/2011).

Further, Ms. Khanyisa claimed that learners are lazy and did not want to take their education into their own hands. Learners in her view did not imagine they could access Rhodes University. She stated,

With these learners, they do not want to take responsibility because the reason why they look at it now and say yoh aaah I will never go there some of them. They know how badly how they are performing. They know of high standards and they know they will not be accepted with their current marks (Focus interview, 07/06/2011).

While the majority of learners interviewed agreed that school was important for their future, teachers tended to view learners as lazy and de-motivated. They said learners had low self-esteem, low capability and no ambition. Reasons offered by teachers for this had to do with limited or no parental involvement, the poor social and material backgrounds of learners, and their perceived lack of values. Mr. Lonwabo stated, “[B]ut here learners are not so well committed to what they are doing and I don’t understand. I am not sure if it is the background, I don’t know. But learners here are not motivated as much (Focus interview, 07/06/2011). Ms. Yatontolo associated laziness with subject choice by girls in particular. She stated, “[B]ut most of these girls are lazy. You find out that most of them go to the Consumer Studies and Tourism. You find many learners there but few learners in Life Science and Physics” (Focus interview, 07/06/2011). Ms. Khanyisa concurred with statements that girls

were 'lazy'. She said, "[Y]eah, they are lazy just like girls. They are lazy because they like copying from each other and they copy it as it is. If you give them homework they copy from each other..." (Focus interview, 07/06/2011).

The principal of Nkosi Secondary School acknowledged that learners understood the importance of education but lacked commitment in terms of learning. He said, "*Learners take education seriously but the effort they put in terms of making sure that they achieve something is not that powerful*" (Individual interview, 06/06/2011).

Both teachers and learners viewed education as important, with the former perceiving learners not to be committed. Learners on the other hand saw the efficacy of education as a means to a better life yet felt constrained by what schools and teachers were able to offer. Even though this was the case, learners were motivated to use education to better their individual and family circumstances.

5.4.2 Motivation to Learn and Become Somebody

Evidence from the focus group interviews suggest that learners were motivated to learn. They recognized and appreciated that they go to school every day to learn new things, acquire knowledge, and see their friends. Babalwa from Rainbow High School stated, "*I come to school because I want to learn something new, to work to know more about things and I want to be something in life.*" Thabiso acknowledged she liked school and commented, "*I come to school because I like school. I want to finish this grade now so that I can go to the next grade next and because I want some education.*" Zama commented that desire to be something in life and wanting to help family is what drove him to come to school. He said; "*I want to be something in life. I want to help people and help my family.*"

Similar sentiments were shared by learners at Nkosi Secondary School. Learners at this school added the expectation to make parents proud. Rosie stated, "*I have goals and I want to make my parents proud because I am the only girl in the family so I have to work hard on that*". Sethu saw education as a means to further broader life goals and said, "*I think I also want to be someone who reaches out to other people. For example, I have my religion so I want to share my religion with other people. It is the main goal that I want to do. Even though my career is not surrounded with the relationship with God, I just want to embrace it.*"

Teachers on the hand felt that learners lacked confidence and self-esteem, which held them back. Teachers blamed this on the lack of parental involvement and lack of role models for learners in their homes. For example, one teacher at Nkosi said, “[M]ost of the people in this place are domestic workers, they work in the supermarkets. They have those types of jobs. I am not trying to discriminate but it’s the situation. So they don’t have that zeal that ambitious spirit of going further than where they are” (Focus group interview, 01/06/2011). Ms. Jewell also attributed this to a lack of self esteem. She said, “It is self respect and self esteem their self esteem is very low, they are not self motivated they do not see their bigger picture. They do not see themselves as being professional as being this and that in the community (Focus group interview 11/10/2011). Mrs. Brockman also commented, “I think the attitude they want to learn I believe they want to learn but again they are lazy you know maybe they are not ambitious but I think that generally for example last year nobody chose Mathematics in Grade 10” (Focus group interview 11/10/2011). Another teacher pinned lack of self-esteem to lack of values and lack of sense of ambition among learners. She said, “It comes down to values. They seem to be lost somewhere or people don’t know. There seems to be no ambition and even an idea of what is out there for them” (Focus group interview 11/10/2011)

The principal of Rainbow Secondary School echoed the same sentiments regarding the lack of motivation from learners. However, he attributed this to the learners’ poor background. He said

[M]any of our children come from poor households. They say to themselves. ‘Yes, I want education’, but some of them may come to a point and say, ‘what is the purpose of education? Why do I want to be educated; just to be able to say at the end of the day this is my paper I have got to take or do I have to pursue a certain career? I have t to take or do I have to pursue certain ... If you say to me, ‘I want to be a doctor one immediately you speak rand and cents. Where will I get money to go and study?’ You hear there are bursaries but yes there are bursaries but not for everyone. There are strict requirements when it comes to those bursaries and not all children are A-Plus learners (Individual interview 23/08/2011).

Again, though learners seemed to be motivated to learn and succeed in their education, teachers seemed to think otherwise, indicating that learners lacked zeal due to lack of motivation, confidence and self-esteem. Education remains important to learners but teachers feel that learners somehow take it for granted.

5.4.3 Aspirations

It is evident that despite learners’ poor background, low motivation and lack of self-esteem their aspirations are very high. From the interview data, learners aspired to be doctors and

engineers. Mostly their aspirations were expressed in relation to choosing careers with high remuneration.

Out of 166 learners who answered the questionnaire, 101 aspired to be professionals. Table 5 below indicates that 62% of learners reported that they would like to be professionals (lawyers, engineers, doctors, pilots, and bankers), 9.2% aspired to be self-employed (own a business, be farmers), while 2.5% wanted to be either politicians or sports players.

Table 5: Learner Aspirations

Aspirations	Frequency	Percent
Politician	4	2.5%
A professional (lawyer, engineering, teacher, pilot)	101	62.0%
Skilled worker (driver, shop-keeper, tailor)	9	5.5%
Self- employed (farmer, business owner)	15	9.2%
Others, (sports player)	4	2.5%
Missing	30	18.4%
Total	163	100.0%

In the focus group interviews, learners who participated shared similar views regarding what they aspired to be. Their career choices favoured professions such as doctor, engineer and lawyer. For example, when I asked what they would like to be in future, Rosie said:

I want to be a doctor. I always wanted to be a veterinarian but as time went on, I noticed that I hate animals. I only love pets and to be a vet means there will be lions when someone comes to me with a lion I have to run. And then I decided... in any case. I looked around the situation around in my family, there is no doctor. All people are educated but all these people no one is called doctor. I chose to let me be the first doctor in this family. Let me be the one and I know all in my family; they all have their degrees almost. My father, when he talks about it, he says 'I am the first person in this family to have a degree'. Then he says, 'that would make me proud if my own daughter gets to be a doctor'. Yeah, then I chose but anyway I always wanted to be a doctor (Focus Group Interview 07/06/2011).

Nikiwe shared that she aspired to be a model as well as a pharmacist. She said;

[S]ince I was a little girl, I have always wanted to be a model because I was always thin you know. I had the body. I don't know about the looks, but I have the body. Then after Grade 9, when I passed Grade 9 and went to 10, my teachers decided that I have to do Physics and Maths. I didn't choose these subjects on my own; my teachers did which was when I was in Uitenhage. So, I did Physics and Maths. So I as the time went on, I realized that I can do pharmacy because it goes with Physics and Maths" (Focus Group Interview, 07/06/2011).

Mapule wanted to be a scientist involved in medical science because of her desire to create medicine for incurable diseases. She said,

I would love to be a scientist because I love exploration. I want to be this side of medicine because now there are diseases that are incurable. There are diseases that have no cure, so I would love to be the one

who says I found the cure for this disease. If I don't not succeed, I would like to be a social worker because there are children and even parents who are suffering. They have no one to turn to. So I would love if they need help, they would know there is this girl hat they can ask and I can help (Focus Group Interview 07/06/2011).

Learners at Rainbow secondary school shared similar views regarding what they aspired to be in future. Xabiso stated, “[I]n my dad’s family, there is no one who was successful. There is no one like high school graduate so if I am going to be what I want it will only be me who is successful in my dad’s family”(Focus Group Interview, 09/10/2011). Sino wants to be a forensic psychologist because she was inspired by medical detective shows on television. She said,

I want to be a forensic psychologist or medical detective, history channel. I wanted to be a forensic analyst but then my dad told me that there is not much money. I like criminals, I want to know why people commit crimes; the different reason and the whole adrenaline... the whole thing that lies behind (Focus Group Interview 09/10/2011).

Babalwa and Zama were also influenced by television shows. The former aspired to be a dermatologist inspired by television and the latter aspired to be a marine biologist. Zama said,

“[W]ell for me, I want to be a dermatologist. I was inspired by a television programme. There was a programme and this woman doing an operation. She was operating on a skin and all these operations. I was so interested in what they were doing that is why I decided I wanted to be that in future” (Focus Group Interview, 09/10/2011).

Babalwa said, “[W]hat attracted to marine water science is that under the water there is a different world. I would like to know more about that. The fish and living organisms under water don’t have the same lifestyle as on land; so that is my future plan” (Focus Group Interview, 09/10/2011).

The comments above suggest that learners were optimistic about their future regardless of their socio-economic background and teacher perspectives about their lack of motivation. Learners did not necessarily consider their current achievements as a reason not to believe they would achieve their dreams. It is worth noting the impact that technology especially television, had on learner aspirations.

CHAPTER 6 LEARNER AGENCY AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is a continuation of the previous chapter where I examined the structural and cultural conditions that shape learner access to education. This chapter provides evidence of agential work by learners. It incorporates the role of structural properties in enabling or constraining individual action, and the role of agency. The focal point in this chapter is to present data on how learners use their agency to respond to structural and cultural conditions in their social context to the extent of either transforming or reproducing these conditions. Thus, the main goal in this chapter is to provide evidence on how learners use their reflexive deliberations ('internal conversations') to seek out courses of action ('projects') in relation to their objective social circumstances ('contexts') (Archer, 2003).

Agency is defined as the capacity of individuals to act reflexively through a process of inner dialogue (Archer 2000), within the possibilities bounded by their social and material environments, to effect changes to their conditions or to reproduce them. As mentioned, emphasis in this chapter is on learners' personal powers of reflexivity through internal conversations, to deliberate about their circumstances with the aim of making changes to their social context. Put differently, this chapter presents evidence on the course of action learners end up taking to transform or reproduce existing structures that either constrain or enable their courses of action.

The findings presented in this chapter focus on how learner agency was shaped (enabled and/or constrained) by structures and cultural conditions, showing how these impact on individuals' will or motivation to make decisions. This reflexive ability of humans to plan for the future provides the opportunity or space for manoeuvre that makes agency possible. Learner responses to social contexts show how social structures delineate some things as possible and others as difficult. For instance, learners in this study were born into previously disadvantaged environment/situations created by the apartheid system that in many ways still challenge any personal projects in terms of educational opportunities and other aspirations. Such situations continue to shape circumstances in which learners live, hence creating restrictions on their power to act differently and beyond the expected. According to (Archer 1995:216) the shaping of the situations provides strategic guidance "by supplying good reasons for particular courses of action, in the form of the premiums and penalties associated

with following them or ignoring them. These are vested interests and opportunity costs” (Archer 1995: 216). Data underpinning this chapter consisted of questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus group interviews undertaken in the two schools.

The findings in the study data provide many examples where individuals acted in accordance with their structural and cultural contexts. Importantly, it includes examples of learner agency where individuals acted in complex ways, often contrary to the structural and cultural pressures in their environments.

The overall findings suggest that learners in this context use their reflexive power (internal conversations) to exert causal powers as evidenced by their abilities to perceive, negotiate, day-dream, fantasise, rehearse for future encounters, plan for future possibilities, and evaluate (and re-evaluate) situations they find themselves in, in order to create new projects for their lives. Thus, contrary to the general assumptions about learners from poor and rural environments that position them as simply responsive and thus compliant with existing structural and cultural conditions, findings in this study suggest that learners significantly can and do engage reflexively in deliberate action based on projects which arise out of their concerns (Archer 2003).

Evidence in the data indicates that learners were conditioned by structural emergent properties with generative powers and causal influences; however, their courses of action were not always determined by these structures or cultural factors.

6.2 Learner Agency, structural and cultural conditions, and access to education

Evidence from the data shows that poverty and living conditions imposed major constraints on learners’ experiences of education and their aspirations. Responses by learners indicate specific ways in which learners were willing to try to overcome such adversities in order to achieve their chosen courses of action. Of particular interest are the reflexive deliberations which, when articulated, illuminate specific concerns, attendant projects and the courses of action embarked upon to achieve specific (Archer, 2003).

6.2.1 Learner Agency and Changing Living Conditions

Learners outlined particular concerns and projects in relation to access (and retention) in school. This section outlines concerns and projects arising from current living circumstances.

Education, staying in school, and overcoming poverty

The findings indicate that learners were committed to getting out of poverty. For most of the learners who participated in this study, the most compelling project was to overcome poverty. Other important projects included learners wanting to be the first in the family to graduate from a tertiary institution, make their parents proud and to become somebody (or become something in life). These projects shaped their courses of action as they looked for pathways to change constraining structures often encountered at home, school, and community. Education was an important catalyst as learners proposed. The courses of action included remaining in school, working hard, and seeking financial assistance. Contrary to the general sentiments by teachers, learners showed an ‘interest’ in education arising out of real concerns, had well articulated ‘projects’, and remained in school despite the structural and cultural constraints experienced.

In this regard, McVane said, “[E]ducation is the basic foundation where you could help your family like out of poverty. It is where you find yourself one day being what you want to be. It is the key, the driving force where it has the power to take where you want to be (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011). Thabo made the point that his current situation drove him to work hard. He said, “[I]t is seeing the situation at home that is quite bad and as I wake up I want to improve that situation because we live in a place that is not good. Both my parents are unemployed; so I will really try to get a job to work and to successfully improve my family life. Well, my father got unemployed in 2009” (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

Babu shared similar sentiments in his desire to improve family living conditions and make a better future for his siblings. He said, “[M]y future also because I want to fix the living conditions that I am in now and improve them and also the future of my siblings. Well because, let’s take for example my mother, my mother has been there for me since the day I was born. So it will be my turn in the future to take care of her and support her with what she needs” (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

Like the above, learners such as Nikiwe viewed education as a key to overcoming poverty and being able to change the situation at home. She commented,

[T]he things that makes me wake up in the morning to come to school (crying) is I want to finish my high school. I really want to finish my school and go to university and study because I want to change everything that has happened to my family (crying). They are educated but they do not know what to do with their education. I really want change that. It scares me when I see like my brother has everything

he; is educated he got everything but he does nothing for those people who educated him and who paid for his education. So, I want to change that. It will improve the situation of the family and my future depends on that (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).

Learners were willing to overcome structural challenges which would seem to determine their responses and thwart their efforts to achieve their projects. Despite the constraining circumstances in which learners found themselves, they were willing to overcome challenges that might determine their course of action negatively. Babu also had the same views regarding his desire to change the situation in his home. He commented, “[Y]ou know what, education is the key. So, in our homes, we live in different situations. We have problems so when I wake up each and every day, I tell myself that I want to change this situation (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

In some ways, learners behaved as one might expect if a socially determinist view of agency is posited. As we have seen above, agency was enhanced by the effect poverty had over their lives. Learners emphasised and highlighted the importance of improving family situations through remaining in school and becoming educated. I posit that this awareness increased learners’ agency, as learners appeared to be personally reflexive in considering their social context. Apart from wanting to alleviate poverty, another important project was learners’ desire to make a success of themselves and life, and become ‘somebody’.

‘Making’ myself, becoming somebody, and supporting family

Another example of learners’ reflexivity was their desire to make a success of themselves, to become somebody. This allowed the exercise of agency in their mediation of structures through internal deliberation as they dreamt and planned, based upon their perceptions of the importance of access to education. Sethu shared his desire to succeed, stating, “*I can say the same. Ok just because I know that I don’t have a future without education, my whole future is based on education. So, this is where am going to start... this is the beginning of everything*” (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011). Sino recognized that passing her current grade was an important step towards achieving a better life and becoming somebody. She said, “[B]ecause I like school and I want to fulfill this grade now so that I can go to the next grade next.” (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).

Becoming somebody had both individual and collective benefits, as learners saw it. Rosie encapsulated this sentiment. The need to protect and look after her brother made her see

education as a vehicle through which she could realize her project and transform structures that constrained her opportunities. She had this to say:

[A]ctually my brother is from another mother and then we both share the same father. His mother doesn't care. She drinks a lot. When he was three years old, she abandoned him. Then only my father cares and my father works far away. Then I saw the situation that if my father would die, now who will be there to take care of my brother. Then now I know if I am educated, I will be the one to care take of him. I know that I have to be educated for his sake; I have to be there for him. Now, we both live with the same stepmother and yeah she loves us but we do not know what will happen if my father is dead. We don't know if she will love us then if my father is dead and now I know that I am supposed to be there for him in any case. Then without education, I can do nothing for him (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011)..

Similarly to Rosie, Mapule shared her sense of the need to help her family, especially her mother who was unemployed. She put it as follows:

I just want to help my mother and my brothers. I have a separate father from them. Their father died a long time ago. So when I am done studying and have a job, I will help my mother with things they need. My mother won't have the energy to do things she is doing now. So, I want to help her, be there for her to do what she did for me when I was still young. So I like taking them to school. I have to be there for them and going to school will help me do that (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

Other learners like Babalwa saw the driving force behind their courses of action as the need to improve family circumstances to show the value of education. She said

I want to go to school and succeed because my parents never went to school. So, I get inspired and I want to change the situation that my family had to a better one. I want to show them that it can be done, and that it doesn't matter where you come from or what colour you are (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).

Responding with sentiments similar to those of Babalwa, Babu commented on his parents' situation and his desire to change that for the better. He explained, *"My father passed away in 2005 and my mother is a pensioner. I have to work hard for my family. I cannot just sit because things have to change at home"* (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011). Zama also commented, *"[M]e to and because my mother forces me. I want to come to school but my body doesn't to. I want to be something in life. I want to help people and help my family"* (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).

Additionally, learners' agency was diminished by family constraints that impinged upon their lives. Learners are influenced by their family background which either enables or constrains their access to education. As mentioned earlier, learners' interviews illuminate that their utmost project is to improve the situation at home and overcome the effect of poverty. The study findings indicate that learners elaborated on why they needed to improve their family situation. In the focus group interview learners shared beliefs about their intentions. Busi also had a vision of working hard for her family. She commented, *"I have to work hard for my*

family. I cannot just sit because things have to change at home.” Sino also shared her views as illustrated here:

I can say that after all these years that I have been studying and going to school from nursery to high school there is no way I can drop out and not complete. It would be a waste of time. All the time spent and energy and I really hope and pray to pass Gr.12 in order to improve the situation I live in as I already said (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).

Similarly, Babu explained, “[M]y future also because I want to fix the living conditions that I am in now and improve them and also the future of my siblings.” (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

Learner responses suggest that they were likely to find ways in which they could overcome challenges to fulfil their projects. For instance, they were willing to study hard so they could change their living conditions. Andile asserted,

“I want to go to school and succeed because my parents never went to school. So I get inspired and I want to change the situation that my family had to a better one. I want to show them that it can be done and that it doesn’t matter where you come from or what colour you are” (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

Rosie said the following about making a success of life, “[A]nd then I decided, I looked around the situation in my family; there is no doctor. All people are educated but all these people have like no one is called doctor. I chose let me be the first doctor in this family. Let me be the one and I know all in my family they all have their degrees almost.” (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

Mapule also shared her desire to succeed. She commented,

I want to be this side of medicine because now there are diseases that are incurable. There are diseases that have no cure, so I would love to be the one who says I found the cure for this disease. Also if I will not succeed on that, I would like to be a social worker because there are children and even parents who are suffering. They have no one to turn to. So I would love if they need help, they would know there is this girl that they can I ask for help (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

Examples given above show how learners exert their agency in opposition to structural and cultural condition they encounter. In this case, there is evidence that learners’ exercise of agency, which stipulates their course of action, had led to them creating projects that are suitable for them.

Contrary to perceptions expressed by teachers and school management, learner concerns and projects shows how they not only acknowledged the importance of education in a quest for success, but also exercised their determination to remain in school to achieve goals. Learners were able to identify desirable projects through a developed process of internal dialogue. For

them, social structures were the condition and reason rather than the determinant of the course of action.

The above shows learners exercising considerable personal agency, despite current constraining circumstances. Learners were willing to act against difficult conditions. They have deeply held values about the possibility of education and its benefits. Even though the structural and cultural conditions in the community, family and school for the most part constrained their situation, learners did not allow this to determine their current and future projects. They recognised the extent to which current circumstances limited their chances, but did not allow this to determine and constrain their desires, dreams and projects for a better future. As Archer's (1995) social model proposes, agency is affected but not determined by the pressures exerted by social structures.

Learners' responses also clearly indicated that they made decisions not only about their own lives but also about the lives of family members. In the case of learners in the study, structural constraints created the space where learners as agents positioned themselves to make choices that not only suited them but also put them on a course of action that was different to what might be expected under such circumstances.

6.2.2 Learner Agency and Desire to Succeed

Human reflexivity comes into play when we exercise choices from a repertoire of possible decisions. Indeed, such agency is necessary, given the contradictions that are faced in daily life. Learners were forced to decide according to the social pressure in play. Such choices play out through socio-cultural interaction, and in turn lead to the transformation and/or reproduction of the cultural and social structures that together constitute social reality (Archer, 1995). Learners' desire to succeed in life was yet another project that, while related to the above, is worth distinguishing for analytic purposes. Their desire to succeed was driven by the need to become somebody in life and make their parents proud.

Whether or not learners go on to achieve their projects, their perceptions remain positive and their desire to succeed propels their courses of action. Some pointed out that they saw themselves as successful and that no challenge would constrain them in achieving their projects. Sethu said, "*I want to complete [school] because I want to become something in life. I feel like it's a force to finish, I have to do it.*" (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

Their desires were also driven by a need to make their parents or family proud. Girls in particular were keen and willing to seek out projects that would lead to parents being proud of their achievements. Sino said, *“I have goals and I want to make my parents proud because I am the only girl in the family so I have to work hard on that I would like to finish because I want to make my mother proud”* (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).

Mapule did not want to disappoint her father because he was her role model. She said

I can say it is my future and also my father's. He always encourages me that education is very important. He warned me that I won't inherit anything from him except if I go to school. My role model is my father; he is so ambitious with everything. If he wants to do something and there are people who are talking behind his back, he doesn't care. He just says 'I am going to do it and nothing and no one can stop me (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011).

Babu also felt that his mother was the most important person in his life. He wants to repay what his mother has done for him by getting educated so that he can support her. He said, *“[M]y role model is actually my mum because, you know what, my mother is a beautiful gift that I have been given by God. Each and every time me and my sisters want something she will struggle and make sure that we have a better life than hers. So I want to make her happy”* (Focus group interview, 07/06/2011). The encouragement from her mother drove Zama to work hard so that she would be independent like her sister. She commented

[M]y mother keeps on telling that she doesn't want me to depend on someone else. So by getting educated, I can become independent. I think they are right because my sister now lives on her own and she bought a car last year. Because I can see like every day she decided to go to work and that motivates me because she has this strength. She went to university when she was old. The fact that she could go to university at that age makes me want to work and make her happy (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011)

Further, Ntosh wanted to make her parents happy, which encouraged her to be determined to achieve what she wants. She said, *“[M]y parents are happy and I can become what I want to be so that I can have my own factory and money, to be someone in life. Both my parents are trying hard for me to get school all the time. They advise me if I have done wrong and if I have done something wrong they always keep an eye to me”* (Focus group interview, 09/10/2011).

The extracts in this section illustrate how the interactions of individuals played out in the course of such decision-making and indeed how relational properties and access to cultural resources affected these interactions. The responses of learners show where social forces

were modified by learners' individual agency. As Archer (2001) reminds us, the human capacity for reflexivity allows for the consideration of alternative courses of action, even those that go counter to social conditioning and the social and material interests of actors. The above also indicates high levels of self-confidence in learners' own ability to desist, which was apparent throughout the interview data. For the most part, responses suggest that this cohort of learners believed they were capable not only of moving away from current individual and family circumstances but also of transforming these circumstances through the projects and courses of action embarked on. These projects and actions would be made possible, in their view, through pursuing education and remaining in school.

6.2.3 Learner Agency in Shaping the Future

Learners explained in the focus group interviews why access to education was important in formulating their future. This I interpreted as the desire to shape their future. For example, McVane commented, “[I]t (education) is important for my future career and is a step to tertiary education. I want to go to university and achieve my dream” (Focus Group Interview’ 09/10/2011). Further, Mapule expressed her need to shape her future as the driving force urging her to continue through school. She stated,

I can say it is my future and also my father, he always encourages me by saying that education is very important. He warned me that I won't inherit anything from him except if I go to school". He (father) knows that I would have his money. And that money will end so when if I finish it all what, would I do then (Focus Group Interview' 09/10/2011).

Babu shared similar views and said,

"[M]y future because I want to fix the living conditions that I am in now and improve them and also the future of my siblings. Well, because let's take for example my mother, has been there for me since the day I was born. So, it will be my turn in the future to take care of her and support her with what she needs. She pays my school fees and she uses her pension so we can manage to pay school, stuff like that (Focus Group Interview, 07/06/2011).

For Sethu education is the key to his future. He said, “I can say the same. Ok just because I know that I don't have a future without education, my whole future is based on education... so this is I where am going to start. This (education) is the beginning of everything” (Focus Group Interview, 07/06/2011). Mapule also accorded education as the key to her future plans. She said, “I can say it is my future and also my father. He always encourages me and education is very important. He warned me that I won't inherit anything from him except if I go to school” (Focus Group Interview, 07/06/2011).

Ntosh saw her future as going to university and thus saw the need to remain in school since her future career depended on it. She commented, “[I]n order to get to another step like university, you cannot skip high school. It is important for my future career and [is a] step to tertiary. She further commented, “I think for us to become what we want to become in our lives, we have to be educated” (Focus Group Interview’ 09/10/2011).

Archer (2007: 93) offers a typology of reflexivity shaped by the interplay between the social situation and the personal projects by agents. The findings discussed in this chapter indicate that despite learners’ social context; they were willing to find ways to overcome them. Further, the data shows that learners used their agency in different ways to circumvent constraining structural and cultural contexts that ordinarily act as barriers to their projects. Learners had bigger projects that were of great concern to them, and which shaped how they perceived and responded. This became a significant recurrent finding in which individual learners’ comments illuminated the interventions by learners to advance projects they set in motion. While the results do not provide understanding on the outcomes of the project, they do offer insight that rejects a determinist view by and of this cohort of learners. While these learners lived in poverty, their ambitions were nonetheless not determined or constrained as a result.

Learners placed great importance on acquiring education as a key priority mediating their future endeavors. For many of those interviewed, the driver was to work hard and move beyond their current situation mainly affected by poverty. Learners do not put forward their current situations as a constraint; rather it was an enablement to achieving their dreams.

Thus an example of agential power exercised by learners is observed in the findings. Learners’ personal need to learn motivated them to come to school and to remain there. They had well articulated aspirations and projects, which they pursued. Despite the constrained circumstances, learners seemed willing to overcome structural challenges which would seem to determine their actions. To engage with these constraints and attempt to overcome them, however, would require commitment and determination from learners (Archer 2000: 297).

CHAPTER 7 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the interface between learner agency and the social structures and cultural conditions shaping access to education for a sampled group of Grade 11 learners in selected schools in the Grahamstown Districts. In doing so, the study drew on Margaret Archer's (2000, 2003, 2004, 2007) work on reflexivity as the mediating power between structure and agency. Archer (2004) suggests, "courses of (human) action are produced through the *reflexive deliberations* [italics added] of subjects who *subjectively* [italics added] determine their practical projects in relation to their *objective* [italics added] circumstances" (p. 17). In this study, key elements of Archer's analytical framework were outlined, with a more detailed engagement appearing in the two previous chapters. Archer distinguishes between the existence of structural and cultural properties and subjects' responses to them; hence the separation that has been made in the two preceding chapters.

Archer's concept of reflexivity provided a way of describing how learners made choices in relation to the structural and cultural conditions encountered. She points out that subjects continually assesses whether the price to be paid for devotion to a project is worth paying and whether the price which has been paid for subordinating and accommodating other concerns is still one with which they can live (Archer 2000: 19).

Further, Archer (2007: 13) argues, "[the] deliberative process involved ... is emotionally charged rather than being a simple exercise in instrumental rationality, because ... our emotions (as distinct from moods) are commentaries on our concerns." By employing notions of reflexivity as a distinct human power, this research treated learners as active rather than passive agents who are able to exercise some governance in their own lives and learning. It determined that learners are inventive beings with the capacity to evade the constraints imposed by structures.

The findings showed that despite constraining factors, learners were determined to find ways to overcome such structures. Learners were motivated by their projects, desires and life concerns. Put into Archer's language, learners have "properties and powers to monitor their own life, to mediate structural and cultural properties of society" (Archer 2000: 19). Interestingly, despite learners' poor backgrounds; they chose to stay in school with the aim of

fulfilling their desired project. Learners were prepared to make sacrifices to create projects that would suit their course of action.

Themes and issues drawn from the data are interrogated using the generic questions that were posited in the methodology chapter, and which form the basis for the research questions set out in the research design chapter.

1. What social structures and cultural conditions shape learner perspectives of access to education?
2. How do social structures and cultural conditions enable or constrain a sampled group of Grade 11 learners' agency in relation to access to education?
3. What are learner responses to the structural and cultural conditions they confront in relation to access to education?

The study challenges current discourses on access to education in South Africa especially as they relate to learners from previously disadvantaged schools. The study points to the ways in which, despite pre-existing structures, learners were willing to uphold their aspirations and intentions to achieve, continue through school, and imagine a different reality for themselves. The results show that despite structures such as poverty and its related effects constraining learners' educational experiences, learners were able to use their reflexive powers to create projects that included a way out of poverty. Key to this was a desire to remain and complete school, with tertiary education as an important ingredient working towards their success.

What follows is a discussion using the theoretical framework and literature review in Chapters 2 and 3 to reflect on the results of this study.

7.2 Value of Education

The evidence gathered from the research is consistent with thinking on the value of education in people's lives. The value of education to economic development is acknowledged widely in the literature and placed at the heart of social transformation and economic development. Since the establishment of EFA and MDGs, international policies, government's policies and strategies, and researchers have rallied and campaigned for universal education, proffering that universalising access to education would help to eradicate poverty, achieve gender

equality, and achieve social cohesion for all (Lewin, 2007, Tikly and Barrett, 2009; Tikly, 2011).

A critical outcome of this study were the findings concerning learner perspectives on the value of education, and the extent of learner belief in this value. It was apparent that learners were optimistic about the promise of education and saw it as a means to accomplish goals more generally; also, that they viewed the absence of education as constraining the achievement of their desired future.

Consistent in the results was learners' view that education was the key to a better future. They also recognised its perceived benefits. Education was the foundation from which they designed projects with the aim of transforming structures that would otherwise constrain them. Thus, the constraining structure became the enablement and condition for considering a different and better future. The value of education was a key priority mediating their behaviours towards gaining education. It was apparent that learners centred their career pathways and life opportunities on education.

The value learners placed on education corresponds to some of the ideals espoused in the 'Education for All' Global Monitoring Report (EFA GMR) of 2009, wherein education is put forward as the vehicle to empower people with the "knowledge and skills they need to increase income and expand opportunities for employment." The idea that access to education can potentially empower people and, as a result, lead to social and economic development framed many government policies and is a promise to which individuals subscribe.

Learners' conviction about the value of education emanates from the structural and cultural conditions that shape their experience of schooling. Archer (2000) argues that the influence of structural factors is mediated by the human power of reflexivity. Because agents can and do reflexively engage in projects which arise out of their concerns, society remains an open and contingent system (Archer 2003). As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, learners encountered pre-existence structures within schools, communities, and homes, which in turn shaped their attitudes, beliefs and values related to education. This may account for how learners came to view education as a pathway to transforming constraining factors.

Archer notes that when a project is constrained "... during its execution, agents can act strategically to discover ways round or to define a second best outcome ..." (2003: 6). Learners' reflexivity moved them to react to structural settings, in the context of this study. In articulating their interests and desires, they designed courses of actions to achieve common aims, in this case education. Furthermore, they were motivated by their bigger projects, their longer-term life concerns. As Archer puts it, learners had the "properties and powers to monitor their own life, to mediate structural and cultural properties of society" (Archer 2000: 19).

As already discussed, learners are reflexive beings who possess powers to circumvent constraints imposed by structures. For Archer, the nature of our human powers of reflexivity means that "the actual outcomes are matters of secondary determination, governed by our inner deliberations about such obstructions and facilitations, under our own descriptions. We often have the capacity to suspend both" (Archer 2007: 8). These powers enabled learners to reflect upon their social context and to act reflexively towards it. The study showed how learners were active shapers of their socio-cultural context, rather than passive recipients constrained and determined by it. It exemplifies Archer's assertion that, "... the activation of causal powers is contingent on agents who conceive of and pursue projects upon which they would impinge" (Archer 2003: 7). In this study, learners challenged structural settings by evading the constraints imposed by these structures.

7.3 Learner Aspirations to Change Lives

Learners' primary motivation to remain in school was to change their individual and family lives. Their own experiences contributed to their motivation and aspirations to work hard as a way to transform their social contexts. The results indicate ways in which learners constructed themselves in relation to the structural conditions, using their agency through internal deliberation to mediate and bracket challenging circumstances.

Archer explains that as human beings, we are in constant communication with ourselves about our surroundings. She notes, "we are aware of how our inner lives, monitor our responses to external situations in which we find ourselves and indeed modify some of the circumstances to which we willingly expose ourselves, be these natural, practical or social"(2000: 193). Archer (2004) suggests that "courses of (human) action are produced through the *reflexive deliberations* [italics added] of subjects who *subjectively* [italics added]

determine their practical projects in relation to their *objective* [italics added] circumstances” (p. 17).

Some of the learners had concerns which resulted in well-articulated individual projects that drove decisions and courses of action. These concerns were integrally linked to how they responded to what education was able to offer; hence the interplay with access. Such concerns lead to individuals setting up individual projects, which may or may not lead to the desired outcome. Of importance and consequence here is not necessarily the actual outcome; rather the desire and aspiration brought about in response to current structures. In response to navigation by urban youth, Fataar (2012: 7) states, “[I]t is not the clarity about where one ends up that motivates school aspirants, but the reaching out for a destination whose route remains unclear and tenuous. Investing in the ‘destination’, however tenuous, serves as a motivation for remaining en route and it is the remaining en route that matters.”

In this study, current circumstances (structural and cultural conditions) created desires for particular destinations that in turn motivated learners to aspire to change their lives. The frequent occurrence of ‘changing lives’ as a general objective held by learners is unsurprising, given that most learners mentioned that they come from poor families. Learners’ objective was changing their lives for the better.

Learners were optimistic, whatever the state of their lives. They possessed a degree of expectation related to overcoming structural factors and did not always experience these as constraining access to education. Archer’s (2000, 2003, 2007) argument is relevant here in that individual capacity to exercise agency that can challenge social contexts and routinised actions can be enhanced by particular forms of reflexivity. Reflexive deliberations, which are concerned with generating alternative future possibilities, are more likely to lead to the individuals exercising transformative agency. This is because, in undertaking reflexive deliberations, the individual wishes to distance themselves from their present context.

The findings demonstrate the process by which, ‘in the light of their objective circumstances’ (Archer 2003: 5), learners perceived and responded to constraints and by engaging with structures as well as making considered decisions about their lives, used constraints as enablements. The findings indicate that despite constraining circumstances that learners

encounter on a daily basis, they were eager to find ways to meet their objectives; illustrating how in this study, the power of structure to determine action is challenged.

Archer (2000: 265) asserts that agents “who know what they want, can articulate it to themselves and to others, and have organised in order to obtain it, can engage in concerted action to reshape or retain the structural and/or cultural features in question.” Learner responses illustrated agential power in how they articulated interests, dreams, and desires and by making decisions that suited their needs, showed their willingness to transform rather than reproduce structures.

It is not surprising that learners saw education as the conduit for transforming lives socially, politically, and economically. All the same, as would be expected, learners’ expectation from education is focused on the positive results it brings. Their views reflected ways in which they saw its transformative power to change their lives and that of loved ones. The educational opportunities sought by learners became the driving force for their need to stay in school. Their desire to change current situations meant that they looked to education as a pathway to achieve such aspiration. The capabilities approach focuses on people’s wellbeing and in this case, emphasises that people pursue what they value or have reason to value (see Chapter 2). In this case, learners considered a change to their own lives and the lives of their families as something valuable and worth pursuing; because it linked to what they want and hope to be.

From a capabilities perspective, education becomes a functioning, which can be defined as achieved outcomes: the things that a person is able to be or to do. Functionings would include learners for example, being able to read, being able to take part in university life, or being able to pass an examination and be awarded a qualification (Wilson-Strydom, 2006: 409). Wilson-Strydom (2006) explains that an achievement or outcome is not a functioning if it is not something that is valued by the person concerned.

The findings indicate that learner aspirations to change lives might be viewed as a functioning in and for itself because it was something they valued and were concerned about. They desired to succeed academically in order to effect changes from the current life - one marred by poverty, unemployment, and financial burden. Through reflexive deliberation learners were able to desire a different reality, establish concerns, identify projects and sets

courses of action in motion, primary of which was to remain in school, make informed subject choices and work hard.

The study has compelling evidence to suggest that learners tend to view schooling experiences and decisions about staying in school through the lens of improving their lives. This finding was not surprising as aspirations to change lives might be expected to be linked to the role education plays in people's lives.

7.4 Aspirations and Careers

The research findings show that learners' career aspirations were identified as ambitious. This notwithstanding, agency was evident in the choice of careers they wanted to follow after high school. As discussed in Chapter 6, agency is instrumental in learners' ability to make decisions. Learners proposed multiple life projects, with having a career as an important project that would lead to them attaining projects they valued highly and felt willing to pursue. Learners indicated an interest in pursuing further education because they believed this would assist them in obtaining a good job that would in turn lead them out of poverty; thus creating better opportunities for them and their families.

The evidence illustrates that through their reflexive ability, learners were able to prioritise what they considered valuable and important (Archer 2000: 313). Concerning career aspirations, the drive and motivation reported among learners urged them to be reflexive and have conversation with themselves about their lives and future. Evidence from data shows that learners were ambitious; they aspired to pursue a wide range of careers which included law, medicine, pharmacy, and engineering. The perceptions attached to these career choices varied from it being a good job, to being able to earn a good salary, becoming successful, being independent, and helping their families. For some learners, the choice of careers linked to attitude and performance in science subjects.

Archer (2003: 15) argues that "the reflexive deliberations of human agents" are the mediating mechanism between structure and agency. Archer's notion of the internal conversation strongly emphasises personal powers to on the part of the agential or individual subject, in relation to their aims and actions (Archer 2003, cited in Clegg 2009). Therefore, as noted above, learner agency, which is their ability to realise the goals they value and have reason to value, also played a key role in shaping their career aspirations.

It is also no surprise that learners' positive attitude indicated a constant assessment and reassessment of themselves and their social context in an effort to model and remodel the social structural and cultural conditions. For, choices were motivated by an interest arising from seeing other people around them, while for others it was primarily through reflexive deliberation. Although the data indicated that career guidance in the two case study schools was of limited quality, learners did not see this as a hindrance on their agency; instead, this constraint animated the importance of their concerns for them (Archer 2000).

It is worth noting the influence of media, specifically television programmes and 'celebrity culture', on learners' career choices. Some romanticised certain careers due to the television portrayal of these (for example, dermatologist and forensic scientist). Even so, the positive outcome here was that learners exercised agency in the proposed choice of career, imagining what was possible and having the desire based on external influences such as television.

Learner concerns were determined through the mediation between their own subjectivity and the objective constraints and enablements that confronted them in their social context. As Archer (2000: 318) proposes, "the 'interior dialogue' is not just a window upon the world, rather it is what determines our being- in-the-world, though not in the times and circumstance of our choosing." It is through engaging in this internal dialogue that learners made decisions about what they wanted to be in relation to their self-knowledge about the world (which is always fallible) and what matters most to them (Archer, 2003). It entailed individual learner dreams, aspirations, motivations and desires for a different life path.

7.5 Aspiration to Change Home Situations

As mentioned, structural emergent properties shape "our situations such that they have the capacity to operate as constraints and enablements" (Archer 2003: 132). Skinner and Davids (2006: 3) point out that poverty has a great impact on children since they are deprived of proper clothes, adequate nutrition, access to services and proper housing. Thus, learner context contributes to conditions that constrain them. The findings from this study highlight a range of constraining factors identified by learners, teachers, and some parents. Yet despite the enduring nature of these conditions, learners were determined and willing to navigate them and temporarily bracket their impact in order to achieve their dreams. Findings indicate

that the desire to change the current situation, often marred by poverty and associated problems, actually drove learners to pursue what they valued as important.

Importantly, learners derived their ambitions from their poor living conditions. In other words, rather than merely constraining them, their living conditions became the enablement for the desire to better their lives and that of their families. Their aspirations and ambitions demonstrated that learners were thinking ahead, had plans for the future and valued education because of the promise it held. This finding is contrary to perspectives by teachers that learners were 'directionless', unmotivated, lazy and uninterested in education.

The results also demonstrate that learners from low socio-economic backgrounds have aspirations and high expectations for their lives. Despite the adverse social and economic living conditions, and the sometimes poor commitment by teachers in school detailed in Chapter 5, learners had dreams and desires that made them hold on to the promise of education and kept them in school.

Research suggests that living in a low-income family affects children and young people's aspirations and their planning for the future (Ridge, 2002; Roker, 1998; Sutton et al., 2007; Taylor and Fraser, 2003; Willow, 2002). In the United Kingdom, young people living in low-income families assumed early and significant family responsibilities, leading some to plan their futures (e.g. the possibility of leaving home) around the impact of their decisions on their family (e.g. on looking after siblings, caring for one or both parents, or on being present to try to prevent family violence and disagreements) (Roker, 1998).

There was widespread belief in 'bettering oneself', and other family members, amongst the cohort of learners in this study. Success in life, even where the social structures were constraining, was still seen as primarily being down to the individual. Since gaining education was an important part of this belief, it was evident that some form of 'hard work' was prevalent and perceived to be necessary in learner outlooks. Beliefs in the need to work hard, to better oneself, and change the home situations via education, were all evident in learner responses. The majority saw this as involving individual rather than collective effort even though many acknowledged support by family members.

Archer (2007) explains that individuals engage in a process of consulting their on going projects to assess whether they can achieve them. In turn, this may result in the individual adapting or adjusting their projects or abandoning them altogether if they decide that they are no longer viable or desirable. If courses of action prove to be successful, individuals may gain confidence and may prioritise more ambitious projects, whereas if courses of action lead to undesired consequences individuals may begin to lose motivation and commitment. Learners in this study used succession from one grade to the next as a way to assess the extent to which their projects were achievable.

7.6 Learner Agency and Family Pride

Archer (2003: foreword) states, “[I]ndividuals reflect upon their social situations in the light of their personal concerns – asking themselves “what should I do?” and answering their own question (Archer 2003: foreword). A significant finding that emerged was the way in which learners mediated the powers of constraint and enablement generated by the structural context they encountered. Learner voices reveal all of the complexities of human deliberations and decision making (Archer 2003: 6), ‘using their own descriptions’ (Archer 2007: 12) that result in intentions and expectations.

Evidence from the data reveals that learners placed importance on making families proud. This was an important priority, mediating behaviour in response to structural and cultural conditions and shaping courses of action. In this particular study, learners indicated that their parents generally had low levels of educational attainment. Rather than seeing this as a constraint upon themselves, learners viewed education as a way of providing them with the opportunity to achieve what their parents could not and in so doing, supersede parent expectations.

Reflexivity can lead to a ‘strong’ form of agency, whereby the potential for transformative action is heightened, or it can lead to a ‘weak’ form of agency, whereby individuals will accept their structural surroundings as they are and resort to the iterational orientation of agency to reproduce them (Archer, 2003). Particular forms of reflexivity located within an individual’s internal conversations can enable such agency, while other forms of reflexivity may lead to an iterational, or reproductive, orientation of agency. The former was evident in this study.

This research set out to present a discussion of the findings of the study informed by Archer's social realist theory. What is noteworthy are the findings which show the choices, decisions, and strategies learners make as they engage with social structures and cultural conditions within their social environment.

As noted above, the concept of agency, which is the ability of a person to realise the goals they value and have reason to value, has been the key focus in this study (Wilson-Strydom, 2011). Sen (1999:19) defines an agent as follows: "someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well." Within the focus on agency, this study is also aligned with the capability approach because it recognises learners' capability to navigate through disadvantaged circumstances in order to pursue what they consider valuable.

The South African government foregrounds the right of every individual to a basic education with the aim of improving the economy and alleviating poverty. However, such thinking undermines the agency of individuals, and the social environment in which they live. Unless we explore and understand learners' voices and how these are shaped by the disadvantageous circumstance encountered in society, we will be committing a fallacy of conflation. The study showed that social structures do not determine the course of action learners as active agents take to navigate social contexts. Similarly, while conditions can profoundly influence the attitudes and behaviour of learners these conditions do not deter their aspirations and motivation. The study further shows how learners are able to find ways to evade, endorse, repudiate or contravene enablements and constraints on their projects (Archer 2003:131).

Through incorporating Margaret Archer's concept of 'internal conversation', an examination of learners' agency in relation to socio-cultural objectivity was possible. This helped the study to move beyond empirical generalisations of what learners are capable of doing and allowed for a greater exploration of how agency is exercised by individuals in their interactions with their social contexts. For the desired and designed projects to be achieved, agency is necessary; and to achieve this agency, individuals need to reflexively deliberate that future change is possible. Agency, it is argued here, is multi-contextual; therefore, through reflecting on their context individuals are capable of exercising agency through different temporal orientations. Essentially, I argue that this theoretical framework can appropriately

be used to examine agency which emerges through an individual's reflexive mediation of their social contexts.

Building upon this, the next chapter outlines the conclusion and recommendations of the research thesis.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

This study set out to investigate the interface between learner agency and the social structures and cultural conditions shaping access to education for a sampled group of Grade 11 learners in selected schools in the Grahamstown District. It aimed to gain insight into how learners exercise agency in responding to challenging circumstances they encounter in their quest for access to education. The study was informed by Archer's social realist theory, particularly the agency/structure relationship that is pertinent in the light of the constraining and enabling factors reported on and the ways that learners engage with them.

This last chapter summarises the study, draws conclusions from the study, analyses the strengths and limitations of the study and makes recommendations for future research. The chapter also reflects on the theoretical and methodological approaches used in this study and examines whether or not they served to answer the research question.

The following question guided the study: "What is the interface between learner agency and the social structures and cultural conditions shaping access to education for a sampled group of Grade 11 learners in selected schools in the Grahamstown District?"

8.2 Summary of the Study

This study was motivated by the quality of education in South Africa and more specifically in the Eastern Cape, where the research is situated, with a focus on learners rather than schools. The study addressed the influence of social structural and cultural conditions on learner access to education and how learners responded to such conditions. It did so by proposing a social realist approach based on Archer's work (Archer, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2007) to analyse the actual experiences of learners and how they engaged with social and cultural conditions in social settings. This theory offered a more nuanced approach than is generally used for understanding the relationship between structure and agency; and it showed that learners exhibited a more complex and nuanced way of engaging with social structures than might be expected.

The premise of the research was that learners are active rather than passive agents who can exercise some governance in their own lives and learning. It challenges the simplistic

explanations of the interplay between contextual realities and learners, showing that the former shapes but does not always play a determining role. By foregrounding learner agency, this study illustrates how a different reading of the problem yields a different view of learners and their engagement with potentially constraining environments. This study also illustrates how the insertion of agency as an important variable to understanding access to education, shifts the discourse away from a deficit model of learners to one that views them as powerful agents who not only desire to transform structures, but are also willing to act to change circumstances for the better. Such an orientation differs from dominant perspectives in the literature of learners in the kinds of schools reflected in this study.

The claims that this research puts forward are tentative due to the research scope and sample size.

8.3 Summary of Findings

While acknowledging that they are not conclusive, I summarise key findings.

First, the role of education in developing the social, political and economic well being of people is widely accepted. The findings point to learners who were committed to education because they believed its extrinsic and intrinsic value and its power to change [their] lives. A particularly striking feature in the results was that learners were neither determined nor limited by the host of constraining circumstances they faced. Rather, they had clear goals, dreams, hopes, and aspirations they intended to achieve through education. The results show that learners are active agents with powers to make decisions and choices that would change structural conditions they are born into or they encounter.

There was wide agreement amongst learners on the role education could play in changing their lives for the better. This perception affirms one of the strong points advocated by the human capital and rights-based theorists who view education as a transformational tool in society ([see Chapter 2](#)). The study shows that in general, learners had a positive attitude towards education, which in turn drives their beliefs and attitudes towards access to education. Importantly, attitudes and beliefs guided decisions and choices they made with regard to their education. It demonstrated learners as social actors who apply reflexivity with the aim of circumventing challenging circumstances in their environment.

Second, this study found that learners had high career aspirations, with access to education perceived to be the key mediating factor. The study shows that learners had a keen interest in careers in science. Access to education is one of a range of social citizenship rights that are intended to afford members of a society an opportunity to share in a basic level of social, economic, and cultural well-being and to mitigate societal inequalities (see also Cohen, 2010; Torres, 1998 as cited in Hill, Baxen, Craig and Namakula, 2012). In accordance with the capability approach, education is viewed as a capability in itself that offers opportunities to learners to choose and to achieve what they value.

In this study, learners as agents were influenced but not determined by structural situations they were born into. Through agential powers, learners made decisions and choices with the aim of transforming their lives.

The study shows that learners as active rather than passive agents do exercise some governance in their own lives by choosing careers that they feel would help them realise their potential. This result highlights limitations in human capital and rights-based approaches.

the capability approach posits that capabilities (opportunity freedoms) and functionings (achievements) are influenced by individual circumstances, relationships with others and social conditions and contexts, which create spaces for opportunities to be realised. Learners in this study saw education or school as the capability that would create the discursive space in which they could dream, think and make choices and decisions regarding their careers. For learners, careers guaranteed financial security and independence. Learners were reflexive about the power of structural contexts within which they were located, recognising aspects that might stand in the way of them fulfilling their dreams and aspirations. This notwithstanding, learners' recognised education as an important tool to enhance their functionings.

Findings suggest that the internal conversations undertaken by learners exerted causal powers evidenced by their abilities to perceive, negotiate, and resist socio-cultural contexts. Contrary to the presumption that learners are passive agents who simply comply with what they encounter in the social context, results show a cohort of active participants who acknowledged the constraining causal powers of structures, yet developed projects arising out of concerns. This is an aspect that is underplayed in literature around learners arising from

such contexts. “Evaluating capabilities, rather than resources or outcomes, shifts the axis of analysis to establishing and evaluating the conditions that enable individuals to take decisions based on what they have reason to value” (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007:3), as was the case in this study.

As indicated in chapter 2, there are numerous studies on the value of education (see chapters 1 and 2). The findings of these highlight the fact that challenges to achieving education mainly derive from socio-cultural status and economic conditions. These contribute to learners’ negative experience in school, which in turn affects their educational participation and retention. The findings in this study contradicted the foregoing because it was found that learners valued education, but tended to be disillusioned by the issues pertaining to the nature of the education and its mode of delivery, their negative experiences in schools, as well as the high opportunity cost of education in relation to their livelihood.

8.4 Recommendations

This study situated learner agency and access to education in South Africa. Implied in the main research question is the objective of developing recommendations, which are meant to improve an understanding of learner agency through adopting a social realist approach in response to social context challenges. Drawing on the research findings, some suggestions can be made to inform future research studies on learner agency and the impact of the structural and cultural context on learners. The following is an outline of these recommendations.

The major problem identified in this research is poverty, which has great influence on learners, their schools, their community and their homes. Learners and parents should be provided with information on available financial assistance for their children. School management teams (SMTs) need to engage effectively in efficient financial management strategies and techniques such as fundraising, so as to be in a better position to buy resources for their schools, whilst waiting for the Department to provide both infrastructure and PRs for their respective schools.

Another issue that emerged from the research is the lack of parental involvement. There is a need to engage community members in a number of activities that promote social action for the protection of their schools. For this to occur, a positive climate, characterised by humane

and caring social relationships between community members and the school is necessary. Parents are often eager to support their children's learning but do not always know how to help or why their involvement is important; therefore this aspect must be strengthened. It is important to create an environment which provides all parents and community members with an opportunity to learn about good communication, mediation and conflict-reducing techniques, tolerance, and civic responsibility; and it is also desirable to create a place where the effects of these values can be seen. There should be educational programmes that sensitise parents and the community about their roles in schools. These programmes should be conducted by representative from Department of Education.

English as a language of instruction was also mentioned as a structural constraint on learners. I would recommend that learners be encouraged to use the language in their everyday activities. The schools should also form reading and writing clubs in which learners are encouraged to participate.

The study found that none of the schools provided learners with comprehensive career guidance and what this entails, and especially failed to foreground its significance to learners and their future. There is therefore a need for developing faculty capacity in sustainable development more comprehensively. Career guidance / awareness should be provided and promoted through sessions for all learners from Grade 9 when learners select their subjects. The schools should seek support from Rhodes University career guidance centre to provide support or offer career guidance to learners.

In relation to infrastructure in these schools, the researcher recommends that schools (through the Department of Education) should construct laboratories, libraries and resource centres which provide training for both learners and teachers in successful teaching and learning processes. In addition, all teaching staff and learners should be provided with appropriate and adequate teaching and learning materials, as well as classroom space that is sufficient for quality teaching and learning to occur without any hindrances.

The schools, parents and communities should work together to establish a school feeding scheme. Parents can support the scheme by providing a hot cooked midday meal and seasonal vegetables for the learners. This process can help to reduce absenteeism, alleviate short-term hunger and improve student achievement.

8.5 Suggestions for Further Research

Emerging from the study is the need for further research in the following areas:

- Exploring the broad understanding of poverty as a barrier to access. While poverty is certainly a major issue, I feel that poverty as a barrier to schooling has been approached simplistically in the relevant education literature.
- An examination of the classroom setting and the influence this has on learners' agency in terms of their learning.
- An investigation of gender as a structure that shapes learners' access to education, especially in township schools.
-
- A study that will look in depth at the influence of school policies on learners' agency and access to education. (Note that this study has not paid particular attention to school policies but has relied for relevant information mainly on interview data with teachers who took part in the study.)
- A study of learner resilience, particularly with regard to learners in township schools, and how resilience influences their access to education

8.6 Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is that it was conducted in only two schools. The other main limitation is that the study did not investigate how learners exercise their agency within classrooms. Further research is thus recommended to determine how learners through reflexivity navigate through classroom structures to gain access to education in particular epistemological access.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Ahmad, A. (2003).** Inequality in the Access to Education and Poverty in Bangladesh. Retrieved April 15, 2010, from http://ideas.repec.org/p/hhs/lunewp/2003_005.html
- Ahmed, R., & Sayed, Y. (2009).** Promoting access and enhancing education opportunities? The case of no fees schools' in South Africa. *Compare: Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 39 (2), 203-218.
- Aikman, S., & Unterhalter, E. (2005).** *Beyond Access: Transforming Policy and Practice for Gender Equality in Education*. Oxford: Oxfam GB.
- Akyeampong, K., Djangmah, J., Seidu, A., Oduro, A. & Hunt, F.(2007).** Access to Basic Education in Ghana: The Evidence and the Issues. CREATE Country Analytic Review. Retrieved September 28, 2010, from http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/Ghana_CAR.pdf
- Alebiosu, O. A. (2005).** An investigation of integrated development planning as a mechanism for poverty alleviation in Grahamstown in the Makana Municipality, Eastern Cape, South Africa. Unpublished M.Sc. thesis, Rhodes University, South Africa.
- Alexander, R. (2008).** Education For All: The Quality Imperative and the Problem of Pedagogy. (Research Monograph). Retrieved September 28, 2010, from http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/PTA20.pdf
- AL-Samarrai, S., & Zaman, H. (2007).** Abolishing school fees in Malawi: the impact on education access and equity. *Education Economics*, 15 (3), 359-375.
- Ampiah, J., G., & Adu-Yeboah, C. (2011).** Understanding the Social and Economic Lives of Never-enrolled Children: A Case Study of Communities in Northern and Southern Ghana. Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity Retrieved September 28, 2010, from http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/ImpAccess_RPC/PTA66.pdf
- Ankomah, Y., Koomson, J., Bosu, R., & Oduro, K.T.G. (2005).** Implementing quality education in low income countries. Retrieved September 28, 2010, from http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/impquality_rpc/ghanarev.pdf
- Archer, M. S. (1995).** *Realist social theory: the morphogenetic approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M. S. (1996).** *Culture and agency: the place of culture in social theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M. S. (2003).** *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Archer, M., Bhaskar, R., Collier, A., Lawson, T. & Norrie, A. (Eds) (1998).** *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*. London: Routledge
- Archer, M., Sharp, R., Stones, R. & Woodiwiss, T. (1999).** Critical realism and research methodology. *Journal of Critical Realism*. 2 (1).
- Archer, M. S. (2007).** *Making our Way through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Arksey, H., & Knight, P., (1999).** *Interviewing for social scientists: an introductory resource with examples*. London: Sage.
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Razavieh, A., & Sorensen, C. (2006).** *Introduction to research in education* (7th Ed.). Belmont: Thompson Wadsworth.
- Aslam, M., Bari, F., & Kingdon, G (2008).** Returns to Schooling, Ability and Cognitive Skills in Pakistan. Retrieved April 15, 2010, from <http://recoup.educ.cam.ac.uk/publications/WP20-MAs.pdf>
- Baatjes, I., & Mathe, K. (2004).** Adult basic education and social change in South Africa, 1994 to 2003. In L. Chisholm, ed. *Changing class: Education and social change in post apartheid South Africa* (1st edition). Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Barrett, A. M., Chawla-Duggan, R., Lowe, J., Nikel, J., & Ukpo, E. (2006).** The concept of quality in education: A review of the ‘international’ literature on the concept of quality in education. EdQual RPC.
- Barrett, M. A. (2011).** A Millennium Learning Goal for education post-2015: a question of outcomes or processes. *Comparative Education*, 47 (1), 119–133.
- Becker, G. S. (1964).** *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*. New York: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Bell, J. (1999).** *Doing Your Research Project: A guide for first-time researchers in education and social science*, (3rd Ed.) Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Bernard, R.H. & Ryan, G. W. (2010).** *Analyzing Qualitative Data: Systematic Approaches*. California: Sage.
- Bhorat, H., & Oosthuizen, M. (1997).** Determinants of Grade 12 pass rates in the Post-Apartheid South Africa schooling system. *Journal of African Economies*, 18 (4), 634-666.
- Birdsall, N., Levine, R., and Ibrahim, A. (2005).** Towards Universal Primary Education: Investment, incentives, institutions. *European Journal of education*, 40 (3), 337-349.
- Bloch, G. (2009a).** *The toxic mix: what is wrong with South African schools and how to fix it*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.

- Bloch, G. (2009b).** The Education Roadmap in South Africa, CREATE South Africa Policy Brief No. 2, Retrieved August 15, 2010, from http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/South_Africa_Policy_Brief_2.pdf
- Bloom, D., Canning, D., & Chan, K. (2005).** Higher Education and Economic Development in Africa. Harvard University: Retrieved August 15, 2010, from http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099079956815/HigherEd_Econ_Growth_Africa.pdf
- Boissiere, M. (2004a).** Rationale for Public Investments in Primary Education in Developing Countries. Retrieved August 15, 2010, from http://www.worldbank.org/oed/education/documents/education_primary_determinants_paper.pdf.
- Boissiere, M. (2004b).** Determinants of Primary Education Outcomes in Developing Countries. Retrieved August 15, 2010, from http://www.worldbank.org/oed/education/documents/education_primary_determinants_paper.pdf.
- Bush, T. (2002).** ‘Authenticity – reliability, validity and triangulation’ In M. Coleman and A. Briggs (eds.) (2002). *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management* (pp. 59-72). London: Paul Chapman.
- Cameron, J. (2012).** Capabilities and the global challenges of girls’ school enrolment and women’s literacy, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 42 (3), 297-306.
- Carnoy, M., & Chisholm, L. (2008).** Towards understanding student academic performance in South Africa: a pilot study of grade 6 mathematics lessons in Gauteng province
- Carrigan, M. (2012).** Internal Conversation, becoming Who We Are: Theorizing Personal Morphogenesis. Retrieved December 10, 2012, from <http://markcarrigan.net/internal-conversation>
- Carter, B., & New, C. (Eds.) (2004).** *Making realism work: Realist social theory and empirical research*. London: Routledge.
- Chigisheva, O. (2010).** International education for the millennium: toward access, equity and quality. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 40 (1), 130-132.
- Chimombo, J. (2005).** Issues in Basic Education in Developing Countries: An Exploration of Policy Options for Improved Delivery. *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*, 8 (1), 129-152.

- Chimombo, J. (2009).** Changing patterns of access to basic education in Malawi: A story or mixed bag? *Comparative Education*, 45 (2), 297-312.
- Chisholm, L. (2004).** *Changing class education and social change in post-apartheid South Africa*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council.
- Christie, P. (2007).** *Schools that work: report of the ministerial committee*, Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Christie, P. (2008).** *Changing schools in South Africa: opening the doors of learning*. Johannesburg: Heinemann.
- Clegg, S. (2009).** 'Forms of knowing and academic development practice,' *Studies in Higher Education*, 34 (4), 403-416
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000).** *Research methods in education* (Ed.). London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007).** *Research methods in education* (6th Ed.). London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transition and Equity (CREATE). (2009).** The education roadmap in South Africa: Policy brief number 9. CREATE, Centre for International Development, Sussex School of Education: Sussex University. Retrieved November 5, 2011, from http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/Policy_Brief_9.pdf
- Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) (2011).** At school but not learning: a day in the life of South African learners creates South Africa policy brief. Retrieved November 5, 2011, from http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/South_Africa_Policy_Brief_5.pdf
- Coovadia, H., Jewkes, R., Barron, P., Sanders, D., & McIntyre, D. (2009).** The health and health system of South Africa: historical roots of current public health challenges. *The Lancet*, 374 (9692), 817-834.
- Corbetta, P. (2003).** *Social Research; Theory, Methods and Techniques*, London, Sage Publications.
- Cramm, J. M., Møller, V., & Nieboer, A. P. (2011).** Individual- and Neighbourhood-Level Indicators of Subjective Well-Being in a Small and Poor Eastern Cape Township: The Effect of Health, Social Capital, Marital Status, and Income. *Soc Indic Res*, 105(3), 581–593.
- Cramm, J. M., Møller, V., Nieboer, A. P. (2010).** Improving subjective well-being of the poor in the Eastern Cape. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 15, (7)1012-1019.

- Cramm, J. M., & Nieboer, A., P. (2011).** The influence of social capital and socio-economic conditions on self-rated health among residents of an economically and health-deprived South African township. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 10(51), 1-7
- Crouch, L.; & Vinjevold, P. (2006).** South Africa: access before quality, and what to do now? *Revista de currículum y formación del profesorado*, 10 (1), 1-16.
- Cruickshank, J. (2004).** A tale of two ontologies: an immanent critique of critical realism. *The Sociological Review*, 52 (4), 567-585.
- Cruickshank, J. (2007).** *Critical Realism: The Difference it Makes*, London: Routledge Falmer.
- Czerniewicz, L., Williams, K., & Brown, C. (2009).** 'Students make a plan: understanding student agency in constraining conditions', *ALT-J*, 17 (2), 75-88.
- Danermark, B., Ekström, M., Jakobsen, L., & Karlsson, J., C. (2002).** *Explaining society: critical realism in the social sciences*. London: Routledge.
- Davenport, A. N., Gambiza, J., & Shackleton, M., C. (2011).** Use and users of municipal commonage around three small towns in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 92 (6), 1449-1460.
- De Wet, C., & Wolhuter, C. (2009).** A transitiological study of some South African educational issues. *South African Journal of Education*, 29 (3), 359-376.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln Y., S. (2000).** *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). California: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln Y., S. (2005).** *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. California: Sage.
- Dieltiens, V. (2006).** Patterns of exclusion. *Quarterly review of education and training in South Africa*, 13 (2), 17-26
- Dieltiens, V., & Meny-Gibert, S. (2010).** School drop-out: Poverty and patterns of exclusion. Retrieved November 28, 2011, from http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/School%20drop%20out%20Poverty%20and%20patterns%20of%20exclusion.pdf
- Dundar, H., & Haworth, J. (1993).** Improving women's access to higher education: a review of World Bank project experience. Retrieved November 28, 2011, from

http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2000/07/19/000009265_3961004075720/Rendered/PDF/multi_page.pdf

- Fataar, A. (1997).** Access to Schooling in a Post-Apartheid South Africa: Linking Concepts *International Review of Education*, 43 (4), 331-348.
- Fataar, A. (2006).** Educational renovation in a South African “township on the move”: A social-spatial analysis. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 27 (6), 599-612.
- Fataar, A. (2012).** Students’ bodily carvings in school spaces of the post-apartheid city. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*.
- Fleisch, B., & Shindler, J. (2007).** School participation from ‘Birth-to-Twenty’: Patterns of schooling in an urban child cohort study in South Africa. Retrieved April 15 2010, from http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/fleisch.pdf
- Fleisch, B., & Shindler, J. (2009).** Gender repetition: School access, transition and equity in the ‘birth to twenty’ cohort panel study in urban South Africa. *Comparative Education*, 45(2), 265-279.
- Fleisch, B., Shindler, J., & Perry, H. (2010).** Who is out of school? Evidence from the Community Survey 2007, South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32 (3), 529-536
- Freebody, P. (2003).** *Qualitative research in education: interaction and practice*. London: Sage.
- Galabawa, J., & Alphonse, N. (2005).** Research on the quest for education quality indicators: issues, discourse and methodology. Retrieved April 15, 2010, from <http://www.edqual.org/publications/workingpaper/edqualwp2.pdf>
- Gibbon, T. (2010).** Weighing success and diversity in the balance at Stellenbosch University. In Letseka, M., Cossier, M., Breier, M., & Visser, M. (2010). *Student retention and graduate destination: higher education and labour market access and success*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council.
- Gibbs, G. R. (2002).** *Analysing Qualitative Data*. London: Sage.
- Gilham, W. (2000).** *Case Study Research in education*. London: Routledge.
- Gilmour, D., & Soudien, C. (2009).** Learning and equitable access in the Western Cape, *South Africa Comparative Education*, 45 (2), 281-295.
- Godden, J. (2005).** Falling at the hurdle: the case of the Eastern Cape Department of Education. *Quarterly Review*, 12 (3), 7-9.

- Gray, D. E. (2009).** *Doing research in the real world*. Los Angeles: SAGE
- Greany, K. (2008).** 'Rhetoric versus reality: exploring the rights-based approach to girls' education in rural Niger', *Compare: Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 38 (5), 555- 568.
- Hadley, S. (2010).** Seasonality and Access to Education: the case of primary education in sub-Saharan Africa. Retrieved July 10, 2011, from http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/PTA31.pdf
- Hanushek, A. E., & Wößmann, L. (2007).** Education Quality and Economic Growth. Retrieved July 15, 2012, from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/16060045/Education-Quality-and-Economic-Growth->
- Hargreaves, J., & Boler, T. (2006).** 'Girl Power – The Impact of Girls' Education on HIV and Sexual Behaviour'. Retrieved July 17, 2011, from www.actionaid.org.uk/doc_lib/girl_power_2006.pdf.
- Hart, C., S. (2012).** The capability approach and education, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 42 (3), 275-282.
- Harttgen, Klasen and Misselhorn, (2008).** Education for All? Measuring Pro-Poor Educational Outcomes in Developing Countries. Retrieved August 15, 2011, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001780/178014e.pdf>
- Harttgen, K., Klasen, S., & Misselhorn, M. (2010).** Pro-Poor Progress in Education in Developing Countries? *Review of Economics and Institutions*, 1 (1), 1-48
- Hays, S. (1994).** Structure and Agency and the Sticky Problem of Culture, *Sociological Theory*, 12 (1), 57-72.
- Hendricks, M. (2006).** Access to educational resources: Illustrative examples from rural schools in the Eastern Cape. Retrieved July 10th 2011, from http://eprints.ru.ac.za/1399/1/Hendricks_school_book_article.pdf
- Hill, L., D., Baxen, J., Craig, T., A, Namakula, H. (2012).** Citizenship, Social Justice, and Evolving Conceptions of Access to Education in South Africa: Implications for Research. *Review of Research in Education*, 36, 239-260.
- Hoel, C. (2010).** Morphogenetic approaches to religion: understanding religion from the perspective of Margaret Archer. Unpublished thesis: University of Agder.
- Hossain, A., & Zeitlyn, B. (2010).** Poverty and Equity: Access to Education in Bangladesh. Retrieved September 28, 2011, from <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/39337/1/PTA51.pdf>

- Hove, J. (2007).** Barriers to girls' secondary education participation in rural Bangladesh. Unpublished Master's Thesis: British Columbia.
- Huggins, A., & Randell, K., S. (2007).** Gender Equality in Education in Rwanda: What is happening to our Girls? Retrieved December 10, 2011, from <http://www.ifuw.org/rwanda/media/art-education.pdf>
- Jansen, J. D. (2009).** Reflections on meaningful access to education. In Pendlebury, S., Lake, L., & Smith, C. (2009). *South African Child Gauge 2008/2009*. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.
- Jansen, J., & Sayed, Y. (2001).** *Implementing educational policies: the South Africa experience*. Lansdowne: University of Cape Town Press.
- Kelly, A. (2012).** Sen and the art of educational maintenance: evidencing a capability, as opposed to an effectiveness, approach to schooling, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 42 (3), 283-296.
- Kelly, K., and Ntlabati, P. (2007).** Marketisation of municipal services, daily life and HIV in South Africa: A Grahamstown case study. Retrieved December 20, 2012, from <http://www.cadre.org.za/files/msp.pdf>
- Kgobe, P. (2006).** Mapping the zones of educational exclusion. *Quarterly review of education and training in South Africa*, 13 (2), 8-16.
- King, J. (2010).** Going Straight On Probation: Desistance Transitions and the Impact of Probation. Unpublished Doctoral thesis: University of Birmingham
- Krueger, A., & Casey, M., A., (2000).** *Focus groups: a practical guide for applied research (3rd Ed.)*. California: Sage Publication
- Lake, L., & Pendlebury, S. (2009).** Children's right to basic education. In Pendlebury, S., Lake, L., & Smith, C. (2009). *South African Child Gauge 2008/2009*. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.
- Lanzi, D. (2006).** Capabilities, human capital and education. *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 36 (3) 424-435.
- Lee, W.O. (2002).** Equity and Access to Education: Themes, Tensions, and Policies. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Lemon, A. (2004).** Redressing School Inequalities in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30 (2), 269-290.
- Letseka, M., Breier, M., & Visser, M. (2010).** Poverty, race and student achievement in seven higher education institutions. In Letseka, M., Cosser, M., Breier, M., & Visser,

- M. (2010). *Student retention and graduate destination: higher education and labour market access and success*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council.
- Lewin, K. M. (2007).** Improving Access, Equity and Transitions in Education: Creating a Research Agenda. Retrieved December 10, 2011, from http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/PTA1.pdf
- Lewin, K. M., & Akyeampong, K. (2009).** Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Researching access, transitions and equity. *Comparative Education*, 45 (2), 143-150.
- Lewin, K. M. (2008).** Reconceptualising Access to Education, CREATE Policy Brief No 1, Retrieved January 15, 2010, from http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/Policy_Brief_Zones.pdf
- Lewin, K. M. (2009).** Access to education in sub-Saharan Africa: patterns, problems and possibilities, *Comparative Education*, 45 (2), 151-174.
- Lewin, K. M. (2001).** Financing Secondary Education in Developing Countries; Strategies for sustainable growth. Retrieved February 20, 2012, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001248/124844e.pdf>
- Lewin, K.M., & Little, A.W., (2011).** Access to education revisited: Equity, drop out and transitions to secondary school in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31 (4), 333-337.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985).** *Naturalistic inquiry*. California: Sage.
- Litchman, M. (2010).** *Qualitative Research in Education: A Users Guide*. California: Sage publications.
- Little, A.W. (2008).** EFA Politics, Policies and Progress. Retrieved February 22, 2012, from http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/PTA13.pdf
- Livingstone, D.W. (1997).** The limits of human capital theory: expanding knowledge, Informal learning and underemployment. London: Sage.
- Maguire, C., Donovan, C., Mishook, J., Gaillande, G., & Garcia, I. (2012).** Choosing a life one has reason to value: the role of the arts in fostering capability development in four small urban high schools. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 42, (3) 367-390.
- Malcolm, C. (2001).** Implementing of Outcomes Based education in Australia and South African: a comparative study, in Jansen, J.D and Sayed, Y (Eds.). *Implementing Education policies: a South African experience*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

- Martin, L. (2006).** Rebutting the suggestion that Anthony Giddens's Structuration Theory offers a useful framework for sociological nursing research: a critique based upon Margaret Archer's Realist Social Theory. *Nursing Philosophy*, 7 (3), 175-180.
- Maxwell, A. J. (2004).** Causal Explanation, Qualitative Research, and Scientific Inquiry in Education. *Educational Researcher*, 33 (2), 3-11.
- Maxwell, A. J. (2004).** Using qualitative methods for causal explanation. *Field Methods*, 16 (3), 243–264.
- Maxwell, A. J. (2005).** *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd Ed.). California: Sage Publications.
- Mboya, M. M., & Mwamwenda, T. S. (1994).** Quality education in black schools of South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 14 (4), 385-39.
- McAnulla, S. (2000).** The Structure-Agency Debate and its Historiographical Utility. University of Birmingham 'The Utility of Structure, Agency and Discourse as Analytical Concepts'.
- McCowan, T. (2011).** Human rights, capabilities and the normative basis of 'Education for All'. *Theory and Research in Education*, 9 (3), 283–298
- McGrath, S., & Akoojee, S. (2007).** Education and skills for development in South Africa: Reflections on the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa, *International Journal of Educational Development*, 27 (4), 421-434.
- Merriam, S. B. (2002).** *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and analysis*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Michaelowa, K. (2000).** Returns to Education in Low Income Countries: Evidence for Africa. Retrieved January 15, 2010, from <http://www1.aucegypt.edu/src/skillsdevelopment/pdfs/returns%20to%20education%20low%20income%20countries.pdf>
- Mitra, S. (2006).** The capability approach and disability. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 16, 236–247.
- Moleke, P. (2005).** *Inequalities in higher education and the structure of the labour market*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Møller, V. (2001).** Living in Rhini: A Social Indicators report. Research Report Series No. 14. Retrieved November 15, 2011, from <http://eprints.ru.ac.za/1022/1/Living-in-Rhini.pdf>
- Møller, V. (2008).** Living in Rhini: A 2007 Update on the 1999 Social Indicators report. Research Report Series No. 14. Retrieved November 15, 2011, from

<http://eprints.ru.ac.za/1022/1/Living-in-Rhini.pdf>

- Motala, E., & Pampallis, J. (Eds). (2001).** *Education and equity: the impact of state policies on South African education.* Johannesburg: Heinemann.
- Motala, S. (2001).** Quality and indicators of quality in South African education: a critical appraisal. *International Journal of education development*, 21 (1), 61-78
- Motala, S. (2007 June, 16).** Remembering June 16 – 30 years later. *The Daily Star*.
- Motala, S., Dieltiens, V. & Sayed, Y. (2009).** Physical Access to Schooling in South Africa: Mapping Drop-out, Repetition and Age Grade Progression in Two Districts, *Comparative Education*, 45(2), 251-263.
- Motala, S., Dieltiens, V., Carrim., Kgobe, P., Moyo., & Rembe, S. (2007).** Educational Access in South Africa: Country Analytic Review. Retrieved January 15, 2010, from http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/South_Africa_CAR.pdf
- Motloug, H. (2009).** Township and rural schools continue to be marginalised as inequality in education system persists commented Graeme Bloch, Education Specialist, Development of South Africa at the knowledge week. Retrieved December 15, 2010, from www.dbsa.org/Mediaroom/Documents/DBSA%20education%20article.doc
- Munn, P., & Drever, E. (2004).** *Using Questionnaires in small-scale research: a beginners' guide.* Edinburgh: SCRE Publication.
- Musson, G. (1998).** 'Life Histories' in G. Symon and C. Cassell (eds.) (1998). *Qualitative Methods and Analysis in Organizational Research: A practical guide*, London: Sage Publications.
- Mutch, A. (2007).** "Mutual Constitution": A Critical Realist Commentary. In Stahl, B, C. (2007). *Issues and Trends in Technology and Human Interaction.* United States of America: IRM Press.
- Negash, Z., Olusola, O., & Colucci, E. (2010).** Access, participation and retention in Africa: evidence from a survey on tertiary institutions.
- Nelson Mandela Foundation. (2005).** *Emerging voices: Report on education in South African rural communities.* Cape Town: HSRC.
- Neuman, L. (1997).** *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (3rd Ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Nikel, J., & Lowe, J. (2010).** Talking of fabric: a multi-dimensional model of quality in education. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 40 (5), 589-605.

- Nyabanyaba, T. (2009).** Factors influencing access and retention in secondary schooling for orphaned and vulnerable children and young people: Case studies from high HIV and AIDS prevalence contexts in Lesotho. Retrieved November, 15, 2011, from http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/ESRC_Dfid/60431_LesothoCaseStudy.pdf
- Olaniyan. D., A. & Okemakinde. T. (2008).** Human Capital Theory: Implications for Educational Development. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 24 (2), 157-162.
- Onceya, T. (2011, July 28).** Rain destroys shacks. *Grocott's mail*
- Onsomu, N. E., Muthaka, I. D., Ngware, W. M., & Manda, K. D. (2006).** Determinants and Strategies for Expanding Access to Secondary Education in Kenya. *Equal Opportunities International*, 25 (7), 523-543.
- Otto, H-U., & Ziegler, H. (2006).** Capabilities and Education. *Social Work & Society*, 4 (2) 269- 287.
- Ozturk, I. (2001).** The role of education in economic development: a theoretical perspective. *Journal of Rural Development and Administration*, 33 (1) 39-47.
- Packer, S. (2008).** Making education work for all: A report from the International Working Group on Education. New York: UNESCO.
- Packer, S. (2009).** Making education work for all: A report from the International Working Group on Education. Retrieved December 15, 2010, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001853/185398e.pdf>
- Patton, C. (2006).** A generation betrayed; why so many teachers are bad and why they won't get better in a hurry. *Financial Mail*, 187 (11), 24-28.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002).** *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. California: Sage Publication.
- Pendlebury, S. (2009).** Meaningful access to basic education. In Pendlebury, S., Lake, L., & Smith, C. (2009). *South African Child Gauge 2008/2009*. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.
- Pillay, P. (1994).** Quality of schooling, certification and earnings in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 14 (1), 13-22.
- Porath, B. S. (2012).** Defending rights in (special) education. *Educational theory*, 62 (1) 25-39.
- Posel, D., & Casale, D. (2011).** Language proficiency and language policy in South Africa: Findings from new data. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31 (5), 449-457.

- Radja, K., Hoffmann, A., M., & Bakhshi, P. (N.D).** Education and the capabilities approach: Life skills education as a bridge to human capabilities. Retrieved December, 30, 2012, from http://ethique.perso.sfr.fr/Hoffmann_Radja_Bakhshi.pdf
- Rahman, R. I. (2006).** Access to Education and Employment: Implications for Poverty. Retrieved January 15, 2010, from <http://www.prcpb-bids.org/documents/workingpaper/wp14fulltext.pdf>
- Raynor, J. (2007).** Education and capabilities in Bangladesh. In M. Walker & E. Unterhalter (Eds.), *Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education* (pp. 157–176). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan
- Rebell, M. A. (2007).** Poverty, “meaningful” educational opportunity, and the necessary role of the courts. *North Carolina law review*, 85, 1468-1544.
- Richardson, P. (2011).** A Proposal for Improving Access to Secondary Education through Innovative Self Study Access Systems. *African policy Watch*, 7, 1-8.
- Riddell, A. (2003).** The introduction of free primary education in sub-Saharan Africa. Retrieved January 15, 2010, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001469/146914e.pdf>
- Ridge, T. (2002).** *Childhood poverty and social exclusions. From a Child's Perspective.* Policy Press: Bristol, UK.
- Robertson, S., Novelli, M., Dale, R., Tikly, L., Dachi, H., & Ndibelema, A. (2007).** Globalisation, education and development: ideas, actors and dynamics. Retrieved January 15, 2010, from <http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/PolicyStrategy/ResearchingtheIssuesNo68.pdf>
- Robeyns, I. (2005).** The Capability Approach: a theoretical survey. *Journal of Human Development*, 6 (1), 93-114.
- Robeyns, I. (2006).** Three models of education Rights, capabilities and human capital. *Theory and Research in Education*, 4 (1), 69–84.
- Robeyns, I. (2009).** Equality and Justice. In: S Deneulin & L Shahani (Eds.). *An Introduction to the Human Development and Capability Approach. Freedom and Agency.* London: Earth scan.
- Roker, D. (1998).** *Worth More Than This: Young People Growing Up in Family Poverty.* The Children's Society: Ilford, UK.
- Rolleston, C. (2009).** Human Capital, Poverty, Educational Access and Exclusion: The Case of Ghana 1991-2006. Retrieved January 15, 2010, from http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/PTA22.pdf

- Rolleston, C. (2011).** Educational access and poverty reduction: The case of Ghana 1991–2006. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31, 338–349
- Ron- Balsera, M. (2011).** Does the human capital discourse promote or hinder the right to education? The case of girls, orphans and vulnerable children in Rwanda. *Journal of International Development*, 23 (2), 274-287.
- Sabates, R., Akyeampong, K., Westbrook, J., & Hunt. F. (2010).** School Drop out: Patterns, Causes, Changes and Policies. Retrieved January 25, 2010, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001907/190771e.pdf>
- Saito, M. (2003).** Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach to Education: A Critical Exploration. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 37 (1), 19-33.
- Sayed, Y., & Ahmed, R. (2011).** Education quality in post-apartheid South African policy: balancing equity, diversity, rights and participation. *Comparative Education*, 47 (1), 103-118.
- Sayed, Y. (1997).** The concept of quality in education: a view from South Africa. In Watson, K, Mogdil, S & Mogdil, C. (Eds.), *Educational dilemmas: debate and diversity, Vol. 4: Quality in education*. (pp. 21-29). London: Cassell.
- Sayed, Y., Subrahmanian, R., Soudien, C., Carrim, N., Balgopalan, S., Nekhwevha, F. & Samuel, M. (2007).** Education Exclusion and Inclusion: Policy and Implementation in South Africa and India. Retrieved April 15, 2010, from <http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/impAccess/ResearchingtheIssuesNo72.pdf>
- Sayer, A. (1992).** *Method in Social Science: a Realist Approach (2nd Ed.)*. London: Routledge.
- Sayer, A. (2000).** *Realism and Social Science*. London: Sage Publications
- Schatz, E., Madhavan, S., & Williams, J. (2011).** Female-headed households contending with HIV/AIDS-related hardship in rural South Africa. *Health & Place*, 17, 598-605.
- Schultz, T. P. (1999).** Health and School Investment in Africa. *Journal of Economic perspective*, 13 (3) 67-88).
- Schultz, T. W. (1961).** Investment in Human Capital. *The American Economic Review*, 51 (1), 1-17.
- Scott, D. (2005).** Critical Realism and Empirical Research Methods in Education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 39 (4), 633-646.
- Sen, A. (1992).** *Inequality re-examined*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sen, A. (1999).** *Development as freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Sen, A. (2009).** *The idea of justice*. London: Penguin.

- Shindler, J. & Fleisch, B. (2007).** Schooling for all in South Africa: Closing the gap. *International; review of education*, 53 (2), 135-157.
- Silverman, D. (1993).** *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction*. California: Sage.
- Smith, C. M., (2011).** Which in- and out-of-school factors explain variations in learning across different socio-economic groups? Findings from South Africa. *Comparative Education*, 47 (1), 79-102.
- Somerset, A. (2011).** Access, Cost and Quality: tensions among three goals in the development of primary education in Kenya. *Journal of Education Policy*, 26 (4) 483-497.
- Soudien, C. (2007).** The 'A' factor: coming to terms with the question of legacy in South African education. *International Journal of Education and Development*, 27 (2), 182-193.
- Soudien, C. (2011).** Building Quality in Education: Are International Standards Helpful? *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 8, (2), 183–201
- South Africa. Department of Basic Education (1995).** *White Paper on Reconstruction and Development*. Retrieved April 22, 2010, from www.info.gov.za/whitepapers/1995/education1.htm
- South Africa. Department of Basic Education (2007).** Community Survey South Africa 2007 - Primary tables-Eastern Cape, Community survey 2007. Retrieved November 15, 2012, from <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/p03011/p030112007.pdf>
- South Africa. Department of Basic Education (2010).** Department of Education Annual Report 2009/10. Retrieved November 23, 2011, from <http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=8mm2QuDyiuw%3D&..>
- South Africa. Department of Basic Education (2010).** *Report on the results of the 2009 Senior Certificate Exam*. Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printer.
- South Africa. Department of Basic Education. (2008).** Report on the annual school survey. Retrieved November 23, 2012, from <http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=n87v%2BFQAYT0%3D&...>
- South Africa. Department of Basic Education. (2010).** Education statistics, 2009. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Stake, R. (1995).** *The Art of Case Study Research* California: Sage Publications.
- Stewart, F. (1996).** Globalisation and education. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 16 (4), 327-333.

- Subrahmanian, R. (2002).** Gender and Education: A Review of Issues for Social Policy. *Social Policy and Development Programme Paper No. 9*. Retrieved April 15, 2010, from [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentid=0A8ADED14E7E1595C1256C08004792C4&parentdoctype=paper&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/0A8ADED14E7E1595C1256C08004792C4/\\$file/subrahma.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentid=0A8ADED14E7E1595C1256C08004792C4&parentdoctype=paper&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/0A8ADED14E7E1595C1256C08004792C4/$file/subrahma.pdf)
- Sutton, L., Smith, N., Dearden, C., & Middleton, S. (2007).** *A child's-eye view of social difference*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation: York, UK.
- Tao, S. (2009).** Applying the capability approach to school improvement interventions in Tanzania. Working paper. Retrieved December 28, 2012, from http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/ImpQuality_RPC/quality11.pdf
- Tarabini, A. (2010).** Education and poverty in the global development agenda: Emergence, evolution and consolidation. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 30 (2), 204–212.
- Taylor, J., and Fraser, A. (2003).** *Eleven Plus: life Chances and Family income*. Retrieved December 13, 2012, from <http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/11plus.pdf>
- Terzi, L. (2005).** A capability perspective on impairment, disability and special needs: Towards social justice in education. *Theory and Research in Education*, 3 (2), 197–223.
- Terzi, L. (2007a).** The capability to be educated. In M. Walker & E. Unterhalter (Eds.), *Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education* (pp. 25–43). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Terzi, L. (2007b).** The capability to be educated. In M. Walker & E. Unterhalter (Eds.), *Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education* (pp. 25–44). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tikly, L., & Barrett, M., A. (2009).** Social justice, capabilities and the quality of education in Low income countries. Retrieved November 22, 2011, from <http://www.edqual.org/publications/workingpaper/edqualwp18.pdf>
- Tikly, L. (2010a).** Towards a framework for understanding the quality of education. Retrieved November 22, 2011, from <http://www.edqual.org/publications/workingpaper/edqualwp27.pdf>
- Tikly, L. (2011b).** Towards a framework for researching the quality of education in low-income countries, *Comparative Education*, 47(1), 1-23

- Tikly, L., & Barrett, A., N. (2011).** Social justice, capabilities and the quality of education in low income countries. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31 (1), 3–14.
- Tikly, L., & Barrett, M., A. (2007).** Education quality - research priorities and approaches in the global era. Retrieved November 22, 2011, from http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/ImpQuality_RPC/workingpaper1.pdf
- Torres C. A. (1998).** Democracy, education, and multiculturalism: Dilemmas of citizenship in a global world. *Comparative Education Review*, 42 (4), 421–447
- Toson, A., L., M., Burrello, L., C., & Knollman, G. (2012).** Educational justice for all: the capability approach and inclusive education leadership. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 17 (5), 1–17,
- Trani, J., Bakhshi, P., Bellanca, N., Biggeri, M., & Marchetta, F. (2011).** Disabilities through the Capability Approach lens: Implications for public policies. *European Journal of Disability Research*, 5 (3), 143–157.
- Trani, J., F. Bakhshi, P., & Nandipati, A. (2012).** ‘Delivering’ education; maintaining inequality. The case of children with disabilities in Afghanistan, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 42 (3) 345-365.
- UNDG, (2010).** Thematic paper on MDG 2: Ensuring that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Retrieved April 15, 2010, from http://www.worldfamilyorganization.org/wfs6/bg/1-Thematic-paper-on-MDG2_28-June.pdf
- UNESCO (2002).** Global Monitoring Report: Education for All: Is the world on track? Retrieved August 25, 2011, from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>
- UNESCO (2003).** Global Monitoring Report: Gender and Education for All, The Leap to Equality. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>.
- UNESCO (2005).** EFA Global Monitoring Report: Education for all: the quality imperative. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>

- UNESCO (2006).** EFA Global Monitoring Report: Education for all (EFA) in least developed countries. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>
- UNESCO (2007).** EFA Global Monitoring Report Strong foundations: Early childhood care and education. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>
- UNESCO (2008).** EFA Global Monitoring Report: Overcoming inequality: why governance matters. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>
- UNESCO (2009).** EFA Global Monitoring Report: Inequality: why governance matters. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>
- UNESCO (2010).** The central role of education in the millennium Development goals. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>
- UNESCO (2011).** Global Monitoring Report: The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>
- UNICEF (2007).** A Human Rights-Based Approach to EDUCATION FOR ALL: A framework for the realization of children's right to education and rights within education. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/>
- Unterhalter, E. (2003).** The Capabilities Approach and Gendered Education: An examination of South African Complexities. *Theory and Research in Education*, 1 (1), 7–22.

- Unterhalter, E. (2005).** Global inequalities, capabilities, social justice: the millennium development goal for gender equality in education. *International Journal for Educational Development*, 25 (2), 222-122.
- Unterhalter, E. (2006).** 'New times and new vocabularies: Theorising and evaluating gender equality in Commonwealth higher education. *Women's Studies International Forum* 29 (6), 620-628.
- Unterhalter, E. (2007).** *Gender, schooling and global social justice*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Unterhalter, E. & Aikman, S. (2007).** *Practising Gender Equality in Education*. Retrieved August 28, 2010, from <http://pdfsb.com/readonline/5a31644365773131583378344148706855513d3d>
- Unterhalter, E. & Brighouse, H. (2007).** 'Distribution of What for Social Justice in Education'. In M. Walker & E. Unterhalter (Eds), *Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education* (pp. 67-86). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Unterhalter, E., Vaughan, R., & Walker, M. (2007).** The capability approach and education. *Prospero*, 13 (3), 13–21
- Van der Berg, S. (2008).** Poverty and education. Paris: The International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and the International Academy of Education (IAE). Retrieved September 24, 2010 from http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Info_Services_Publications/pdf/2009/EdPol10.pdf
- Vegas, E. & Petrow, J. (2008).** *Raising Student Learning in Latin America: The Challenge for the 21st Century*. Washington DC: World Bank.
- Vorster, J. E. J. (2010).** A social realist analysis of collaborative curriculum development processes in an academic department at a South African university. Unpublished PhD thesis, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- Walker, M. & Unterhalter, E. (Eds.) (2007).** *Sen's Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Walker, M. (2003).** Framing Social Justice in Education: What Does the 'Capabilities' Approach Offer? *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 51 (2), 168-187.
- Walker, M. (2006).** 'Towards a Capability-Based Theory of Social Justice in Education', *Journal of Education Policy*, 21 (2), 163-185.
- Wedgwood, R. (2005).** Education and Poverty Reduction in Tanzania. Dar es Salaam: Retrieved April 23, 2011, from http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/PolicyStrategy/OXCON_Wedgwood_final.pdf

- Welman, C., Kruger, F., & Mitchell, B. (2005).** *Research methodology*. (3rd Ed.). Cape Town. Oxford University Press.
- Wikgren, M. (2005).** Critical realism as a philosophy and social theory in information science? *Journal of Documentation*. 61 (1), 11-22.
- Willow, C. (2002).** *Bread is free: Children and young people talk about poverty*. Save the Children UK: London.
- Wils, A., Carrol, B., & Barrow, K. (2005).** Educating the World's Children: Patterns of Growth and Inequality. Retrieved February 25, 2010, from http://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Educating_The_Worlds_Children.pdf
- Wilson-Strydom, M. (2011).** University access for social justice: a capabilities perspective. *South African Journal of Education*, 31, 407-418
- Winter, G. (2000).** A comparative discussion of the notion of validity in qualitative and quantitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 4(3&4). Retrieved February 25, 2010, from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR4-3/winter.html>
- World Bank. (2006).** Schooling Access to Learning Outcomes: An Unfinished Agenda an Evaluation of World Bank Support to Primary Education. Retrieved February 25, 2010, from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/7083/372650Schooling0Access01PUBLIC1.pdf?sequence=1>
- World Education Forum, UNESCO, (2000).** Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments. Retrieved February 25, 2010, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001202/120240e.pdf>
- Wright, H. R. (2012).** Childcare, children and capability, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 42 (3), 409-424
- Yin, R. K. (1993).** *Case study research: design and methods*. California: Sage.
- Yin, R. K. (1994).** *Case study research: design and methods* (1st ed.).California: Sage.
- Yin, R. K. (2003).** *Case study research: design and methods* (3rd ed.).California: Sage.
- Yin, R. K. (2009).** *Case study research: design and methods* (4rd ed.).California: Sage.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Eastern Cape Provincial results and pass rate 1996-2009

Year	Learner who wrote	Learners who passed	Pass rate (%)
1996	67,414	33,524	49.7
1997	76,967	35,660	46.3
1998	84,168	38,298	45.5
1999	79,819	33,188	40.3
2000	75,484	37,717	50.0
2001	63,504	28,939	45.6
2002	65,676	34,061	51.9
2003	62,140	37,370	60.1
2004	63,426	33,915	53.5
2005	69,869	39,607	56.7
2006	69,561	41,269	59.2
2007	69,158	39,553	57.2
2008	60,297	30,494	50.6
2009	68,129	34,731	51.0

Source: Eastern Cape Department of Education Website
(http://www.ecdoe.gov.za/files/documents/NSC%20BOOKLET%202009_Rev2_Cosmetic_Changes.pdf)

Higher Grade Mathematics candidates passing by race and gender, 2002

Race and Gender	Candidates who wrote	Pass rate distribution	Candidate who passed	Pass rate %
African				
Female	7185	42.7	1638	22.8
Male	9634	57.3	2999	31.1
Total	16829	100.0	4637	27.6
Coloured				
Female	742	49.1	511	68.9
Male	769	50.9	556	72.3
Total	1511	100.0	1067	70.6
Indian				
Female	2231	52.9	1614	72.3
Male	1987	47.1	1421	71.5
Total	4218	100.0	3035	72.0
White				
Female	6334	50.0	5632	88.9
Male	6329	50.0	5394	85.2
Total	12663	100.0	11026	87.1

Table 3: Higher Grade physical candidates passing, by race and gender, 2002

Race and Gender	Candidates who wrote	Pass rate distribution	Candidate who passed	Pass rate %
African				
Female	13319	44.2	2654	19.9
Male	16837	55.8	4475	26.6
Total	30156	100.0	7129	23.6
Coloured				
Female	786	45.4	570	72.5
Male	945	54.6	681	72.1
Total	1731	100.0	1251	72.3
Indian				
Female	2617	50.7	1973	75.4
Male	2540	49.3	1736	68.3
Total	5157	100.0	3709	71.9
White				
Female	5815	43.0	5098	87.7
Male	7706	57.0	6206	80.5
Total	13521	100.0	11304	83.6

Source: Reddy (2006) in Letseka, et al (2010)

Appendix B: LEARNER QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions:

- ✚ Please read each question carefully and follow instructions
- ✚ Circle the correct code for your answer or write in the space provided
- ✚ Answer All questions

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE			
No	Question	Response	Code
1	Age	13-14 15-16 17-18 19-20 21+	1 2 3 4 5
2	Gender	Male Female	1 2
3	Who do you stay with at home? (<i>You can circle more than one</i>)	Mother Father Both parents (mother and father) Grandmother/Grand father Uncle/Aunt Siblings only (brothers and sisters) Others	1 2 3 4 5 5 7
4	Do you have Brothers and sisters?	Yes No	1 2
5	How many brothers and sisters do you have?	Brothers _____ Sisters _____	
6	Are they in school?	Yes No	1 2
7	Write down the number of those in school and out of school (Answer this if you answered yes in question 6)	In school _____ Out of school _____	
8	How do you get to school?	Walk Public transport Cycle Parents car Others, Specify	1 2 3 4 5
9	How far do you walk? (<i>answer this circled if you walk</i>)	0-1 kilo meters 2-3 4-5 6+	1 2 4 5
10	What is/are the main chore/s you perform before school everyday? (<i>You can circle more than one</i>)	Fetching water Cooking Cleaning(the house/yard, sweeping, laundry) Washing dishes Herding cattles, goats, sheep Nothing	1 2 3 4 5 6
11	How long does it take you to do these chores?	0-15 minutes 16-30 minutes 31-45 minutes 46-60 minutes	1 2 3 4

		Longer than 60 minutes	5
12	What is/are the main chore/s you do after school every day? (<i>You can circle more than one</i>)	Cleaning (Sweeping, cleaning the house, Laundry) Watering the garden Washing dishes Fetching water Cooking Nothing	1 2 3 4 5 6
13	How long does it take you to do the chore(s)	0-15 minutes 16-30 minutes 31-45 minutes 46-60 minutes Longer than 60 minutes	1 2 3 4 5
Section B: Profile of Parents /Guardians			
14	Are your parents/guardians	Employed Self employed Unemployed Retired/pensioner	
15	If they are employed, what do they do?		
16	What are the levels of education the following people	Mother _____ Father _____ Uncle/aunt _____ Brother/sister _____ Grandparents _____	
17	What is the highest level of education reached in your family (<i>e.g. Grade 12, Masters degree</i>)	Grade 7 and less Grade 8-11 Grade 12 Certificate/Diploma University degree (i.e. BA, BSC, Masters, PhD)	
Section C: Aspirations			
18	Do you like school?	Yes No	
19	What do you like most about school and why (<i>answer this if you answered yes</i>)		
20	What you dislike most about school and Why (<i>answer this if you answered No</i>)		
21	What problems do you face at school?		
22	How do you deal with these problems		
23	Where do you see yourself in 5 years?	Still in school In university Employed Married	
24	Would you like go to University?	Yes No	
25	If yes which University would you like to go to?		
26	If no , what would you like to do?	College Employed Married Self-employed Stay home Others, specify	
27	Do you think you can achieve your dream?	Yes No	
28	What would stand in your way?	Nothing parents/Guardians Economic limitation (financial, farming, informal trading) Unforeseen realities (illness, death, pregnancy, orphan-hood, prostitution)	

		Lack of direction (laziness, lack of goal) Lack of teachers (counsellor) Peer pressure Academic (still in school, poor performance)	
29	Who is your role model	Mother/father Teacher Brother/sister Aunt/uncle Grand parents Neighbour Celebrity Other, specify-----	
30	What do you admire most about this person?		
31	What would do you like to become one day?	Professional (Doctor,Teacher,Lawyer,Nurse, Skilled worker (driver, chef, tailor Married (includes taking care of husband Mother House helper (domestic worker Self employed(farmer, business owner Casual labourer (hawking, selling fruits) Politician (president, MP) Other, specify	
32	What subjects do you need to achieve this career?		
SECTION D: Academics			
33	What is your most favourite subject		
34	Why do you like this subject		
35	What is the subject you dislike most		
36	Why do you dislike this subject		
37	What does your favourite teacher do that makes you him/her		
38	What activities are you involved in at school?	None Sports Debate Music/dance/drama Clubs (i.e. eco, debate, president Reading clubs, maths Poetry clubs Cultural activities	
39	Do you get help with homework at home?	Yes	1
		No	2
40	Who helps you with homework at home? (You can circle more than one)	Mother	1
		Father	2
		Both parents	3
		Grandparents	4
		Uncle/aunt	5
		Sister/brother	6
		Other, specify	7
41	If there is one thing you could change about school what would it be		

APPENDIX C: LETTERS OF CONSENT

LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL

Education Department
Rhodes University
P.O Box 94
Grahamstown
6140

22th May 2011

The Principal
Mary Waters Secondary School

Re: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Sir

I am writing to request permission to conduct my research study at your school. I am currently registered for an M.Ed degree in the Education Faculty at Rhodes University, The study is entitled: **Examining the interface between socio-ecological (gender, race, social class and poverty) factors and access to education in some public high schools in Makana region Grahamstown District in the Eastern Cape.**

The purpose of this study is to understand the crossing point between socio-ecological factors (gender, race, social class, culture and poverty) and access to education. My intention is to gain teachers, learners and school management's views about these factors and how they shape access to education in schools.

I hope that the school administration will allow me to observe the school and Grade 11 English, Mathematics (pure) and science (physical and Life science) classrooms. Due to the nature of the study, I hope to also interview Grade 11 teachers, learners, Principal and two SGB members. In addition, I also hope to interview parents and visit 2 learners at their homes to gain a deeper understanding of how these factors influence learner's access to education. All participants, who volunteer to participate, will be given a letter and consent form to be signed by their parent or guardian and returned to the primary researcher at the beginning of the research process. Teachers who volunteer to participate will also be given letters of permission to allow me observe their classrooms and be interviewed.

If approval is granted, the research process should take no longer than two weeks. The results will be used as part of the final thesis and individual results of this study will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. Should you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me at my email address: hknamakula@gmail.com or Cell: 0732430309, or my supervisor, Prof. Jean Baxen and Dr. Ken Ngoza, at the Faculty of Education at Rhodes, on 0466038386. If you agree, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study at your school.

Sincerely,

Halima Namakula

TEACHERS' CONSENT LETTER

Education Department
Rhodes University
P.O Box 94
Grahamstown
6140

To whom it may concern

15th April 2011

Dear sir/madam

I am currently registered as a M.Ed. student in the Education Faculty at Rhodes University. My research topic is entitled: **Examining the interface between learner agency and socio-ecological factors and access to education in some public high schools in Makana region Grahamstown District in the Eastern Cape.** Presently am at the initial stages of my data collection and I would most appreciate it if I could observe your Grade 11 class and interview you as part of my research study. I would also wish to have a copy of your lesson plans for the learning areas that am going to observe.

I wish to assure you that your anonymity, as well as the schools and learners will be maintained. Participation in the study is voluntary you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. All the information gathered will be solely used for research purposes only.

Sincerely,

Halima Namakula

Permission

I understand my rights in relation to my participation in this research and agree to participate. I understand that I may withdraw from the research at any time prior to the publication of the research findings.

Signature.....

Name.....

Date.....

PARENTS' CONSENT LETTER

Education Department
Rhodes University
P.O Box 94
Grahamstown
6140

To whom it may concern

15th February 2011

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a M.Ed. student in the Education Faculty at Rhodes University. I am doing a research on factors shaping access to education in schools. I need to observe and interview learners for this research. This letter is requesting your permission to observe and conduct interview with your son/daughter at school and home. I guarantee full anonymity of your son/daughter. All information gathered will be solely used for research purposes only.

Consent Form

We/I _____ (full name and surname of the parents/guardian), give permission to Halima Namakula (student number: 604n5553) to observe and interview the Grade 11 classroom in which our/my son/daughter will participate in.