

Investigating the factors that contribute to the academic underachievement of Grade 9 learners

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DECLARATION OF RESEARCHER

I declare that the thesis *Investigating the factors that contribute to the academic underachievement of Grade 9 learners* is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Riza Marí Uys

7 November 2011

DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITOR

Hereby I declare that I have language edited and proofread the thesis *Investigating the factors that contribute to the academic underachievement of Grade 9 learners* by Riza Marí Uys for the Masters degree in Psychology.

I am a freelance language practitioner after a career as editor-in-chief at a leading publishing house.

Lambert Daniel Jacobs (BA Hons, MA, BD, MDiv)

7 November 2011

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SUMMARY

Academic underachievement potentially redirects the future of adolescents. The specific sample for this research was Grade nine learners. Grade nine is when subject choices are made and the last year of compulsory education. Academic underachievement during Grade nine becomes a barrier to career enhancing subject choices. Subject choice is a first step to greater specialisation of skills and a future career path. This study focused on the investigation of factors that could possibly contribute to the academic underachievement of Grade nine learners to the extent that they would fail. The findings will make teachers more aware of the influence that the internal and external fields of Grade nine learners have on their academic achievement. From the results it was found that academic underachievement is influenced by peer acceptance, parental involvement, cognitive development, the ability to handle examination anxiety, the Grade nine learner's perception of academic identity as well as other factors. A mixed method approach was used. Interviews with underachieving Grade nine learners, Grade nine teachers and Grade nine parents, as well as questionnaires completed by a cluster sample of the general Grade nine population of this study indicated the influence of the underachievers' external and internal fields on academic performance.

Key words: academic, underachievement, adolescent, development, grade nine learners, field factors, Gestalt.

OPSOMMING

Akademiese onderprestasië het die potensiaal om rigtingveranderend te wees vir die toekoms van adolessente. Die spesifieke steekproef vir hierdie navorsing was Graad nege leerlinge. Nie alleenlik is Graad nege die laaste jaar van verpligte onderwys nie; dit is ook die graad waartydens vakkeuses gemaak moet word. Akademiese onderprestasië in Graad nege mag 'n struikelblok veroorsaak vir vakkeuses, wat tot 'n suksesvolle loopbaan kan lei. Vakkeuse kan gesien word as die eerste stap na groter spesialisasie van vaardighede en per implikasie 'n toekomstige loopbaan. Hierdie studie is gefokus op die ondersoek van faktore wat moontlik kan bydra tot die akademiese onderprestasië van Graad nege leerlinge tot op die punt waar hulle druip. Die bevindinge van hierdie studie behoort onderwysers en navorsers te help om meer insig in die rol van die interne en eksterne velde van die Graad nege leerlinge op hulle akademiese prestasië te bekom. Die resultate het bevind dat onder meer portuurgroepaanvaarding, ouerbetrokkenheid, kognitiewe ontwikkeling, die vaardigheid om eksamenangs te hanteer en Graad neges se persepsie van hulle akademiese identiteit 'n invloed op onderprestasië het. 'n Gekombineerde kwalitatiewe/kwantitatiewe metode is gebruik. Onderhoude met onderpresterende Graad nege leerlinge, Graad nege onderwysers en ouers van Graad neges asook vraelyste voltooi deur 'n "cluster sample" van die algemene Graad nege populasie van hierdie studie is gedoen. Die bevindinge dui die invloed van interne en eksterne veldfaktore aan op akademiese prestasië.

FOREWORD

This dissertation is presented in article format in accordance with the guidelines as set out in the **Manual for Postgraduate Studies – 2008** of the North-West University. Each section has its references at the end. Section A consists of a general introduction to the dissertation and also includes the aims, motivation and methodology overview of the study. Section B consists of the manuscript to be submitted for publication (article). However, for the purpose of examination the length of this section has been adapted and needs to be reduced when submitted for possible publication. Section C is a summary and review of the study and also includes recommendations for future studies.

SECTION A:

ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

1. RATIONALE AND MOTIVATION

Achievement can take many forms. According to Webster's dictionary (Webster's dictionary, 2006) achievement means: "The act of achieving or performing; an obtaining by exertion; successful performance; accomplishment". Underachieve according to the Oxford Dictionary means to: "do less well than expected, especially in schoolwork" (POED, 2006). According to McCall (1994:15) an academic underachiever is a learner that has a lower average mark than would be suggested by his measured IQ, aptitude and other educational achievement assessments. Most schools focus on more than academic achievement, but the success of an academic institution is at least in part measured by its academic results (Hoërskool Outeniqua, 2010; Hoërskool Waterkloof, 2010). The researcher is of the opinion that academic underachievement might be the difference between the intellectual capacity observed by the teacher during class and the written realisation thereof as reflected in test and examination results. Intellectual ability may however also contribute to academic underachievement. The focus of this study is on one aspect of academic underachievement – failure because of underachievement. The term underachievement will represent the concept of failure because of underachievement throughout the research.

In South Africa the requirements to pass Grade nine entails at least 40% in one of the official languages, mathematics and four other subjects (Department of Education, 2007:25). For the other official language an average of at least 30% has to be achieved. The eighth learning area has no specific requirement. The minimum requirements of the seven subjects calculate to an average of 38.6%. For the purpose of this study a below-average mark of 38.6% will therefore be considered as academically underachieving.

Some research has been conducted on underachievement. Johnson, MacGue and Iacono (2006:514-532) studied environmental and genetic factors that influence

academic achievement in adolescents. No emphasis was placed on a specific group. The underachievement of boys encouraged researchers to focus on various aspects concerning male underachievement (Lindsay & Muijs, 2006; Véronneau, Vitaro, Pedersen & Tremblay 2008; Glen & Van Wert, 2010; Smith 2010). Fewer research attempts focused on female underachievement, although some exist (Jones, 2005; Jackson, 2006). As mentioned above various aspects of academic underachievement were researched, but come mainly from either an American or British frame of reference. Little research of the factors that contribute to academic underachievement focuses on South African learners (Masitsa, 2004:215). Although existing research targets certain phases of education and underachievement (Schagen, Kendall & Sharp, 2002:255-267) Grade nine learners have not been the focal point of such studies. It is during this grade where important subject choices need to be made with regards to career planning and therefore it seems to be an important grade during which underachievement should be addressed.

Media reports confirm that management of schools are sometimes questionable (Taylor, 2010), levels of numeracy and literacy are declining (Govender, 2010a) and teachers might not be qualified for their task (Govender, 2010b; Ndlovu, 2010). This might contribute to academic underachievement. The table below indicates the increase in academic underachievement as reflected in matric results (Department of basic education 2009:87).

Table1: Matric results reflecting increase in academic underachievement.

Province name	2008	2009
Eastern Cape	50.6%	51.0%
Free State	71.8%	69.4%
Gauteng	76.4%	71.8%
Kwazulu-Natal	57.6%	61.1%
Limpopo	54.3%	48.9%
Mpumalanga	51.8%	47.9%

North West	68.0%	67.5%
Northern Cape	72.7%	61.3%
Western Cape	78.4%	75.7%
National	62.6%	60.6%

According to the researcher's teaching experience, academic underachievement could possibly be the result of disinterested learners who are often absent from class; non-motivated teachers who are often out of class and a school system where learners are condoned to pass. These condoned learners cannot repeat the grade again because they would then not be in compliance with regulations from the Department of Education (Department of Education, 2007:25). When poor Grade nine marks have been obtained learners may need to make substandard subject choices. This in turn has an effect on learners' Admission Points Scores, required by tertiary institutions (University of Johannesburg, 2010).

Grade nine learners are specifically targeted in this study because they are in the last year of the General Education and Training (GET) phase of the curriculum. At the completion of the GET phase the Grade nine learner receives a GET certificate (Department of Education, 2002). At completion of this phase the learner may choose to continue with school, pursuing Further Education and Training (FET), choose an ABET (Adult Basic Education and Training) direction or discontinue education altogether. The South African School Act (84/1996) states that it is only compulsory to attend school until Grade nine or 15 years of age, whichever occurs first. It is therefore important to discover the reasons for underachievement, to prevent grade nine learners from discontinuing education as a result of poor performance. According to Bronfenbrenner, McClelland, Wethington, Moen, and Ceci as quoted by Johnson *et al.* (2006:514) academic achievement is a significant indicator of success later in life and therefore learners need to be motivated to achieve.

Underachievement has various implications for adolescents. From the researcher's teaching experience, adolescents who underachieve are more likely to drop out of

school. These underachievers tend to be home, socialising in the streets while their peers are at school. This may be where gangs recruit their members (Ngai, Cheung & Ngai, 2007:382). A drop-out learner may not only struggle with identity but also with the failure to perform, which might motivate more vigorous participation in this possibly delinquent society (Moran & Du Bois, 2002). Underachievement could also lead to loss of focus and hope. If underachievers choose to explore possibilities for their future, it will most likely be in an area that is below what they are capable of (Anyadike-Danes & McVicar, 2010:503).

Academic underachievement is the focus of this study for the purpose of determining what the specific factors are that cause underachievement of the Grade nine learners. Determining these factors, may assist the researcher to make certain recommendations to address the problem and to develop an intervention plan (further research) for future use.

According to Vithal and Jansen (as quoted by Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2007:30) the research question is directly connected to the statement of purpose and is understandable to people outside this field of study. Based on the problem formulation the following research question can be asked: What are the factors contributing to the academic underachievement of Grade nine learners?

2. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

According to Fouché and Delport (2011:108) it is necessary to define the research problem clearly. The goal assists in this by stating what would be included and what excluded from the study. The goal of this study was to investigate the factors that contribute to the academic underachievement of Grade nine learners.

3. CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT

Academic underachievement has definite implications for adolescents. Apart from the negative influence that academic underachievement has on an adolescent's self-image.

It contributes to a higher school drop-out rate, substandard subject choices, which in turn lead to lesser career opportunities. This makes academic underachievement a worthy field of research.

4. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

4.1 Analysis of literature

Cognitive, emotional and social aspects of development have to be incorporated when contributing factors to academic underachievement are considered. For the purpose of this study the following developmental theories have been chosen as focus: Erikson's psychosocial theory's fifth stage – adolescent identity formation (Erikson 1950:254; Louw & Louw, 2007:309-311); Piaget's cognitive development theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model, which explains the adolescent's field and the influence thereof. The influence that the identity formation in adolescents might have on their academic achievement necessitates the inclusion of Erikson's psychosocial theory while Piaget's cognitive development theory has a direct link to adolescents' ability to achieve academically.

Piaget's cognitive development theory is significant as academic underachievement is closely connected to cognitive functioning (Piaget, 1973:59-60; Piaget in Harwood, Miller & Vasta, 2008:230-255). According to Piaget's cognitive theory children enter the Formal Operational Stage between ages eleven or twelve (Louw & Louw, 2007:299). This stage continues into adulthood and therefore includes the population of this study. The inclusion of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998:996), which emphasises the influence of the field on the individual, supports the purpose of this study by highlighting external factors that might influence underachievement and are therefore included. The Gestalt theoretical approach encapsulates the whole study as discussed by Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951), Yontef (1993), McConville (1995), Polster (2005) and others, with special emphasis on the role of the field. The field of the learners may play a significant role in their academic

achievement (cf. Yontef, 1993; Bronfenbrenner & Morris 1998:996; Bronfenbrenner as quoted by Harwood *et al.*, 2008:5-8; Philippson, 2009).

A discussion on underachievement (Jones, 2005; Jackson, 2006; Johnson *et al.*, 2006; Lindsay & Muijs, 2006; Véronneau *et al.*, 2008; Glen & Van Wert, 2010; Smith 2010) is also incorporated as it forms a core focus of the study. Throughout this study the paradigm of the researcher was influenced by the Gestalt perspective, and the Gestalt concepts focused on during the study therefore warranted further explanation.

4.1.1 Gestalt concepts – A brief foundation

Yontef (1993:55) suggests that Gestalt theory rests on three pillars which are: awareness, self-support and internal integration of the person. An increased awareness, improvement in self-support as opposed to environmental support and more dynamic integration of the different aspects of the self may summarise the much vaster theory of Gestalt. Application thereof is also relevant when focusing on adolescent development. Polster and Polster (1999:102) essentially highlight the same aspects but focus in more detail. Yontef's (1993:55) point of view seems more generalised and will therefore be used as focus.

4.1.2 Three pillars of Gestalt

4.1.2.1 The role of awareness in Gestalt development

By focusing on becoming more aware, a deeper consciousness of what is already internally known by the person surfaces (Yontef, 1993:7). Perls *et al.* (1951:400) suggest that being in the here-and-now, being aware of this moment, in collaboration with the ability to creatively adjust will have an effect on the functioning of the self. Adolescents gain a greater consciousness of the previously undetected internal processes. An example of this is questions by the researcher that leads underachievers to greater understanding of the behaviour that causes their underachievement.

The intensified intrapsychic process in adolescent development might bring the adolescent to greater awareness (McConville, 1995:6). They are more aware of the changes in their bodies, their discomfort in front of other people and their abilities and inabilities (polarities) within the self (Zinker, 1977:97). The difficulty in many respects is to name what they are feeling, observing and experiencing both externally and internally. Polster (2005:54) states that attribution of a name is an important part of self formation. During early adolescence awareness is mainly focused to the external field of the adolescent and is apparent in struggles with relationships with parents, peers and teachers (McConville, 1995:13).

Intrapsychic processes are still limited during early adolescence and projection is often used by early adolescents to take their conflict to the contact boundary rather than handling the ambivalence and polarities internally (McConville, 1995:106-113). Adolescents might not own their underachievement and rather blame it on their peers, parents or teachers. As adolescents mature, their conflicts will move more to the intrapsychic. The interiority of middle adolescence increases and is characterised by more reflection, internal conflict and the taking of ownership of the forming self (McConville, 1995:115). Taking responsibility for academic underachievement might become easier than during early adolescence.

4.1.2.2 Self-support as function of Gestalt

Creative adjustment might be seen as a result of contact with the field. This takes place internally and is often not in the awareness of the adolescent. Because of the lack of “contactfulness” creative adjustment might be a result of contact with the field but not contact itself (Perls *et al.*, 1951:400). Joyce and Sills (2010:38) indicate that resistance to change might be a reaction of adolescents when they lack enough self-support. This might account for many adolescents’ apparent inability to break the cycle of academic underachievement. Breakdown of this resistance may only come about once the problem situation is accepted and the adolescent comes to greater awareness. Contact boundary disturbances are often a product of the adolescents’ beliefs and therefore their creative adjustment to incorporate these beliefs (Joyce & Sills, 2010:63). Within a

specific cultural setting the unimportance of academic achievement might cause adolescents to underachieve and to seek significance in different ways. Adolescents might make decisions without being aware and the creative adjustment they use in reaction might cause an immobility to change in the here and now, a fixed gestalt (Joyce & Sills, 2010:67). Creative adjustment might be adolescents' attempt to protect their stability (Joyce & Sills, 2010:76). According to Joyce and Sills (2010:112) in order to be able to lead a healthy life creative adjustment, a continuous reworking of most appropriate behaviour, is necessary. Yontef (1993:145) states that the ability to organismically self-regulate lays in taking responsibility for interaction from self to others, from others to self and also for internal interaction. As adolescents mature they take greater responsibility for their actions and might start addressing their ignorance related to their underachievement.

4.1.2.3 Integration as goal in Gestalt

During childhood children are submerged in a society, culture and family. At the onset of adolescence a quest for independence starts. McConville (2001:40) uses the example of an adolescent that voices autonomy by drawing back from parents, while simultaneously forging a deep bond with the peer group. The great emphasis early adolescents place on the relationships in their field might take precedence over their need for academic achievement. It is important to focus on the interaction between the adolescent's development and the field (Plummer & Tukufu, 2001:60-61). The aim is to organise the field in the most beneficial order and attain balance between a need to establish contact and a need to retain "organisational integrity", thereby indicating that the contact process developed further (McConville, 2001:40). Adolescent development starts when they become more aware of their immersion within their culture, family and the introjects they adhere to. The rejection of previously held introjects, usually originating from a primary caregiver, might cause adolescents to underachieve if the rejected belief was focused on academic achievement. This takes place in three "phases": disembedding, interiority and integration (McConville, 1995).

Disembedding is the process of extracting the self from the collective identity of family and parents; questioning routines, values and interactions from childhood and renegotiation of familial boundaries (McConville, 1995:36). Adolescents move from a mere external contact with the field to awareness of own thoughts and feelings and the consideration thereof. A shift from external to internal takes place. Introjects, the redirection of a reaction in order to revert back to a preconceived belief (Spagnuolo Lobb & Lichtenberg, 2005:33), come into awareness and are partly or completely assimilated or rejected. Introjects assist with childhood identity formation as is the case with a male role model, positive or negative. Assimilation or rejection will enable a boy to form an own male identity (McConville, 1995:25-26).

Interiority is considered by McConville (1995:113) to be an expansion of the inner life and an acceptance thereof by the adolescent. Own meaning is made of experiences as opposed to the meaning that was adopted from a parent or caretaker. Eventually adolescents come to trust their ability in making choices based on their thoughts, ability to observe and processing of both thoughts and observations (Blaney & Smythe, 2001:199). During this time, usually in middle adolescence, adolescents' focus might shift back to academic achievement depending on how he assimilated or rejected introjects regarding achievement.

Integration is that which takes place internally, a move away from the fragmentation that characterises both disembedding and interiority. Greater internal stability allows influences from outside without fear of losing the self (McConville, 1995:117).

4.1.3 Contact as part of the Gestalt development process

According to Perls *et al.* (1951:400) contact is made at a boundary. This implies the existence of an "other" when contact is made. In the case of adolescents this might be parents, peers, teachers and other people in their field. The existence of "fixed modifications to contact" (Joyce & Sills, 2010:125) may be to a large extent attributed to introjects. Introjects exclude the possibility of questioning prior decisions and therefore

encumber spontaneity and decision making based on the novel information available and influence the manner in which the contact making process is conducted. Contact boundary disturbances may be the result of the way the contact process is adjusted to accommodate introjects held by the person.

4.1.4 The importance of the field in Gestalt development

The field of adolescents plays an important role in their further development (McConville, 2001:27). According to Clarkson (2004:9) it is only possible to understand people if the environment/ field surrounding them is also taken into account. The different aspects of the field will have a multi-faceted influence on the development of the adolescent (McConville, 2001:28).

Perls *et al.* (1951:228) and O'Neill (2010:175) agree that it is impossible to isolate adolescents from their fields because it is in the interaction of field and adolescent that the influence is seated. Dent-Read and Zukow-Goldring (1997:7) state that "Organisms act and adapt, environments support and surround". Perls *et al.* (1951), Bronfenbrenner (as quoted by Harwood *et al.*, 2008) and O'Neill (2010) view the field and organism from the inside as being part of the relationship, while Dent-Read and Zukow-Goldring (1997) stand as observers of this interaction. Both views essentially support the notion of organism and field in relationship and the importance thereof for both components. The reaction of the field to the adolescent will influence future creative adjustments and possibly impact the formation of new selves (McConville, 2001:29). Adolescents' previous academic experiences might influence the way they approach academic work and view themselves with regard to academic achievement.

Developing adolescents do not experience the field and contact in the field exactly the same. Philippon (2009:6) suggests that it is not possible to experience the world exactly as it is, as all experience will be viewed through the understanding and senses of the person having the experience. Adolescents' individual developmental experiences, external world in interaction with internal world, may not be seen as too

insignificant or inferior to consider (Yontef, 1993:37). The common denominators of adolescent experience of academic underachievement are considered without dismissing the uniqueness of each individual experience. According to McConville (1995:36) disembedding assists adolescents to mature towards autonomy from significant adults and move towards what Yontef (1993:106) suggests “a disciplined phenomenological relation of person and context, an integration of the ‘subjective’ and the ‘objective’”.

4.1.5 The self

Distinguishing between what is part of self and what is not gives an indication of a person’s healthy self-formation (Latner, 1986:35). “The self varies according to the different people or things it encounters and in the ever-changing circumstances of the field in which it exists” (Mackewn, 1997:73). In relationship with the field and the others in the field the self gains identity and the right to existence. Adolescents that underachieve compared to their peers with incorporate this as part of their self. “Tailoring” assists the selves to constantly change (Polster, 2005:36-37). Perls *et al.* (1951:401) state that the self originates both from the physiology of the person and from the way the field interacts with the person. “The self is us in process. It is the creating of the figure, not the figure itself” (Latner, 1986:39).

At the onset of adolescence various selves have already been established. Changes in boundaries, rules, internal and external fields might contribute to the reconfiguring of existing selves and the establishment of new selves. The confusion caused by this reconfiguration of selves might explain adolescents’ erratic behaviour.

4.2 Empirical investigation

4.2.1 Research approach

For the purpose of methodological triangulation the researcher decided to use the combined qualitative-quantitative approach. According to Babbie (2007:113), using a mixed method approach employs strengths from both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007:39) state that triangulation neutralises the effect of bias in the method of measurement, the investigator or source used.

For this study the basic and applied methods of research were used, as this study's focus was on acquisition of new knowledge and supporting or refuting existing theories (Neuman, 2003:21; Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94), but also contributed to limited theory building (Neuman, 2003:22-29). Exploratory (Babbie, 2007:88-89) and descriptive (Neuman, 2003:29-31) research were conducted. The researcher aimed to explore and describe the factors that contribute to underachievement in Grade nine learners. In this process of exploration, familiarity with the basic facts and a general preparation for future research was undertaken (Neuman, 2003:29-30; Babbie, 2007:88-89; Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95-96).

4.2.2 Research design

According to Mouton (2001:55) the research design of a study is a clearly defined action plan as to how to conduct research. Rubin and Babbie (2001:107) refer to the research design as a list of possible options to choose from or a plan already selected. The qualitative design of this study was a case study (Mouton, 2001:149; Babbie, 2007:298). Case studies make it possible to connect individual actions to larger social trends (Neuman, 2003:33), which makes it especially applicable to this study.

4.2.3 Participants

The population (Babbie, 2007:190) of this study included all Grade nine learners of two schools in George who had to make subject choices, their parents and teachers. For the qualitative component non-probability purposive sampling (Neuman, 2003:213-214; Babbie, 2007:184) was used as interviews were only conducted with learners who obtained less than 38.6% during the June 2010 examination. Cluster sampling as sampling technique for the quantitative segment of the research was used to select learners from different register classes (cf. Maree & Pietersen, 2007:176; Strydom, 2011:230). Further criteria of inclusion for learners were both genders and all cultures.

4.2.4 Measuring instruments

Semi-structured interviews were used for the qualitative component. The qualitative interview has a general line of inquiry and less rigid questions than the questionnaire (Babbie, 2007:306). Using semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to focus on a specific topic, but to still have the flexibility to explore interesting details that might emerge from the interview (Greeff, 2011:351).

The quantitative component of this design played a supportive role to the qualitative component and was addressed by using a survey in the form of questionnaires. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison as quoted by Maree and Pietersen (2007:155) the function of a survey is defined as “what is” and is usually conducted by using questionnaires. Surveys measure many variables, test multiple hypotheses and gain information about past behaviour and characteristics (Neuman, 2003:267). It therefore made it applicable to this study where underachievement as behaviour is investigated.

Two schools were included in this sample to increase the validity of the findings while keeping to restrictions for a master’s dissertation in article format. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with learners, their parents and teachers. Before the

interview process commenced, permission was obtained from the Department of Education, principals of the schools, parents of the learners selected for interviews, teachers and the learners themselves (see Addendum 2). Permission to record interviews and confidentiality were included in the written consent given by all parties involved. Each interview was more or less 30 minutes. During the interview the interviewer took brief notes and also video recorded the interview. The interviewer notes contained both verbal and non-verbal communication from the respondent and, together with observation, contributed to the trustworthiness of the study.

After all interviews were completed and data analysed, the interviewer compiled a structured questionnaire (see Addendum 5a) that was tested during a pilot study to determine the viability and reliability of the questionnaire. Because of the size of the Grade nine groups at the two schools cluster sampling was used to select learners from the Grade nine year groups.

4.2.5 Data-analysis

Qualitative data was prepared by organising of the written data and video recordings for review and transcribing (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:130). For qualitative analysis, coding data, division of text into smaller bundles and naming each, is important. Coding was done in the margins of the typed transcript pages (see Addendum 4). Evidence was grouped and named to reflect progressively broader points of view through coding.

Quantitative data demand that a numerical value was given to each written response, unusable data were taken out of the process and creation of variables acquired, such as recording forms (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:130). Exploration, examination of data to come to broad conclusions and reading through data while making notes and familiarising oneself with the data base followed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:130).

Qualitative trustworthiness was enhanced by triangulation of different data sources (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:419-422). To enhance the dependability of the

research all evidence generated during the research process was kept (Bryman, 2008:378). Using video recordings of all interviews it is possible to confirm that the researcher aimed to stay as objective as possible during the research process (Bryman, 2008:379). The credibility of the research study was increased by using sound research practice for example protection of the identity of the interviewees and refraining from the use of leading questions (Bryman, 2008:377). Credibility in this study was further established by the use of an anonymous questionnaire during the quantitative component of the study and ensuring the anonymity of the participants by not mentioning real names during interviews. Furthermore the schools will not be identified in the written article. Quantitative reliability and validity were enhanced by conducting a pilot study (Neuman, 2003:181), with a clearly phrased, concise questionnaire (Mouton, 2001:105-106) based on outcomes of the literature study and interviews. External validity was increased by using both an Afrikaans and English school during research, as well as including different ethnic groups in both semi-structured interviews and as questionnaire respondents (Bryman, 2008:376-377).

4.2.6 Ethics

Babbie (2007:64-71) states that ethical considerations focused on the subjects include: voluntary participation, no harm coming to the participants, the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents during the research process and the need and desirability of deception during the research process. In anticipation of these guidelines the following measures were put in place:

- Written permission was gained from the Department of Education operational in the area where the two schools were situated;
- Written permission was obtained from the principals from the two schools from which Grade nine learners were selected to take part in interviews and answer an anonymous questionnaire;
- Written permission was obtained from the parents, teachers and learners;
- Anonymity and confidentiality of all participants in both the interview and questionnaire processes were maintained. During the interviews learner

interviewees used pseudonyms and when parent interviewees referred to their underachieving children by name the names were blotted out during transcription. The names of the two schools are not mentioned in the research. Questionnaire respondents did not include their names on the questionnaires;

- Participants could withdraw at any stage;
- Emotional support was given if needed after research.

5. REPORT LAYOUT

Section A: Orientation to the research

This first section serves as a general introduction to the study. The problem statement, central scientific paradigm, research methodology and a description of concepts regarding development theories and a greater perspective on aspects of Gestalt theory are dealt with in this section.

Section B: Journal article

This section is comprised of the article. The title of the article is as follows: An investigation into the factors that contribute to the academic underachievement of Grade 9 learners: a case study.

Journal for submission:

South African Journal of Education. (see addendum 6 for author guidelines)

Section C

This section of the study comprises the summative research findings and the conclusions and recommendations that had been reached through this study.

Section D

All the addenda that were used in this study are included in this section.

Section E

The final section comprises a consolidated list of references that were used throughout this study.

6. CONCLUSION

Academic achievement enhances the possibility of greater career opportunities and socio-economic stability (Johnson *et al.*, 2006:514; Véronneau *et al.*, 2008:429). Grade nine underachievers might miss the chance to make beneficial subject choices because of their poor academic performance.

Prior knowledge derived from development theories, viewed from a Gestalt frame of reference, formed the foundation of this research. Mixed method research was employed to describe and explore different factors that might influence academic achievement. Interviews conducted with Grade nine underachievers and some of their teachers and parents enlarged the knowledge base further. Both developmental theories and information supplied by the interviewees were used to design a questionnaire focused towards the general Grade nine population. Grade nine questionnaire respondents reported field factors, patterns of behaviour and attitudes towards school work that might contribute to academic underachievement. Converging developmental theories, insights gained during the semi-structured interviews and the collated answers by questionnaire respondents gave the researcher a more complete picture of factors that influence academic achievement.

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SECTION B: ARTICLE

ABSTRACT

Academic underachievement potentially redirects the future of adolescents. The specific sample for this research was Grade nine learners. Grade nine is when subject choices are made and the last year of compulsory education. Academic underachievement during Grade nine becomes a barrier to career enhancing subject choices. Subject choice is a first step to greater specialisation of skills and a future career path. This study focused on the investigation of factors that could possibly contribute to the academic underachievement of Grade nine learners to the extent that they will fail. The findings will make teachers more aware of the influence that the internal and external fields of Grade nine learners have on their academic achievement. From the results it was found that academic underachievement is influenced by peer acceptance, parental involvement, cognitive development, the ability to handle examination anxiety, the Grade nine learner's perception of academic identity as well as other factors. A mixed method approach was used. Interviews with underachieving Grade nine learners, Grade nine teachers and Grade nine parents, as well as questionnaires completed by a cluster sample of the general Grade nine population of this study indicated the influence of the underachievers' external and internal fields on academic performance

Key words: academic, underachievement, adolescent, development, grade nine learners, field factors, Gestalt.

1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of Grade nine, learners are assessed nationally and if successful receive a General Education and Training (GET) certificate (South Africa, 2002). The South African School Act 1996 (84/1996) indicates Grade nine or the age of 15 as the cut-off for compulsory school attendance. Academic underachievement can potentially redirect the future of adolescents and may become a barrier to the feasibility of making career enhancing subject choices. Subject choice may be seen as a first step to greater specialisation of skills and by definition a future career path. Literature also suggests that unstable high school achievement might be indicative of lesser career opportunities and possibly a lower socio-economic future (Johnson, McGue & Iacono, 2006:514; Véronneau, Vitaro, Pedersen & Tremblay, 2008:429; Timmermans, Van Lier & Koot, 2009:630).

The focus of this study is on one aspect of academic underachievement – failure because of underachievement. The term underachievement will represent the concept of failure because of underachievement throughout the research. When focusing on the factors that might contribute to the academic underachievement of Grade nine learners it is important to consider their level of development in various areas, including cognitive, emotional and social. Their developmental functioning will influence the way the Grade nine learners make contact with their world, what their perception will be of their field and the influence their field would have on their ability to academically achieve (cf. Yontef, 1993; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998:996; Bronfenbrenner as quoted by Harwood, Miller & Vasta, 2008:5-8; Philippon, 2009).

It is important to explore the reasons for underachievement, to prevent Grade nine learners from discontinuing education as a result of poor performance. The purpose of this study was to determine the specific causes of academic underachievement among Grade nine learners. Determining these causes, may assist the researcher to develop an intervention plan at a later stage in order to enhance academic achievement of future Grade nine learners and learners in general.

2. THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Cognitive, emotional and social aspects of development have to be incorporated when contributing factors to academic underachievement are considered. For the purpose of this study the following developmental theories have been chosen as focus: Erikson's psychosocial theory's fifth stage – adolescent identity formation; Piaget's cognitive development theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model, which explains the adolescent's field and the influence thereof. The influence that the identity formation in adolescents might have on their academic achievement necessitates inclusion of Erikson's psychosocial theory while Piaget's cognitive development theory has a direct link to adolescents' ability to achieve academically. Inclusion of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which emphasises the influence of the field on the individual supports the purpose of this study by highlighting external factors that might influence underachievement and are therefore included. The Gestalt theoretical approach encapsulates the whole study as discussed by Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951), Yontef (1993), McConville (1995), Polster (2005) and others. A discussion on underachievement (Jones, 2005; Jackson, 2006; Johnson *et al.*, 2006; Lindsay & Muijs, 2006; Véronneau *et al.*, 2008; Glen & Van Wert, 2010; Smith, 2010) is also incorporated as it forms the core focus of the study.

2.1 Developmental theories

Regardless of the parameters set for onset and conclusion of adolescence, it is during this time that a final quest is undertaken to establish an identity that will take the adolescent into adulthood. While the configuration of identity is carried over from childhood, it is during adolescence that all previous formations of identity are reconsidered and changed to produce a newly formed identity (Erikson, 1980:119; McConville, 1995; Kroger, Martinussen & Marcia, 2010:683). During adolescence all previous psychosocial tasks are revisited (Erikson, 1950:252-253). Marcia (1966) elaborates on Erikson's task of identity versus identity confusion, stating that the adolescent will choose one of four styles to make decisions regarding identity in areas

like future careers, religion, politics and sex role values. Marcia (as quoted by Moshman, 2005:83-87) further refers to four ways of making identity forming decisions during late adolescence. They are: identity achieved; moratorium; foreclosure and diffusion. Early adolescents will usually use the diffusion style, where no decisions are made, or the foreclosure style, where decisions are made based on the influence from a significant caregiver during childhood (Kroger *et al.*, 2010:684).

Piaget considers organisation to be the centre point around which cognitive development turns. Factors like culture (Maynard, 2008:57), level of stimulus from the environment and the interaction with others in experiments carried out, will influence the speed and level of cognitive development (Piaget, 2008:44). Social and neurological aspects of development will play a role in the age when adolescence commences in each child (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958:337). The broad bracket for the start of this final stage in Piaget's cognitive development theory occurs because of different development tempos (Moshman, 2005:13). For development to take place through learning, the task has to include internal monitoring, managing and reflection – executive actions (Kuhn & Pease, 2006:292). The “pruning” process that early adolescents' brains undergo, where some brain connections are cut off and others are reinforced, supports the notion of specialisation and the concentration of formal operational attainment in certain aspects/aptitudes (Luna, Garver, Urban, Lazar & Sweeney, 2004:1358). Cognitive development of adolescents does not stand in isolation and might be influenced either positively or negatively by the field that surrounds adolescents.

According to Bronfenbrenner (as quoted by Harwood *et al.*, 2008:5) the characteristics of children in the five environments and the environments of these children mutually influence each other. The five environments are: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. The Ecological Systems Model explains development through this mutual influence of characteristics and environments. Personality traits, physical appearance and intellectual capacity all play a significant role in children's interaction with the environment. These characteristics are seen as either “developmentally generative” or “developmentally disruptive”. “Developmentally

generative” is defined as the environment’s reaction to the characteristics of a child that has a positive outcome for the child. “Developmentally disruptive” would be a negative reaction from the environment to the characteristics of the child. These environments are described as circles surrounding the adolescent. The different environments influence the adolescent just as the adolescent influences the environments. The Gestalt theories of Perls, Lewin and McConville discussed below further emphasise the importance of considering the adolescent’s environment when focusing on adolescent development.

According to Perls (1957) development is divided into five layers. These layers are not sequential, but are rather characterised by a continuous movement between the five different layers. The interacting and perpetual movement between the layers is necessary to enable the adolescent to be fully functional (Philippson, 2001:109). Perls’s developmental layers could be successfully integrated with the other Gestalt theories, specifically Lewin’s “life space” or McConville’s disembedding theories, as the constant flow between the different layers might explain how the adolescent for example makes contact with the external and internal field mentioned below.

Lewin (1952:xi) gives an encompassing theory of adolescent development. He includes biological, psychological and social dimensions in his inclusive theory of the field and refers to this as the “life space”. This “life space” not only includes the external field of a person but also the internal field. By being part of an ever changing field the person in the field per definition will be changing and therefore it is important to keep the field in mind when development is discussed (McConville, 2001:30). How the adolescent makes contact with the field and cultivates relationships in the field is of importance when considering the adolescent within Gestalt theory (McConville, 1995:4). Depending on the layer (Perls, 1957) in which the adolescents find themselves they will make contact with their fields in a different manner, which in turn will determine where the adolescents are in terms of their “life spaces”. According to Lewin (as quoted by McConville, 2001:30-31), three aspects influence development: extension of “life space”,

greater differentiation of “life space” and improved organisation of “life space”. This interlinks with McConville’s theory on development of the adolescent.

The developmental process starts when adolescents’ awareness of their immersion in their culture, family and the introjects they embrace, increases. The three phases through which adolescents develop are: disembedding, interiority and integration (McConville, 1995). To realise an own identity the adolescent first has to be disembedded from the family of origin. By using mode three of McConville’s (2007:6-8) three modes of relationship the parent might facilitate a smoother transition during this first phase of disembedding. The three modes are: care taking and supervision (Mode one), dialogue and consultation (Mode two) and negotiation and accountability (Mode three). The relationship modes address the boundaries, power and allocation thereof between parent and adolescent. These modes of relationship stand in unity with the other developmental theories already addressed. Each theory addresses different aspects of development.

Eriksonian psychosocial development focuses on identity formation using Erikson’s eight stage theory, supported by Marcia’s decision making styles, while Piaget has a strong focus on organisation of cognitive processes. Increased complexity in cognitive organisation implies cognitive maturation. Bronfenbrenner concentrates on the interaction between field and adolescent and hereby encompasses what Erikson and Piaget are focusing on in adolescent development. The process of identity formation is unpacked by both Lewin and McConville. Their theories do not contradict each other but like Erikson’s and Piaget’s theories differ in focus. Perls’s five layers may be applied as smaller steps within the different stages that are followed in Erikson’s, Piaget’s, Lewin’s and McConville’s theories on adolescent development. The importance of the field is continuously highlighted by the above mentioned theories. Without growing awareness from the adolescent the maturation implied by these theories will not fully take place. In the process of developing an identity, the two polar conflicts, identity versus identity confusion, demand choices to be made (Kroger, 2007:67). A well developed identity decreases chances of delinquent behaviour among adolescents and also increases the

likelihood of academic achievement (Ferrer-Wreder, Palchuk, Poyrazli, Small & Domitrovich, 2008:96).

According to Caccioppo and Petty (as quoted by Preckel, Holling & Vock, 2006:402) the lack of Need for Cognition (NFC) might partly explain underachievement. NFC is defined as “people’s tendency to seek, engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive activity”. In this instance it is necessary to refer back to Piaget’s cognitive theory supported by Kuhn (2006:64) where the reinforcement of cognitive pathways will strengthen mentioned pathways and support cognitive specialisation (Piaget, 2008:46). Luna *et al.* (2004:1358) elaborate on this by stating that underused brain connections are “pruned” away during early adolescence, to leave the brain more focused and able to work more efficiently. The increased ability of adolescents to think about their thoughts is evidence to the maturation of formal operational thinking processes (Kuhn, 2006:64). This increase in intrapsychic ability might become the figure, effectively redirecting the focus from academic pursuits in favour of analysis of the internal process taking place. One of the by-products of increased intrapsychic ability might therefore be academic underachievement.

According to Johnson *et al.* (2006:515) the change in achievement may be connected to self-support and environmental support experienced at a specific point in time. Applying Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Model, Stewart (2007:17) states that “academic outcomes, such as academic achievement, are seen as a result of joined function of characteristics representing the individual person (e.g. personal traits) and their environment (e.g. school, family, home).” Change internally in the adolescent might influence the level of academic achievement. “Developmentally destructive” character traits, as coined by Bronfenbrenner, might interact negatively with the adolescent’s field regarding academic work which in turn could lead to academic underachievement. The environmental interaction of adolescents and their field also affects how the disembedding process might proceed.

At the onset of adolescence a process of disembedding begins (McConville, 1995:35). If the relationship patterns between parents and adolescent were stable during childhood it will pave the way for a more harmonious reconstruction of the parent-adolescent relationship (Kroger, 2007:52). Bronfenbrenner refers to the interrelatedness of the different systems present in a person's life. It stands to reason that less discord in the disembedding process of the adolescent will imply less figure/ground shifts necessary and a possibly more favourable environment for academic achievement for the adolescent. Factors that increase the risk of underachievement in the adolescents' field include the socio-economic status of parents, the mental health of parents and the occurrence of traumatic events like job loss, divorce or violence inside or around the family (Johnson *et al.*, 2006:514-515). Not only does the external field of the adolescent hinders chances of achievement, but also a genetic predisposition (part of the internal field) inherited from parents, which may cause the adolescent to repeat a cycle similar to that of the parents (Johnson *et al.*, 2006:515). The parental beliefs regarding the importance of academic achievement might also influence the adolescent's attitude towards school, homework and academic achievement (Neihart, 2006:196). If Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model is considered, it is clear that because of circumstances in the familial field the adolescent's reaction and attitude at school will also be influenced (cf. Bronfenbrenner, 1977:523).

One of these aspects in the school field is the peers that a learner is surrounded and influenced by. McConville (1995:46) mentions that the adolescent is starting with a process of disembedding from the family and naturally gravitates towards peers for support and affiliation. The influence of peers and peer opinion strongly impact every aspect of adolescent life. Adolescents' growing ability to understand the perspective of others enables them to form closer relationships with peers (Martin, Sokol & Elfers, 2008:294). This implies a possible interactive influence and importance that adolescents may have on each other. This influence might extend to academic achievement or underachievement, as academic achievement is influenced by peers (Neihart, 2006). During adolescence the psychosocial conflict that has to be addressed is identity confusion versus identity (Erikson, 1950:252-255). A sub-conflict encountered during

early adolescence, group identity versus alienation (Newman & Newman, 2001:516), makes the opinion of the peer group even more important during the early stage of adolescence. Conflict occurs between the need to be part of a group and the need to achieve (Neihart, 2006:196-201).

The cultural group adolescents are part of might also play a significant role in their opinion of academic achievement. Some adolescents might view academic achievement as a betrayal of their cultural heritage (Neihart, 2006:197). McConville (1995:21) stresses the importance of understanding the cultural field when dealing with adolescents where focus on academic endeavours might be overshadowed by what is valued by said culture. Protection of their social status and prevention of derogatory labels also cause some adolescents to purposefully underachieve (Neihart, 2006:199). The pressure to underachieve in order to be accepted by the group is largely determined by the value the peer group places on academic achievement (Boehnke, 2008:151).

The principle of reciprocity (Bronfenbrenner, 1977:519-520) also plays a role in achievement and is clearly visible in the relationship between parents and adolescents and also teachers and adolescents. It is not only the one party that is completely responsible for the power struggle often found between adolescents and significant adults in their field, but rather an interaction between both adult and adolescent. The field and the organism are clearly in interaction with each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1977:519). An example of the principle of reciprocity is a teacher's more positive attitude because of the adolescent's high academic achievement (Erkman, Caner, Hande Sart, Börkan & Sahan, 2010:295-296).

Furthermore if adolescents frequently receive messages of inadequacy and/ or of being unlovable during childhood, the adolescent self is configured to protect (McConville, 1995:30). The self or selves that the adolescent will allow to come to the fore would compensate for the messages received during childhood. Academic underachievement might be one of the behaviours that support the image of the self as unbreakable and

non-caring. In the process of strengthening own boundaries, early adolescents may take their intrapsychic struggles and project them onto the boundary between “me” and “others” and see the inner conflict played out externally (McConville, 1995:68). Underachievement might therefore also become a projected “confrontation” at the boundary instead of an intrapsychic conflict addressed internally. Adolescents’ poor academic performance then become the fault of a teacher unable to explain properly, too little time to study because of household chores and various other projections.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND FOCUS

Underachievement has various implications for adolescents. From the researcher’s teaching experience, adolescents who underachieve are more likely to drop out of school. These underachievers tend to be home, socialising in the streets while their peers are at school. This may be where gangs recruit their members (Ngai, Cheung & Ngai, 2007:382). A drop-out learner may not only struggle with identity but also with the failure to perform, which might motivate more vigorous participation in this possibly delinquent society (Moran & Du Bois, 2002). Underachievement could also lead to loss of focus and hope. If underachievers choose to explore possibilities for their future, it will most likely be in an area that is below what they are capable of (Anyadike-Danes & McVicar, 2010:503).

Academic underachievement is the focus of this study for the purpose of determining what the specific factors are that contribute to the academic underachievement of the Grade nine learners. Determining these factors may assist the researcher to develop an intervention plan (further research) for future use.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND OBJECTIVES

4.1 Research approach

For this study basic and applied research were done within a combined quantitative and qualitative approach, as this study focused on acquisition of new knowledge and supporting or refuting existing theories (Neuman, 2003:21; Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94), as well as a contribution to theory building (Neuman, 2003:22-29). Exploratory research, to gain insight into a reasonably unknown topic (Babbie, 2007:88-89) and descriptive research, to give a specific picture of the research topic (Neuman, 2003:29-31) were conducted.

The researcher aimed to explore and describe the factors that influence underachievement in Grade nine learners. In this process of exploration, familiarity with the basic facts and a general preparation for future research was undertaken (Neuman, 2003:29-30; Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95; Babbie, 2007:88-89).

4.2 Participants

The population, which according to Babbie (2007:190), is a grouping of people with shared characteristics from which candidates for a study are selected, included all Grade nine learners of two schools in George who had to make subject choices, their parents and teachers. One of the schools was an Afrikaans medium school and the other an English school. The schools had a different socio-economical status, with one school more affluent and the other from a poorer socio-economical background. For the qualitative component non-probability purposive sampling (Neuman, 2003:213-214; Babbie, 2007:184) was used as interviews were only conducted with learners who obtained less than 38,6% during the June 2010 examination. Interviews with willing parents of the Grade nine interviewees were also conducted, as well as with teachers of Grade nine learners at both schools. Eleven Grade nine learners participated in the semi-structured interviews. Six of the learners' mother tongue was Afrikaans, three

English, one Xhosa and one Zulu. They were all underachievers selected because of their poor academic performance in the June 2010 exams. Five of the parents of these underachievers were willing to participate in interviews. Six Grade nine teachers, three from each school, were willing to take part in semi-structured interviews. Each group of participants answered questions aimed at discovering the nature and possible reasons for academic underachievement of Grade nine learners. Further criteria of inclusion for learners were both genders and all cultures.

Cluster sampling as sampling technique was used to select learners from different register classes for the quantitative component of the study (cf. Strydom, 2011a:230-231; Maree & Pietersen, 2007:176). Eighty-one Grade nine learners from two schools were selected. One school had extremely large classes and only one register class was given permission letters. While the other school had smaller classes, therefore permission letters were sent to the parents of two register classes in the second school. Only Grade nine learners from the selected classes that obtained written permission from their parents, were allowed to complete the questionnaire.

4.3 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with learners, their parents and teachers. Before the interview process started, permission was gained from the Department of Education (Addendum 2h), principals of the schools, parents of the learners selected for interviews, teachers and the learners themselves (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011:175). Permission to record interviews and confidentiality were included in the written consent given by all parties involved. Each interview lasted more or less 30 minutes.

After all interviews were completed and data analysed, the interviewer compiled a structured questionnaire that was tested during a pilot study to determine the viability and reliability of the questionnaire. Because of the size of the Grade nine groups at the two schools, finalised questionnaires were only handed out to selected Grade nine

register classes during their registration period. Before the selected Grade nine learners completed the questionnaire, written permission was obtained from their parents.

4.4 Data-analysis

Qualitative data was prepared by organising of the written data and video recordings for review and transcribing (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:130). For qualitative analysis coding data, division of text into smaller bundles and naming each were important. Coding was done in the margins of the typed transcript pages. Evidence was grouped and named to reflect progressively broader points of view through coding. Quantitative data demanded that a numerical value was attributed to each written response and unusable data were taken out of the process (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:130). Exploration, examination of data to come to broad conclusions and reading through data while making notes and familiarising oneself with the data base followed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:130). Qualitative trustworthiness was enhanced by triangulation of different data sources (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:419-422). To enhance the dependability of the research all evidence generated during the research process was kept (Bryman, 2008:378). Using video recordings of all interviews it is possible to confirm that the researcher aimed to stay as objective as possible during the research process (Bryman, 2008:379).

To ensure quantitative reliability and validity a pilot study was used (Neuman, 2003:181), with a clearly phrased, concise questionnaire (Mouton, 2001:105-106) based on outcomes of a literature study and interviews. External validity was increased by using both an Afrikaans and English school during research, as well as including different ethnic groups in both semi-structure interviews and as questionnaire respondents (Bryman, 2008:376-377).

4.5 Ethical aspects

According to Babbie (2007:64-71) ethical considerations focused on the subjects include: voluntary participation, no harm coming to the participants, the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents during the research process and the need and desirability of deception during the research process. For the sake of this study ethical considerations were accounted for in the following ways:

4.5.1 Voluntary participation

As part of the qualitative segment of this research the potential interviewees were informed of the nature of the study and were given an open letter of consent which the researcher invited them to read and give to their parents. The participants were further invited to ask questions regarding the research. On the day of the interview, the interview schedule was given to each participant and the researcher read through the questions with the interviewees. The interviewees were once again invited to ask questions regarding the research and were allowed to choose the sequence of the questions. The researcher also pointed out to the interviewees that they were allowed to omit questions they felt uncomfortable answering. The teachers and parents of the interviewees received a letter explaining the interview process and content of the interviews the researcher would conduct with them.

Both teachers and parents were giving a choice to participate in the research, with some parents opted not to be part of the process. The qualitative segment included letters of consent to the clusters that were chosen to complete the questionnaires. Not all letters of consent were returned, implying the choice that parents and learners made whether to participate in this research.

4.5.2 Prevention of harm to participants

The possible discomfort to the participants (parents, teachers and Grade nine learners) were explained in the letter of consent given to each participant. All possible steps were taken by the researcher to minimise any discomfort to the participants in both the qualitative semi-structured interviews and the quantitative questionnaire conducted thereafter.

4.5.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

The qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted without using the participants' names. In transcribing the interviews the researcher took further precautions by blocking out any reference to names of participants or schools they were interviewed at. The transcriptions and recordings are securely stored and the recordings will be destroyed after completion of the research.

The quantitative questionnaires were anonymous and only coded with numbers. The questionnaires are securely stored in a lockable cabinet at the researcher's home where only the researcher has access.

4.5.4 Deception during the research process

Prior to the initial interviews, the researcher explained her capacity as research student. Verbal and written explanation to the content and intent of the interview were given to the Grade nine participants as well as the participating teachers prior to the interviews. The reasons for the research were explained to the parents in the letters of consent and the researcher also phoned the parents to answer any questions about the research.

5. RESULTS

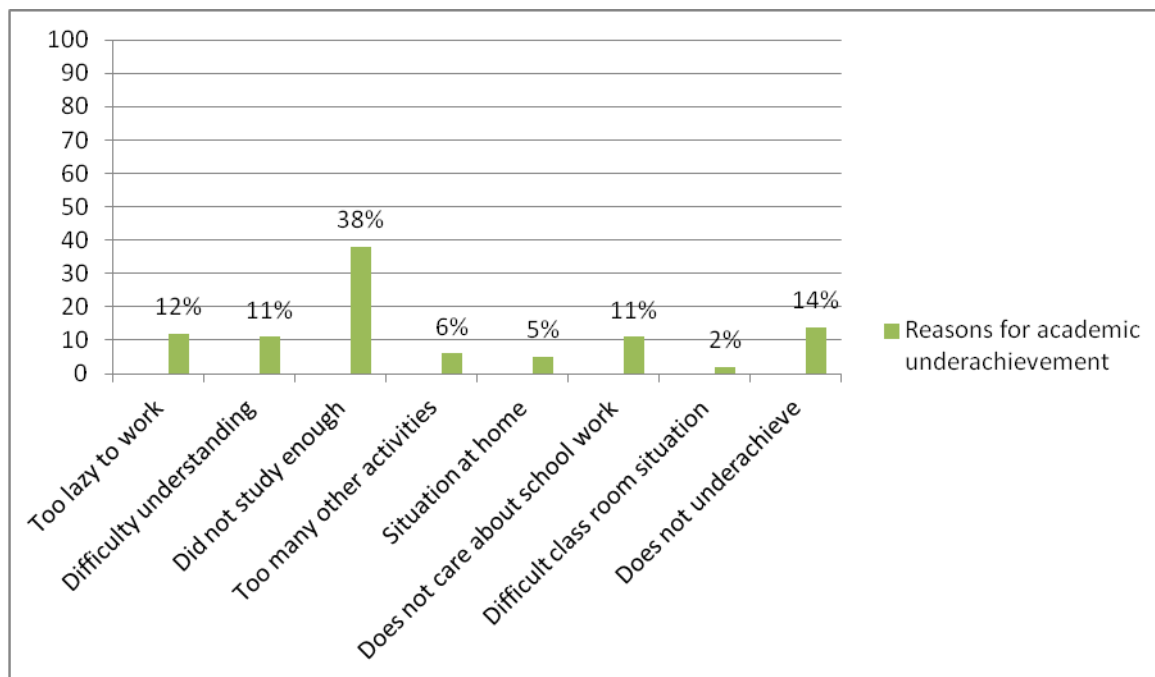
Eighty-one grade nine learners were given an anonymous questionnaire to complete on their experience of grade nine; 53% of the respondents were from an Afrikaans school

and 47% from an English school. 33% of the respondents were boys and 67% were girls.

From the interviews with Grade nine underachievers, some of their parents and some of their teachers as well as information gained from the literature study a number of detailed themes emerged. These themes were grouped together in separate sections of the questionnaire including exam factors, field factors, how the grade nine underachievers self-regulated and a general theme that included a number of smaller themes. The general theme encompassed themes about Grade nine learners experience of Grade nine; a possible indication of their cognitive level as described by Piaget; their decision making style as suggested by Marcia; Grade nine learners' ability to access the language used in class; a general indication of Grade nine learners spend their time after school; the way in which they address their studies; how they view their academic self and where they put the blame for their academic underachievement. Exam factors included the level of exam anxiety experienced before an examination; their method of coping if they cannot answer a question and the self-talk they engaged in before the exam. Field factors that emerged from the interviews were: the perceived role of parents in academic achievement and other hindrances to academic achievement reported by interviewees. Organismic self-regulation indicated the ways the interviewees reported that Grade nine learners addressed lack of understanding of school work. An open question on possible underachievement was included at the end of the questionnaire to gather even more information on underachievement not yet mentioned by interviewees. After the processes of interviewing, coding and grouping into themes were complete and tested with a pilot study, the second part of the sequential mixed method process started. Questionnaires were handed out to a cluster sample of the general Grade nine population of the two schools.

Questionnaire respondents were asked to provide reasons for their academic underachievement (see question 601), which are indicated in the graph below. It was interesting to see how the reasons that were given by the questionnaire respondents, differed from the factors that emerged from the combined data obtained from interviewees and questionnaire respondents.

Graph1: Reasons for academic underachievement



The comparison of the data in graph 1 and the factors discussed below indicated that the questionnaire respondents' understanding of academic underachievement seemed to be more simplistic than what became apparent after data of both the questionnaires and interviews were analysed. The following factors as reasons for underachievement emerged from the qualitative and quantitative data as categories:

5.1 Developmental factors

According to question 202, 89% of the respondents who completed the questionnaires indicated mastery of the formal operational cognitive phase. If the June 2010 exams results are considered it is unlikely that this is truly the case. The June exam results are used as a measure for attainment of the school curriculum. The school curriculum, designed to test the ability of the average Grade nine learner in the formal operational cognitive phase, indicates the possibility of less mastery of the formal operational cognitive phase than suggested by the 89%.

The Grade nine learners' decision making style were explored and according to their response 7% indicated a diffusion style, 5% a foreclosure, 21% used the moratorium style and 67% indicated an identity achieved style of decision making. The interviews with the underachievers however indicated their ability to identify possible reasons for their underachievement, but found it difficult to suggest workable solutions. This suggests that their ability to explore the problem and find a solution is not as well developed as suggested by the answers to question 203 in the questionnaire. The questionnaire responses therefore suggest that they might be selecting the answer based on what would be considered an appropriate answer and not necessarily according to what they are experiencing.

5.2 Personality factors

When struggling with schoolwork or homework 33% of questionnaire respondents indicated that they ask peers or friends for help, 32% ask the teacher for assistance and 19% ask their parent or caregiver for help, 9% admitted to copying work from friends, while 5% reported lying to keep themselves from getting in trouble for incomplete work. During the learner interviews only two learners suggested asking the teacher for help, but were quite reluctant to really engage the teacher's assistance for fear of being ridiculed by peers. A third learner interviewee admitted that he would never ask a teacher because of possible peer ridicule. Another two learner interviewees did ask both teachers and peers to assist them where they struggled with schoolwork.

During the learner interviews, six interviewees displayed a dominant internal locus of control and five an external locus of control, when underachievement was discussed. 35% percent of questionnaire responses indicated an external locus of control, while 65% suggested an internal locus of control. The 20% discrepancy from the interviews to the questionnaires might suggest that the questionnaire respondents once again aimed to create a more mature picture of themselves, either because they wanted to impress or were more focused on the "ideal" self, rather than the reality of the self as it is in the here and now.

Asked about their perception of their academic identity, 58% of questionnaire respondents viewed themselves as hardworking, while 11% thought that they were clever. 27% considered themselves to be lazy, while 2% of respondents saw themselves as stupid. 1% of respondents did not answer the question. This contradicts the reasons questionnaire respondents gave for possible underachievement, where 61% of respondents sighted their lacking work ethic – laziness, carelessness about schoolwork and limited time directed towards studying, as the reason for their underachievement. 48% of questionnaire respondents also sighted lack of studying as one of the reasons for low marks obtained in a test, which further contradicts the respondents' academic identity of being hard working.

5.3 Academic factors

The questionnaire respondents reported an underachievement rate of 16%, but according to the exam results for June 2010, supplied by the schools, this number should have been higher. The questionnaire respondents were asked to give a possible reason for their underachievement, if they underachieved and 86% responded to the question. This suggests that the Grade nines are aware of their ability or inability to perform academically. The motivation for the contradictory responses might possibly indicate a discomfort with admittance of underachievement by questionnaire respondents.

To the question, "How do you find Grade 9?", only 6% of questionnaire respondents indicated that they were not coping, while 2% did not answer the question. 86% of questionnaire respondents indicated in Question 601 that they were underachieving. (Question 601 asked respondents to give a reason for their underachievement, if they felt that they were underachieving.) This discrepancy might suggest a dissatisfaction of some of the 92% who indicated that they had Grade nine under control. They still considered themselves able to access the curriculum for Grade nine. Ten of the eleven Grade nine interviewees displayed awareness of being underachievers.

According to answers to Question 204 language used by the teacher in class is understandable to 81% of the questionnaire respondents. The interviews with the learners however indicated that six of the eleven learner interviewees struggled to understand some of the questions asked by the interviewer and used language with poor vocabulary content. Three of the teachers interviewed indicated that language issues might influence academic achievement. Poor reading skills hampered cognition during examinations when no explanation of questions are allowed or poor spelling sabotages the learners' chances of achievement in languages and other subjects. A fourth teacher indicated that underachievers tend to function in class, but fail during examinations because of poorly developed ability to integrate and reproduce knowledge which might be closely connected to literacy of the learner.

In response to the questionnaires, 44% of the Grade nine learners reported that they did not use a study plan, but succeeded academically; 30% claimed to have a study plan that was effective. 11% of the respondents used a study plan, without success, while the remaining 15% did not use a study plan and reported to be struggling academically.

A discrepancy exists between what was reported about study planning and academic outcome, and what examination results for June 2010 attest to. The respondents indicated that 74% are doing well academically regardless of using a study plan or not, while the examination results suggest a significantly lower success rate. The 26% who reported failure does not correspond to the only 16% of respondents that indicated an average below 40% for the June 2010 examinations. The reason for this trend might be a desire by respondents to seem more in control, organised and mature.

5.4 Examination factors

51% of Grade nine questionnaire respondents reported some fear in the examination room. This corresponds with the five out of eleven learner interviewees that specifically sighted anxiety during examinations as an important factor that hampered their academic achievement.

In reaction to struggling with examinations, 38% of questionnaire respondents reported that they wrote anything and 23% reported that they started thinking of other things. 23% of respondents had a more positive way of creatively adjusting to the strain by going through information in their head or trying to write the most correct answer as suggested under the “other” option for this question.

Only one of 81 respondents reported no negative self-talk before the examinations. The other 80 questionnaire respondents all indicated some form of anxious self-talk before the exam. This was confirmed by five out of the eleven learner interviewees, describing anxious thought patterns prior to the examinations. Two teachers from the different schools also indicated that examination caused anxiety among learners.

In Question 301, 38% of learners indicated feeling calm and in control in the exam room; this is in sharp contrast to 99% of questionnaire respondents that acknowledged their worry over some aspect of the examination before the start.

5.5 Peer factors

The peer group of the Grade nine questionnaire respondents was identified as a significant part of their self definition. 40% indicated that they were always surrounded by friends. This was confirmed by ten out of the eleven learner interviewees who place great value on relationships with peers.

Four of the parents also indicated that peers play a very important role in their Grade nine children’s lives. All the teachers indicated the importance of their peer group for adolescents.

5.6 Parental factors

The questionnaire respondents indicated the importance of their parents' involvement to their academic performance. 37% indicated their parents' belief in their ability to be important, while 33% indicated that encouragement and support by their parents were important, 14% reported that interest in their schoolwork by parents were important, assistance with homework was indicated as important by 10% of respondents, 1% considered regular contact by the parent with the school as important. 5% of questionnaire respondents indicated no involvement from their parents. Parent involvement was mentioned by only one learner interviewee. Four of the five parent interviewees communicated guilt regarding their involvement with their Grade nine underachiever children. They sighted busy work schedules, younger siblings and an inability to assist with schoolwork because of the changed curriculum as reasons for their lack of involvement. Teachers from both schools mentioned the importance of parental involvement in adolescents' achievement.

5.7 Other field factors

Question 401 indicated that 41% of questionnaire respondents experienced interference by siblings when trying to study or do homework. Only 5% of questionnaire respondents indicated that they were only children and 6% did not answer the question. 89% of questionnaire respondents indicated that they had at least one sibling which might influence the respondents' optimal academic achievement. Other field factors that had a negative influence on the questionnaire respondents' homework or study time were: Having nobody to assist them with their homework (22%), chores at home were keeping them from their studies (9%) and 9% indicated not struggling at all with regards to homework.

11% sighted various other stumbling blocks to study like preoccupation with other things, laziness, a loss of interest in schoolwork, procrastination and too many extra-curricular activities. The learner interviewees made little mention of sibling roles or lack

of assistance with homework, but rather focused on school, peer and personal attributes when explaining their underachievement.

5.8 Types of underachievers

All six teacher interviewees identified two types of underachievers. The first type of underachiever was depicted as withdrawing from classroom activities, while the second type's classroom behaviour was more disruptive of nature. The learner interviewees' descriptions of their classroom behaviour suggested that at least seven out of the eleven interviewees could possibly be withdrawers in class, while the other four's description of their classroom behaviour suggested they could possibly be disruptors.

Table 2 summarise the results gathered from qualitative and quantitative data:

Factors that contribute to underachievement	Qualitative data	Quantitative data
Developmental factors	Exam results and teacher interviews elude to the beginning of the formal operational development phase and this is confirmed by primary decision making styles used by learners – diffusion and foreclosure.	Questionnaire respondents indicate a high level of formal operational development and decision makings styles more commonly associated with late adolescence – moratorium and identity achieve .
Personality factors	Learners indicated a fear of ridicule associated with asking for academic assistance. Little distinction existed between the number of learner interviewees who has internal or external loci of control.	Questionnaire respondents indicated less reluctance to ask friends or teachers for help and a greater number claimed to have an internal locus of control.

Academic factors	Learners identified themselves as underachievers and poor organisers of academic matters. The teachers suggested that poor language skills might also be partly to blame for underachievement.	Questionnaire respondents contradicted themselves with regards to their view of their underachievement and indicted academic success without using a specific study plan. They denied problems understanding of language used by teachers
Examination factors	Fear associated with exams reported by learners, but lacking emotional vocabulary made it difficult to pinpoint the extent thereof.	Questionnaire respondents indicated to experience little fear prior to exams, however their description of thought patterns during the exam indicated the presence of anxiety
Peer factors	Learners and teachers suggested the importance of peer relations.	Questionnaire respondents confirmed the importance of their peers.
Parental factors	Parents and teachers suggested that parent involvement influenced the underachievers' ability to improve.	Questionnaire respondents indicated that the presence of younger siblings caused greater challenges with regards to studying.

6. DISCUSSION

The field of adolescents does not only refer to their external field as addressed in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977:513-515), but also attends to the internal field of adolescents that McConville (1995:7) refers to as the intrapsychic. Reynolds and Mortola (2005:159-162) refer to the internal and external field and the contact boundary disturbances that affect the contact made with the other (that which is not me).

The internal and external field of adolescents affect their functioning and the formation of identity and may therefore also have a significant effect on their academic achievement. Stewart (2007:17) uses Bronfenbrenner's theory to suggest an interaction between person and environment with regards to academic achievement.

Internal change as well as changes to the field of adolescents might therefore influence academic achievement. Interviews with Grade nine underachievers, Grade nine learners' parents as well as Grade nine teachers underscored some possible factors that might encourage academic underachievement. The questionnaires that were given to the general population of Grade nine learners also indicated a degree of awareness of academic underachievement.

6.1 Developmental factors

6.1.1 Formal operational cognitive mastery

The Grade nine learners' June 2010 examination results suggest less formal operational cognitive mastery than their questionnaire answers indicate. This is in line with the suggestion that mastery of formal operations is attained at the individual's pace and that does not imply formal operational mastery in all aspects (Kuhn, 2006:65). It has been suggested that the education level of parents, the amount of time spent with their children in activities that stimulate cognitive development (Howe, 2010:70-90), time in interaction with peers around cognitive activities and the importance attributed to cognitive development by a culture will influence the speed of achievement of the formal operational stage (Maynard, 2008:61; Piaget, 2008:43-44).

Two of the teacher interviewees suggested that the processing skills of underachievers might be less developed than those of their achieving counterparts. The teachers commented that: *"Hulle inname is gebrekkig en hulle weergawe is gebrekkig en dan kom hulle deur as onderpresteerders ..."* (Their processing and their reproduction of information are ineffective and that translates into academic underachievement), and *"... ek dink eintlik hy het die vermoë om te kan, want as jy met hom alleen werk in die*

klas en vir hom goed verduidelik ... dan dink ek neem hy tog in en kan hy tog van die goed wat jy vir hom leer weergee.” (I think he has the ability, because when you explain the work to him individually he understands and is able to reproduce some of what you have taught him).

6.1.2 Decision making styles

Marcia focuses on identity development which includes four decision making styles during adolescence and is influenced by two variables: exploration and commitment (Kroger 2007:64). Exploration considers different options while commitment implies the elimination of all but one option. Marcia elaborates on Erikson’s task of identity versus identity confusion. This process of identity formation starts during early adolescence but it is only when society demands decisions during late adolescence that the adolescent eventually makes a decision in areas including careers, beliefs and sexuality (Kroger, 2007:65). The majority of Grade nine questionnaire respondents indicated their decision making style as either the Moratorium or Identity achieved styles (Addendum 5b, Question 203). This suggests that they might be selecting an answer based on what would be considered an appropriate answer and not necessarily according to their true experience. Their motivation might be to seem more mature but might also suggest a lack of awareness to identify what drives them. By focusing on becoming more aware, adolescents may gain a deeper consciousness of what is already internally known by them (Yontef, 1993:7).

6.2 Personality factors

6.2.1 Self-support

Seeking assistance from teachers suggests that the learner interviewees need to have some degree of self-support. Yontef (1993:135, 145) states that self-support encapsulates knowledge of the self and acceptance thereof. Blom (2006:52) suggests that self-support assists in taking responsibility for the self and making choices to help

satisfy needs. The reluctance of academic underachievers to ask for the teacher's assistance, satisfying their need for support might indicate a lack of self-knowledge and acceptance or an unwillingness to take responsibility for the self. The reported reluctance of a number of the learner interviewees to ask the teacher for assistance might be indicative of the measure of self-support available to these learners, as illustrated by the following: *"I'm always scared of what other children think of me, say I'm dumb, laugh at me and stuff. Because when the teacher's explaining, they say: 'I get it, I get it, I get the whole thing, it's easy' and I don't and she just goes on ... and I am thinking if I ask now, they will think of me as a stupid person because of them already getting it and I'm not even close!"* Asked if the learner asked teachers for assistance after class the learner replied: *"I get like shy, like. Sometimes I think of what other people will think of me."* Asking friends for assistance might be an easier option but not without pitfalls as a learner interviewee stated: *"... maybe ask a friend if they could help me, if I go to their house. The problem is they don't know what should be different."*

6.2.2 Locus of control

Often underachievers seem to be motivated externally, unlike most achievers who seem to be motivated internally (Laffoon, Jenkins-Friedman & Tollefson as quoted by Preckel *et al.*, 2006:403). This might explain the discrepancy regarding locus of control. The 20% discrepancy from the interviews to the questionnaires might suggest that the questionnaire respondents aimed to create a more mature picture of themselves, as the learner interviewees were selected specifically with underachievement in mind, while the questionnaire respondents were selected from the general Grade nine population. It is further suggested by Reiss and McCoach (as quoted by McCoach & Siegle, 2003:415) that underachievers share some characteristics, including low perceptions of the academic self, less internal motivation, low self-regulation and inadequate behaviour to support goal achievement.

"Effortful control" as an aspect of emotional regulation is relevant when considering academic achievement. It refers to the ability of concentrating on relevant information by

focusing attention (Iyer, Kochenderfer-Ladd, Eisenberg & Thompson, 2010:363). If “effortful control” is not attained, the adolescent may struggle to disregard unwanted stimuli in favour of what is necessary. This might explain underachievers’ greater tendency to exhibit an external locus of control, favouring irrelevant external stimuli and also keeping the external stimuli responsible for their academic underachievement.

The external locus of control corresponds with the following quotes from Grade nine underachievers:

- “... *would mostly change for my friends to sit somewhere else far away from me ...*”
- “... *I do get marks for stuff, but it’s always the ADD that really messes up my marks.*”
- “*Is my vriende wat praat nie eintlik ek nie, ek praat net so nou en dan ...*” (It’s my friends that are talking, not really me. I just talk now and then).
- “*I just don’t have enough time to study ... I still have some homework to do ... have some extra stuff to do. There’s dancing and I still ...*”

6.2.3 Academic identity

The way in which adolescents portray their academic identity could become part of how they construct their sense of self. Adolescents’ activities and behaviour help define their sense of self; it gives meaning and adds value to their life (Maynard, 2008:57). This might be one of the reasons for the questionnaire respondents’ largely positive view on their own academic identity. By admitting their academic underachievement the sought after “ideal self” (Polster, 2005:27-29) becomes less powerful and the adolescent loses value.

According to Oaklander (2006:5) the strengthening of the sense of self is of great importance for successful functioning. A well developed identity decreases chances of delinquent behaviour among adolescents and also increases the likelihood of academic achievement (Ferrer-Wreder *et al.*, 2008:96). Confidence in their ability to perform enhances adolescents’ likelihood of performing well academically (McCoach & Seigle, 2003:416), thus proving the importance of a well defined identity (Ferrer-Wreder *et al.*, 2008:96).

The perceptions learners have of their ability influence the possibility that they will be able to achieve in future. As this learner's words illustrate: "... *test marks, they don't come out the way I want them to come out and stuff. I fail.*" Another learner interviewee stated: "*I just feel like, like I am stupid, stupid 'cause I can't remember the stuff.*"

A parent commented on her child's perception of himself in class: "... *maybe he will want to be part of the class ... because he is quiet ... ask him something that he doesn't know, he feels like an idiot and next time he won't answer ...*"

These learners' self-images are already influenced by underachievement; more failure causes the self-image to plummet even further. Depression and discouragement are reported by teachers, the underachievers and their parents. One parent reported about his child: "... *he feels he's useless and not clever enough*". A parent interviewee fears her child's reaction to failing Grade nine: "*I think it's my biggest fear that he's gonna fail this year and he's not going to be able to cope with it, ...*" A Grade nine learner reported of teachers' words: "*Dit voel of ek myself wil doodmaak ... omdat hulle bly vir my sê ek gaan drui, drui, drui.*" (It feels like I want to kill myself, because they keep on saying I am going to fail).

Erkman *et al.* (2010:295-296) support the importance of teachers' attitudes on the self-concept of learners stating that when teachers were seen as accepting of learners, the self-concept and also school attitude of learners were more positive.

6.3 Academic factors

6.3.1 Admittance of underachievement

The motivation for the contradictory responses of Questions 106 (My average for the June 2010 exams was:) and 601 (If I underachieved and could give one reason for my academic underachievement it would be:), might possibly indicate a discomfort with admittance of underachievement by respondents of the questionnaire. According to

McCall (1994:15) an academic underachiever is a learner that has a lower average mark than would be suggested by his measured IQ, aptitude and other educational achievement assessments. Therefore more of the questionnaire respondents might consider themselves as underachievers compared to the measured mark of underachievement set at 38,6%.

In contrast with the reluctance of the questionnaire respondents, learner interviewees were fairly candid about their underachievement. Eight of the eleven reported a struggle with concentration in class. One underachiever said: “... *little things will distract me like very little things and then I'll go back again and it says we writing now and then I write and think about it, but it just didn't get in.*” Another said: “... *sometimes I find it hard to concentrate, I have trouble and I start day dreaming.*” Yet another student agrees with this: “... *it actually happens in all the classes even though I enjoy the subjects it still happens. Sometimes I just lose concentration.*”

6.3.2 Language

Contrary to the learners' questionnaire responses that they experienced no problems with the language of instruction, teacher interviewees indicated that language was a struggle, especially a second language or in the case where the language of instruction is a second or third language for the learner. Teachers suggested a struggle with language: “... *dis 'n vreemde taal vir hulle, so culturally gaan hulle onderpresteer want hulle verstaan nie wat die onderwyser vir hulle in die klas sê nie ...*” (It is a strange language for them, so culturally they're going to underachieve, because they don't understand what the teacher is saying to them). Another said: “... *you ask them a question and they will be reluctant to answer ... especially in my subject where the language is their second language.*” Because of problems with the language of instruction or a general struggle with literacy, underachievers often struggle to follow written instructions. A mother tongue Zulu speaker in an English school on the struggle with Afrikaans: “*I got a friend that's in matric here in school that helps me with Afrikaans and I did do well this term with Afrikaans.*” The researcher also observed that some of the learner interviewees used very simplistic language during the interviews.

6.3.3 Study organisation

Questionnaire respondents report not using a plan to organise their studies, but achieving academic success. This might be a presentation of the “Ideal academic self” of the respondents and their wish to seem more in control, organised and mature than is the reality. Polster (2005:27-29) refers to the real self (ideal self) that is seen as the development goal to strive for. This could have an influence on how the questionnaire respondents view their current academic performance and organisation. Also questionnaire respondents might feel ashamed of their lack of planning and resulting academic underachievement. Their responses might reflect an introject of “good students organise well and work hard” and their desire for a different academic outcome. A learner interviewee stated: *“Then I’m next to all the good students, the ones that work.”* Learner interviewees commented on their study methods saying: *“When I study, I sometimes just read and sometimes just write. I don’t know what’s right and what’s wrong. I think I’m studying correctly but it doesn’t look like it though.”* Asked what would need to change for the interviewee to get better marks he replied: *“... to study more and (silence) and have a better way of studying”*. McConville (1995:231) states: “The self projects itself, investing aspects of its environment as extensions of itself.” It might therefore be possible that the majority of the adolescents are not willing to associate themselves with a projection of the self that is unsuccessful.

6.4 Examination factors

6.4.1 Exam anxiety

The ability to perform academically is greatly influenced by the manner in which adolescents experience examinations. Several underachiever interviewees reported feelings of extreme anxiety about the unfamiliar, threatening situation of writing exams. The allocated time limit of examination papers adds pressure to an already stressful situation. According to Preckel *et al.* (2006:407), adolescent underachievers struggle

with higher levels of anxiety, which would explain an inability to reason abstractly in this time pressured situation. Examinations in line with the curriculum for Grade nine are therefore set to a certain level of abstract thinking.

Slow reading tempo and inability to process increase the pressure even further and negative expectation of the outcome of the exam might cause the underachiever to completely freeze, blocking information and preventing recall. Some of the underachievers report the following about examinations:

- *“... I always freeze before I do exams ... exams put a lot of pressure on me, projects it’s all right, it’s like I have time and space to do it ... I’m very slow in working and then I have to rush and I mess up the answers ...”*
- *“projects and assignments I do well in, but I look at my exam marks ... I do get nervous, I just try to have to remember this, I have to remember that and then I forget some stuff ...”*
- *“... sometimes I think I should just finish the exam paper as fast as I can. Think for myself, well what’s that question, what’s that question? Start getting like agitated ... think but I studied that, but I can’t remember it ... I just feel like I am stupid, stupid ...”*

6.4.2 Self-talk prior to exam

The discrepancy between the responses related to feelings about the exam and anxious thoughts prior to the exam might be an indication that the questionnaire respondents are less able to translate their emotions surrounding the exam into words than would be the case with their thoughts. The lack of emotional vocabulary was also evident during the learner interviews. Asked what prevents the learner from asking for a teacher’s assistance, he replies: *“Partykeer het ek nie lus om te gaan vra nie, dan kry ek sommer so ’n snaakse gevoel, maar ek kan nie nou dink nie.”* (Sometimes I am not in the mood to ask, then I get this funny feeling, but I can’t think what now). Asked if daydreaming makes him feel better, a learner says: *“Well I don’t really feel, well, not really better, I just feel in the middle I guess”.*

6.5 Peer factors

When asked to describe the self, questionnaire respondents chose to see themselves surrounded by peers more than anything else. During the interviews the existence of peer pressure at school was confirmed by both learners and teachers. The importance of acceptance by the group was indicated by underachievers from both schools. Evaluation by their peers and the importance of conforming to the peer group norms were important themes. Decisions made within a peer group include desirability of specific peers, hierarchy within the group and membership to a specific sub-group. One of the Grade nine interviewees reported on peer acceptance: *“It’s basically like, they making jokes, they making the class laugh. So now let’s say, they famous about making jokes ... now everyone is talking about them ... how he was back-chatting the teacher ... I think ok, maybe if I try to do the same they will also talk about me like that ...”* The desire to be accepted by the peer group is a very important developmental milestone for adolescents (Newman & Newman, 2001:516) and this might even overshadow the need for academic performance (Neihart, 2006:196-201).

During this process of identity formation the adolescent is subjected to internal and external pressure to change. Furthermore the strong need to be part of a peer group and to be accepted by this group may relegate the importance of academic achievement to the ground. The formation of identity and inclusion in a peer group become the figure, coupled with relationships with previously significant adults (McConville, 1995:60).

6.6 Parental factors

6.6.1 Parental involvement

The involvement of the parents was influenced by their attitude towards their child; what they saw as the role of the school and their own opinion regarding assistance with their

child's schoolwork. Blondal and Adalbjarnardottir (2009:732-733) indicated that authoritative parents (Ek stuur vir jou die artikel van Blondal saam, sal graag jou opinie oor die geldigheid van die eksaminator se evaluasie hiervan wil hê) brought an "emotional content" to their parenting that assisted their children in better academic achievement.. Makgato and Mji (2006:263) also verify that parental involvement in all areas of their child's school life influence their child's academic performance. The parent interviewees introjects regarding assistance to their child, included: *"My parents never sat and did homework with me ... I pay Rxxx per month for my child to get educated at school."* Another parent stated: *"... my role is that, I am paying school fees up to date, providing learning materials, taxi fare every day ... I know that it's not enough I know I also have to facilitate learning at home ... but I play my part."* The parent interviewees sighted long working hours; younger siblings that needed more care and their own limited education levels as aspects that further limited their assistance to their adolescent children. One parent stated: *"I work with clients the whole day, I get home at 5 o'clock. And the last thing I want to do is sit and talk, (learner interviewee's name) have you done your homework ..."*

Parents agreed that the lack of supervision after school decreased their underachieving children's chance at academic improvement. It has been suggested that the education level of parents, the amount of time spent with their children in activities that stimulate cognitive development (Howe, 2010:70-90), time in interaction with peers around cognitive activities and the importance attributed to cognitive development by a culture, influence the speed of achievement of the formal operational stage (Maynard, 2008:61; Piaget, 2008:43-44). One of the teachers observed that: *"... die outjies wat akademies goed doen is die outjies wat uit 'n baie gedissiplineerde huis kom, wat doodgewoon taakgebonde is ..."* (The Grade nines that perform well academically are the ones that come from a disciplined house, they are task focused). This was confirmed by Blondal and Adalbjarnardottir (2009:729), stating that adolescents with authoritative parents stay better on track academically than is the case with authoritarian or permissive parents.

6.6.2 Family composition

Family composition also has a role to play in academic achievement. A number of the learner interviewees as well as questionnaire respondents mentioned younger siblings that make homework and studying a greater challenge. One underachiever referred to her younger sibling, saying: *“By die huis is my broertjie en hy raas as ek moet leer vir die eksamen.”* (At home is my little brother and he makes noise when I want to study for the exam). Divorce, single parenting and blended or reconstituted families also create unique problems for adolescents to navigate and have an impact on the emotional state and the factors already mentioned like supervision and the lack of parental assistance. A parent interviewee from a blended family stated: *“But we are a very big family. I got two big ones and two little ones, so to harp on (learner interviewee name) the whole time ... when the babies need the attention too ... they need it more than the big ones. I’m more here with the little ones.”*

6.7 Other field factors

The reported sibling interference and lack of assistance with studies by questionnaire respondents might be a case of new awareness born from answering the questionnaire. This awareness did not raise a dominant concern during interviews, as only one learner interviewee mentioned a disruptive younger brother. Reluctance of the learner interviewees to implicate their parents as absent or uninvolved and their home environment as inadequate for studying might be reasons for the relative absence of these aspects during the learner interviews. When asked if anything in her environment hampered her academic achievement, a learner interviewee quickly answered: *“Not really ’cause, there’s no trouble at home ...”* The complete absence of any indication of challenging socio-economical circumstances, parental absence or lack of involvement or even complaints about teachers by the learner interviewees might suggest a lack of awareness or unwillingness to share these aspects with a relative stranger (the interviewer).

6.8 Types of underachievers

All the teachers that were interviewed, identified two types of underachievers. The first group tend to withdraw from attention and participation in class and for this study will be referred to as “withdrawers”. The second group are the underachievers with the tendency to disrupt the class and will be referred to as the “disruptors”. Interviews with the underachieving Grade nine learners confirmed the existence of the two types of underachievers. As this quote from a possible disruptor illustrates: *“I always want to fit in, so say if other kids let’s say, are naughty, I want to join them”*. Being asked about asking teachers for help after class, a possible withdrawer answered: *“I get like, shy like. Sometimes I think of what other people will think of me.”*

The personality traits of the underachievers might influence the way that they adjust to their situation, by withdrawing or disrupting. When exploring possible reasons for academic underachievement, the important effect of the field on adolescents’ performance has to be considered.

6.8.1 Withdrawers

According to the teachers’ observations, the withdrawers exhibit some or all of the following characteristics: They tend to hide from attention; are more prone to depression than other learners; have poor reading ability and class work is often not done or copied from an achieving friend. Some withdrawers’ books may be up to date, through the mentioned copying, but poor test and/ or exam results highlight their underachievement.

The teachers observed that socially the withdrawers mainly fall in three categories: the socially disconnected; grouped with other underachievers or affiliated with supporting academically achieving peers. Erkman *et al.* (2010:298) show that skills necessary for academic success also influence the levels of social connectedness experienced by adolescents. Because of their reluctance to interact in class and possible poor self-

image, withdrawers are often the target of ridicule by their peers. Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer and Perry (2003:311) emphasise the effect that ridicule by peers might have on the withdrawers' sense of self and identity formation. One of the teachers observed: *“een seuntjie wat heeltemal, hom heeltemal afsluit van die klas en hy het van die begin van die jaar af ... hy gaan al hoe nader aan die bank. Hoe verder die jaar gaan en hoe verder hy agter raak ...”* (one boy completely closed himself off from the class, is moving lower and lower in his desk as the year progresses. He is falling further behind). The result of withdrawers' natural tendency to stay in the background is their disappearance into the greater peer group.

6.8.2 Disruptors

The teachers reported the disruptors' tendency to draw attention in class. The attention will be focused on either their interests or their strengths and is used to mask their inability to perform academically. The disruptors do not only focus the attention on themselves, but might engage in a power struggle with the teacher by disrupting the class, absenteeism or truancy. Masitsa (2004) sites truancy as one of the aspects that causes underachievement. It was reported by the interviewed teachers that some of the disruptor underachievers, like their withdrawer counterparts might cluster together. These “disruptor clusters” might bully their peers and thereby regain power and social standing which was lost by their inability to achieve academically. One teacher reported: *“as hulle nou onderpresteer ... van hulle is dan bietjie ouer ook ... hulle kry dan 'n magsbasis onder mekaar en dan beweeg hulle saam om die ander te boelie.”* (If they underachieve, some of them are a little older than their class mates, they create a position of power by grouping together and then work together to bully others). Ma, Phelps, Lerner and Lerner (2009:865) confirm the existence of such “power clusters” by stating that underachievers might try to mask their lack of understanding by engaging in bullying behaviour.

7. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

7.1 Limitations of subjects

Even with the anonymity supplied by a questionnaire that does not require identification of the subject, the Grade nine respondents frequently chose the option that might indicate greater maturity rather than the predicted option according to the developmental literature. Some of the respondents might have indicated a true response according to their greater maturation.

The individual interviews with Grade nine underachievers suggested some insight into certain aspects of their academic underachievement, but the significant absence of voluntary discussion of their experience of their home environment and parents, might indicate that similar interviews could be more successful if interviews were preceded by more relationship building opportunities between the interviewee and the researcher.

7.2 Limitations of researcher

The researcher's inexperience at the research process has to be taken into account. A future solution for inexperience is deeper immersion of the researcher into research. Furthermore the therapeutic background of the researcher was a challenge during the interview process. Strain was caused by the constant awareness that information applicable to research was the object of the interviews rather than becoming aware of a client's needs in a therapeutic setting. The researcher's therapeutic mindset also influenced the follow-up questions that were subconsciously at times focused more on therapeutic information rather than research.

7.3 Time limitations

The research process was started towards the end of the academic year with interviews with Grade nine underachievers, Grade nine teachers and parents of Grade nine underachievers. The pressures of transcription and analysis of the interviews in time to develop questionnaires might have caused some of the research information to be overlooked. It was necessary to develop the questionnaire before the Grade nine population, from which the interviewees were selected, changed by leaving school at the end of Grade nine or continuing to Grade ten.

8. CONCLUSION

The research indicated the presence of factors that contributed to underachievement. The contributing aspects to academic underachievement identified by this study were: developmental, personality, academic, examination, peer, parental and other field factors. The following conclusions were reached with regards to the different factors indicated during the research:

- Developmental factors:
 - Grade nine learners might exaggerate or over estimate their intellectual development.
 - Grade nine learners seem to misjudge their ability to make decisions that lead to workable solutions.
- Personality factors:
 - Grade nine learners seem to place equal value on assistance from peers and teachers when struggling with schoolwork.
 - Discrepancies exist between how Grade nine learners reported their locus of control during the interviews and what they indicated in the anonymous questionnaires.
 - Grade nine learners contradict themselves by saying that they consider themselves to be hardworking, while indicating an important reason for their own underachievement to be a lacking work ethic.

- Academic factors:
 - Grade nine learners seem to be unsure if they underachieve or not.
 - Grade nine learners seem to be unable to clearly define the meaning of underachievement and how it applies to each individual.
 - The importance of a study plan seems to have various degrees of significance for Grade nine learners.
- Examination factors:
 - Grade nine learners seem to have various degrees of fear during examinations.
 - A large majority of Grade nine learners experience some form of anxiety before or at the start of examinations.
- Peer factors:
 - Grade nine learners seem to place great value in the opinion of and interaction with their peers.
- Parental factors:
 - Grade nine learners indicated that their parents' involvement with their schooling were important to them.
- Other field factors:
 - Grade nine learners showed some awareness of the influence that field factors had on their academic achievement.
- Types of underachievers:
 - Two types of underachievers were identified by teachers – the withdrawer and the disruptor types of underachievers.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of conclusions reached, the following recommendations might improve the quality and insight of a future study:

The creation of a program whereby Grade nine underachievers might rediscover academic success will not only improve their intellectual sense of self, but will also alleviate anxiety regarding their self-worth.

Underachievers' self-support will be improved by experiencing more academic success, which in turn would create a greater willingness to ask questions during lessons. By reinforcing underachievers' sense of self, they will be more willing to risk peer ridicule.

Furthermore a greater focus on strategies to address exam anxiety and fear will assist underachievers in performing better during tests and exams. This will positively impact their results, which in turn will influence their academic attitude.

Creating opportunities for greater group cohesion among the peer group will lessen peer ridicule and foster an atmosphere of empathy and support.

- Developmental factors:
 - Have a discussion regarding the discrepancies between the “ideal self” and a more realistic view of self before requesting the Grade nine learners to complete questionnaires in order to gain a view less influenced by the “ideal self”.
- Personality factors:
 - Improve the quality of the interview responses from Grade nine underachievers, by the inclusion of trust building exercises prior to interviews.
 - Questionnaire respondents might benefit from a more guided approach, where the researcher work with them through the questionnaire while answering the questionnaire, resulting in more realistic responses.
- Academic factors:
 - Clearly defining underachievement prior to both interviews and completion of the questionnaire might give a clearer guideline to interviewees and questionnaire respondents.
- Examination factors:

- Inclusion of a specific question regarding exam fear and anxiety when interviewing underachieving learners might lead to more focused attention given to this aspect.
- Peer factors:
 - Inclusion of a question that focuses specifically on the role of peers with regards to underachievement, to probe the peer involvement in academic underachievement more than during this study.
- Parental factors:
 - Creation of an opportunity to interview learners and parents together after separate interviews for clarification and to give the researcher an opportunity to observe the parent/ learner interaction and gain a greater understanding of the home and parent/ child dynamic.
- Other field factors:
 - Inclusion of a question regarding field factors like socio-economic status and living conditions in both interview and questionnaire settings to verify the teacher interviewees' observations regarding these factors' influence on academic underachievement.
- Types of underachievers:
 - Explanation of the types of underachievers to learner interviewees and asking them to identify their in-class underachievement type to verify learner interviewees' underachievement type rather than using only observations from the researcher.

In conclusion this study investigated factors that could influence the academic achievement of Grade nine learners. Academic underachievement was influenced by peer acceptance, parental involvement, cognitive development, the ability to handle exam anxiety, Grade nine learners' perception of academic identity and other factors. It was aimed at exploring and describing factors that might encumber Grade nine learners' experience of academic success. The long term goal is to stimulate action plans for addressing these barriers and enhance academic achievement of future Grade nine learners and learners in general.

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SECTION C:

SUMMARY, EVALUATION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

This section of the research aims to summarise the results of this research study. Furthermore it reflects the successful achievement of goals and objectives of the research. Overall conclusions and resulting recommendations conclude this segment.

2. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

Academic underachievement not only has an effect on the accessibility of optimum career choices (Bronfenbrenner, McClelland, Wethington, Moen & Ceci in Johnson, McGue & Iacono, 2006:514), but also impacts adolescents' decisions to drop out of school (Ngai, Cheung & Ngai, 2007:382). This makes the investigation of factors that might play a role in academic underachievement a necessary field of research.

South Africa faces the challenge of significant numbers of unemployed (De Kiewiet & Campbell, 2008:78-79). Higher education levels might help in addressing this problem (Roux, 2008:58-61). The effect of academic underachievement on school dropout and the problems it causes for later employment might be addressed by putting preventative measures, for example academic intervention programs, in place.

The research process commenced by first doing a literature study with the focus on development theories, both classic and contemporary, as well as Gestalt theories. Classic development theorists included Bronfenbrenner, Piaget and Erikson. Gestalt theory formed the foundation for the research. Grade nine learners and their underachievement were the focus of the study, because of the significance of Grade nine when subject choices and subsequent career choices are considered. For this study underachievement was defined as the inability to reach an average of 38,6%

across all subjects for the June 2010 examination. Learners from the two schools that have been classified as underachieving according to the mentioned definition, were selected. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with these learners, some of their teachers and parents. The information obtained from these sources on possible contributing factors to underachievement was then used to develop a questionnaire for a wider population of Grade nine learners. The questionnaire was distributed to learners from the two schools. The questionnaire respondents were selected by using cluster sampling.

The findings of the questionnaire were compared to the information that was obtained from the semi-structured interviews with underachievers, teachers and parents, as well as findings from literature on the subject. Finally conclusions were drawn from the data obtained during the research process. Recommendations regarding the enhancement of future research were made.

3. EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH

Goal and objectives of the study

The goal of this study was to investigate the factors that contributed to the academic underachievement of Grade nine learners. This goal was achieved by the following objectives:

- A literature overview of developmental theories, underachievement and Gestalt theory was compiled by studying books focusing on developmental theories related to the specific developmental phase of Grade nine learners. Academic journals incorporating the classic developmental theorists, like Bronfenbrenner, Erikson and Piaget, emphasised the relevance their theories still have today and the integration thereof with contemporary developmental theorists. Using Gestalt developmental theories caused classic and contemporary theories to successfully converge with each other. Development includes various different

aspects of adolescents' changing internal and external fields and are therefore very relevant when researching academic underachievement;

- Interviews were conducted with eleven Grade nine underachievers selected from two schools. Three Grade nine teachers from each school and five parents were interviewed; most of the learner interviewees' parents were not available for interviews;
- After transcription of the interviews, the transcriptions were analysed for ideas relating to academic underachievement; overarching themes emerged;
- After a questionnaire was developed using the themes described above, it was tested during a pilot study using ten Grade nine learners from a third school;
- Questionnaires were distributed during registration period to the register classes of Grade nine learners that were identified through cluster sampling. This was done at both schools involved in the research;
- Answers given by questionnaire respondents were collated and substantiated with information given by learner, teacher and parent interviewees;
- Conclusions and recommendations were made to Grade nine learners, their parents and teachers regarding developmental, personality, academic, examination, peer, parental and other field factors and suggesting strategies which might result in improved academic performance.

4. SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this study was to investigate factors that contribute to academic underachievement among Grade nine learners. Various factors were identified which include developmental, personality, academic, examination, peer, parental and other field factors.

The Grade nine learners displayed various combinations of the above mentioned factors. Great importance was placed on the way their answers would depict their intellectual ability and level of development. The respondents might not have been purposefully lying; this rather conveys how adolescents view themselves or how they

see their “ideal self”. At this stage adolescents are contemplating their identity and worth; the realisation of intellectual inadequacy would therefore be devastating.

The self-support Grade nine learners displayed appears to influence the learners’ ability to ask teachers for assistance, which might affect their academic achievement. The importance of positive regard by peers and fear of ridicule might play a significant role in asking for assistance. Contradiction in how Grade nine learners view their academic self suggests a struggle between what they know to be true and how society prescribe that Grade nine learners should perform academically.

Grade nine learners’ concept of academic underachievement influenced the way they reported on the matter. This confusion might lead them to a false sense of achievement. This however is dependent on Grade nine learners’ view of academic achievement and the importance thereof to themselves.

The majority of Grade nine learners reported some degree of examination anxiety or fear. The inability to deal with this strain might cause Grade nine learners to underachieve academically.

Peer relationships influence Grade nine learners significantly. Their desire to be accepted and fit into the group might be the motivation for learners to misbehave in class. Fear of rejection might inhibit learners to seek assistance from teachers during lessons. The greater developmental desire for acceptance into the peer group and the ever changing typography of adolescent peer relationships might cause academic achievement to take a back seat to action necessary to gain peer acceptance and interaction with the peer group.

The strain on families because of economic and other reasons influence Grade nine learners’ ability to perform academically. Family composition (single parent, blended families and households after divorce and other configurations) appears to influence the extent to which the parents were involved with their Grade nine underachiever. The lack

of or an insufficient support system at home seems to add additional stumbling blocks to already struggling Grade nine learners.

Reluctance from Grade nine learners to indicate poor socio-economical circumstances or home-environment as a reason for academic underachievement might suggest possible denial of circumstances, shame or loyalty towards their parents.

Two types of underachievers were identified. The withdrawers tried to prevent the teacher from noticing their academic inability by being completely undemanding, while the disruptors refocused attention on their negative behaviour rather than being unmasked as academically inept. Peer influence might play a role in both of the underachievement types. The disruptors tend to perform to the crowd and thereby gain acceptance from the peer group. The withdrawers, because of their fear of rejection by the peer group aim to interact as little as possible during lessons and in doing so mask their academic ineptitude.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The creation of a program whereby Grade nine underachievers might rediscover academic success will not only improve their intellectual sense of self, but will also alleviate anxiety regarding their self-worth.

Underachievers' self-support will be improved by experiencing more academic success, which in turn would create a greater willingness to ask questions during lessons. By reinforcing underachievers' sense of self, they will be more willing to risk peer ridicule.

Furthermore a greater focus on strategies to address exam anxiety and fear will assist underachievers in performing better during tests and exams. This will positively impact their results, which in turn will influence their academic attitude.

Creating opportunities for greater group cohesion among the peer group will lessen peer ridicule and foster an atmosphere of empathy and support.

6. SUMMARY STATEMENT

While working as teacher and guidance counsellor, the researcher became aware of the uniqueness of all learners and their struggle to develop greater identity autonomy during adolescence. One learner struggled to complete Grade nine successfully, but was extremely creative and artistic. Because of her academic struggle she had a poor sense of self. Being emotionally underdeveloped compared to her peer group made her interaction with the peer group awkward and often unsuccessful. Her inability far overshadowed her superior creativity and artistry. This Grade nine learner's story is a universal story and was repeated often during the researcher's teaching career. Building a stronger sense of self among adolescents became one of the researcher's main focuses. Finding practical ways to improve adolescents' sense of self became the aim.

Academic success is one important avenue for improvement of the sense of self. By discovering contributing factors to academic underachievement, specific programs to address academic underachievement may prove a practical way to strengthen adolescents' sense of self. Using these programs as a vehicle not only to address academic matters, but also to touch on other aspects of adolescent development would be a future goal. This research may be a first step towards the development of such programs and the unearthing of untapped potential.

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SECTION D: ADDENDA

COVER LETTER

TRANSFER FROM UNISA TO NWU

At the end of 2010 the Masters degree in Play Therapy presented by the Institute for Child, Youth and Family Studies changed academic partners. Initially the Institute was affiliated with Unisa. During this affiliation with Unisa the researcher obtained permission to undertake this dissertation. All documentation regarding permission from the different parties involved in research therefore refers to Unisa and the degree MDiac in Play Therapy. An agreement was reached with NWU which validates the use of the mentioned documentation.

Addendum 1: Ethical approval

ETIEKKOMITEE-AANSOEKVORM INSTITUTE FOR CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY STUDIES

HUGUENOT COLLEGE

30 Augustus 2010

Aansoek by die Huguenote Kollege Navorsingspaneel om klaring van nuwe/hersiene navorsingsprojekte

Naam: Prof/Dr/Mnr/Me: Ms Riza Marí Uys

Posisie/Professionele Status:

Affiliatie: Navorsingsprogram/Instelling: MDiac Play Therapy Huguenot College

Telefoon- en uitbreidingsnommer. **Kode:** 044 **nr.** 879 1815

Faks: **Kode:** 044 **nr.** 879 1815

E-posadres: ysblou@yahoo.com

Titel van navorsingsprojek: (Moenie afkortings gebruik nie)

Investigating the factors that contribute to the academic underachievement of Grade nine learners.

Waar sal die navorsing uitgevoer word?

Western Cape, specifically George and surrounding areas.

Al die volgende afdelings moet voltooi word (Merk (✓) asseblief alle tersaaklike blokkies waar van toepassing)

1. BEFONDSING VAN DIE NAVORSING: Hoe sal die navorsing befonds word?

Student will fund the project.

2. DOEL VAN DIE NAVORSING:

The goal of this study is to investigate the factors that contribute to the academic underachievement of Grade nine learners.

3. OOGMERKE EN DOELWITTE VAN DIE NAVORSING: (*Lys asseblief alle doelwitte*)

- To conduct a literature review on developmental theories, underachievement and Gestalt theory;
- To follow a combined research approach during which semi-structured interviews (qualitative) with Grade nine learners, their parents and teachers will be conducted in order to gain in depth data on possible factors contributing to underachievement;
- To analyse qualitative data by grouping evidence and labelling ideas to reflect progressively broader perspectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:132);
- To develop a questionnaire (quantitative) based on the literature study and interviews and test it by means of a pilot study (cf. Neuman, 2003:181;) in order to determine whether the questionnaire will be clear, reliable and valid when administered to a group;
- To distribute questionnaires (quantitative) to Grade nine learners as part of methodological triangulation and support to the semi-structured interviews;
- To analyse the data by using the relevant statistical test to address the type of questions asked (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:131);
- To come to conclusions and make recommendations to Grade nine learners, their parents and educators.

4. OPSOMMING VAN DIE NAVORSING (*gee 'n beknopte beskrywing van die navorsingsplan – hoogstens 200 woorde*)

Erikson, Piaget, Bronfenbrenner and others will be the focus of the development component of the literature study on the underachievement of Grade nines. All the information will be viewed from a Gestalt perspective.

By using the qualitative-quantitative mixed method approach, semi-structured interviews (qualitative) will be done with Grade nine underachievers

selected by using purposive sampling. The interviews will explore possible factors that might lead to underachievement. The information gained will be used to compile a questionnaire (quantitative) that will be tested during a pilot study. By using cluster sampling the questionnaire will then be distributed among the Grade nine learners preparing to make subject choices. Triangulation by using the mixed method will improve the trustworthiness, reliability and validity of the study. Parents and teachers of selected underachievers will also be interviewed. The universe of this study is all Grade nine learners who will be making subject choices in the Western Cape, their teachers and parents. The population will be Grade nine learners who will be making subject choices from two schools in and around George, their parents and teachers. For qualitative analysis coding data, division of text into smaller bundles and naming each will be done. For the quantitative data a numerical value will be given to each written response, unusable data will be taken out of the process and acquired variables will be created (cf. Creswell & Plano Clark 2007:130). Exploration, examination of data to come to broad conclusions and reading through data while making notes and familiarising oneself with the data base will follow (cf. Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:130).

The findings of this study will hopefully contribute to further studies aimed at the creation of intervention programs to assist in addressing these aspects of underachievement.

5. AARD EN VEREISTES VAN DIE NAVORSING

5.1 Hoe word die navorsing gekarakteriseer? (*Merk (✓) asseblief ALLE toepaslike blokkies*)

5.1.1 Persoonlike en sosiale inligting direk van deelnemers/proefpersone verkry	X
5.1.2 Deelnemers/proefpersone word liggaamlik ondersoek	

5.1.3 Deelnemers/proefpersone word psigometries getoets
5.1.4 Identifiseerbare inligting oor persone word uit beskikbare rekords verkry
5.1.5 Anonieme inligting word uit beskikbare rekords verkry
5.1.6 Literatuur, dokumente of argiefmateriaal oor individue/groepe word ingesamel

5.2 Deelnemer/Proefpersoon-inligtingsblad aangeheg? (*vir geskrewe en mondelinge instemming*)

JA	X
NEE	

5.3 Vorm vir Ingeligte Inwilliging aangeheg? (*vir geskrewe instemming*)

JA	X
NEE	

5.3.1 Indien ingeligte inwilliging onnodig is, meld waarom nie:

5.4 Sal u van enigeen van bogenoemde meetmiddels gebruik maak in die navorsing?

JA	X
NEE	

6 DEELNEMERS/PROEFPERSONE IN DIE STUDIE

6.1 Indien mense bestudeer word, meld waar hulle uitgekies word: They will be selected from two high schools in George or surrounding area (Western Cape).

6.2 Merk (✓) asseblief die toepaslike blokkies:

Deelnemers/Proefpersone sal:	JA	NEE
gevra word om vrywillig deel te neem	X	
uitgesoek word	X	

6.2.1 Meld hoe die deelnemers/proefpersone uitgesoek sal word, en wie sal as vrywilligers deelneem: The prospective participant will be selected, but thereafter will have a choice to participate or not.

6.3 Is die deelnemers/proefpersone ondergeskik aan die persoon wat die werwing doen?

JA	
NEE	X

6.3.1 Indien JA, regverdig die keuse van ondergeskikte proefpersone:

6.4 Sal kontroledeelnemers/proefpersone gebruik word?

JA	
NEE	X

6.4.1 Indien JA, verduidelik hoe hulle gekies sal word:

6.5 Watter rekords, indien enige, gebruik sal word, en hoe sal hulle gekies word?

6.6 Wat is die ouderdomsomvang van die deelnemers/proefpersone in die studie? The participants will be Grade nine learners between the ages of 14 and 15, their parents and teachers.

6.6.1 Is inwilliging vir voogde/toestemming vir deelnemers/proefpersone verkry?

JA	X
NEE	

Indien JA, heg asseblief die toepaslike vorms aan.

6.6.2 Indien NEE, meld asseblief waarom:

6.7 Sal deelneming of nie-deelneming die deelnemers/proefpersone enigsins benadeel?

JA	
NEE	X

6.7.1 Indien JA, verduidelik asseblief hoe:

6.8 Sal die navorsing die deelnemers/proefpersone op enige manier direk bevoordeel?

JA	
NEE	X

6.8.1 Indien JA, verduidelik asseblief hoe:

7. PROSEDURES

7.1 Merk (✓) die navorsingsprosedure(s) wat gebruik sal word:

Literatuur	
Dokumentêr	
Persoonlike rekords	
Onderhoude	X
Opname	X
Deelnemer-waarneming	
Ander (spesifiseer asseblief) _____	

7.2 Hoe sal die data bewaar word?

The data will be stored in a lockable cabinet at the researcher's home and only the researcher will have a key.

7.3 Indien 'n onderhoudsvorm/skedule; vraelys of waarnemingskedule/raamwerk gebruik sal word, is dit hierby aangeheg?

JA	X
NEE	

7.4 Risiko's van die prosedure(s): Deelnemers/proefpersone sal/kan miskien van die volgende ondergaan:

Geen risiko	
Ongemaklikheid	X
Pyn	
Moontlike komplikasies	
Vervolging	
Stigmatisering	
Negatiewe etikettering	
Ander (spesifiseer asseblief)	

7.4.1 Indien u enige van bogenoemde gemerk (✓) het, behalwe 'geen risiko', verskaf besonderhede asseblief:

The Grade nine underachievers might feel slight discomfort at discussing their poor academic performance with the interviewer.

8. NAVORSINGSDUUR

(a) Wanneer sal die navorsing begin?

The research will start at the end of September 2010.

(b) Ongeveer hoe lank sal die navorsing duur?

The empirical research will take approximately two months to complete.

9. ALGEMEEN

9.1 Is toestemming van die toepaslike owerheid/owerhede verkry?

JA	X
NEE	

9.1.1 Indien JA, meld die naam/name van die owerheid/owerhede:

Department of Education – Western Cape.

9.2 Vertroulikheid: Hoe sal vertroulikheid gehandhaaf word om te verseker dat deelnemers/proefpersone/pasiënte/kontrolepersone nie geïdentifiseer kan word deur persone wat nie by die navorsing betrokke is nie?

Confidentiality will be addressed using coding instead of names on any records used. In the report the participants will also be referred to according to the coding system used on other records.

9.3 Resultate: Aan wie sal die resultate beskikbaar gestel word, en hoe sal die bevindinge aan die navorsingsdeelnemers meegedeel word? Finale verhandeling

9.4 Onkoste sal gely word deur:

deelnemer/proefpersoon	
Instelling	
Ander (spesifiseer asseblief) Student	X

9.4.1 Verduidelik enige van bogenoemde wat $\checkmark$ gemerk is:

The student will pay for anything that is needed to complete the research project.

9.5 Navorsingsvoorstel/protokol hierby aangeheg?

JA	X
NEE	

9.6 Enige ander inligting wat vir die Komitee van waarde sal wees, moet hier verskaf word:

Geen

Datum:

Aansoeker se handtekening:



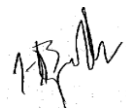
Riza Mari Uys

Wie sal toesig hou oor die projek?

Naam: Dr HB Grobler **Program/Instelling/Departement:** Speltherapie

Datum: 30/08/2010

Handtekening:



Direkteur/Hoof/Navorsingskoördineerder van Departement/Instelling waar die navorsing uitgevoer sal word:

Naam: Dr Retha Bloem

Datum: 30/08/2010

Handtekening:



Addendum 2: Consent for participation in research

Addendum 2a

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

INVESTIGATING THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT OF GRADE NINE LEARNERS: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

You are asked to consent to participation of _____
School in a research study conducted by Riza Uys – Honours Psychology, from the
Institute for Youth, Child and Family Studies at Huguenot College. The results of this
research study would form part of her MDiac Play Therapy dissertation.
_____ School was selected as
possible participants in this study because of its geographical position in the Western
Cape, specifically George.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is designed to investigate what factors play a role in academic
underachievement and focus specifically on Grade nine learners.

2. PROCEDURES

If you consent to participation of _____ School in this
study, you will have the right to read through the interview questions before it is given to
the parties involved.

As Department of Education you will be asked to permit the researcher to:

- See the results of the **Grade nine learners** of the school for the May/ June 2010 exams. From these schedules specific learners (between five and ten) will then be selected that scored an average of 38% or less for mentioned exams. Face to face individual interviews, consisting of five questions will be conducted. The 30

minute interviews will be conducted at school at a time convenient for all parties involved. The questions the researcher will ask the learners to answer will be about their experience of Grade nine, school and their exam results. The interview will be recorded to enable the researcher to make notes after the interview. The names of the learners will only be used during the initial selection process, thereafter a coding system will be used for identification purposes. The participants will be able to choose the order of the questions.

- Interview the **Grade nine teachers** individually. Face to face individual interviews, consisting of five questions, will be conducted. The 30 minute interviews will be conducted at school at a time convenient for all parties involved. The questions the researcher will ask the teachers will focus on their experience as a Grade nine teacher, their observations on achievement and underachievement of the Grade nine learners in their classes. The interview will be recorded to enable the researcher to make notes after the interview. The names of the teachers will be substituted with a coding system for identification. The participants will be able to choose the order of the questions.
- Make contact with the **parents of the Grade nine learners involved in the interviews**. Face to face individual interviews, consisting of five questions will be conducted. The 30 minute interviews will be conducted at school at a time convenient for all parties involved. The questions the researcher will ask the parents will focus on their experience as the parent of a Grade nine learner, their observations on achievement and underachievement of their child. The interview will be recorded to enable the researcher to make notes after the interview. The names of the parents will be substituted with a coding system for identification. The participants will be able to choose the order of the questions.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

All efforts will be made by the researcher to put the correct procedures in place, thereby minimising risk to the school, learners, teachers and parents.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/ OR TO SOCIETY

The information gathered through this process will enable the researcher in future to develop solutions to assist struggling Grade nine learners to achieve their academic goals.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

The interviews will be completely voluntary and no payment will be made for participating in the research.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is gathered in connection with this study and that can be connected to the school, learners, teachers or parents will remain confidential and will be given to anyone only with the participant's permission or as the law states. Confidentiality will be kept by using codes instead of names on both the interview schedule and the video recording of the interview. The information will be kept in a lockable cabinet and only the interviewer will have a key.

The only other person that would have access to either the recording or the notes is the researcher's supervisor, employed by Huguenot College, who is helping to improve the researcher's research skills. The recording will be destroyed after completion of the study.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to allow the school to participate in this study. If you give permission for the school to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. The investigator may withdraw the school from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact Riza Uys on 072 366 7750.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights of remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Dr Herman Grobler at the Institute for Child, Youth and Family Studies, Huguenot College.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to _____ official of the Department of Education by Riza Uys in English and the official of the Department of Education is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to the participant. The official of the Department of Education was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to his/ her satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntary to the participation of _____ School in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participating School

Name of Official – Department of Education

Position held at Department

Signature of Official – Department of Education

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____. He/ she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Addendum 2b

HUGUENOT COLLEGE

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

INVESTIGATING THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT OF GRADE NINE LEARNERS: SCHOOL PRINCIPAL.

You as principal are asked to consent to the participation of your school _____ in a research study conducted by Riza Uys from the Institute for Youth, Child and Family Studies at Huguenot College. The results of this research study would form part of her MDiac Play Therapy dissertation. Your school was selected as possible participants in this study because of its geographical position in the Western Cape, specifically George.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is designed to investigate what factors play a role in academic underachievement and focus specifically on Grade nine learners.

2. PROCEDURES

If you consent to participation of your school in this study, you will have the right to read through the interview questions before it is given to the parties involved.

As principal you will be asked to permit the researcher to:

- See the results of the **Grade nine learners** of your school for the May/June 2010 examinations. From these schedules specific learners will then be selected that scored an average of 38% or less for mentioned exams. Face to face individual interviews, consisting of a few questions will be conducted. The 30 minute interviews will be conducted at school at a time convenient for all parties involved. The questions the researcher will ask the learners to answer will be about their experience of Grade nine, school and their underachievement. The

interview will be recorded to enable the researcher to make notes after the interview. The names of the learners will only be used during the initial selection process. Thereafter a coding system will be used for identification purposes.

After completion of the face to face individual interviews all Grade nine learners, depending on the number of Grade nine learners in the school, will be asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire based on the findings of the questions asked during the semi-structured interviews.

- Interview the **Grade nine teachers** individually. Face to face individual interviews, consisting of a few questions, will be conducted. The 30 minute interviews will be conducted at school at a time convenient for the school and the participant. The questions the researcher will ask the teachers will focus on their experience as a Grade nine teacher, their observations on underachievement of the Grade nine learners in their classes. The interview will be recorded to enable the researcher to make notes after the interview. The names of the teachers will be substituted with a coding system for identification.
- Make contact with the **parents of the Grade nine learners involved in the interviews**. Face to face individual interviews, consisting of a few questions will be conducted with the parents. The 30 minute interviews will be conducted at school at a time convenient for all parties involved. The questions the researcher will ask the parents will focus on their experience as the parent of a Grade nine learner and their observations on underachievement of their child. The interview will be recorded to enable the researcher to make notes after the interview. The names of the parents will be substituted with a coding system for identification.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

All efforts will be made by the researcher to put the correct procedures in place, thereby minimising risk to the school, learners, teachers and parents.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/ OR TO SOCIETY

The information gathered through this process will enable the researcher in future to assist struggling Grade nine learners to achieve their academic goals.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

The interviews will be completely voluntary and no payment will be made for participating in the research.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is gathered in connection with this study and that can be connected to the school, learners, teachers or parents will remain confidential and will be given to anyone only with the participants' permission or as the law states. Confidentiality will be kept by using codes instead of names on both the interview schedule and the video recording of the interview. The information will be kept in a lockable cabinet and only the interviewer will have a key.

The only other person that would have access to either the recording or the notes is the researcher's supervisor, employed by Huguenot College, and possibly the external examiners. The recording will be destroyed after successful completion of the research.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to allow your school to participate in this study. If you give permission for your school to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. The investigator may withdraw your school from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Riza Uys on 072 366 7750.

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL OF THE SCHOOL OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to _____ principal of _____ by Riza Uys in English and the principal of the participating school is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to the participant. The principal of the participating school was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to his/her satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntary to participate of _____ School in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participating School

Name of Principal

Signature of Principal

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____. He/ she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Addendum 2c

HUGUENOT COLLEGE

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

INVESTIGATING THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT OF GRADE NINE LEARNERS: PARENTS OF GRADE NINE LEARNERS – INTERVIEWS.

You are asked to allow your child to participate in a research study conducted by Riza Uys from the Institute for Youth, Child and Family Studies at Huguenot College. The results of this research study would form part of her MDiac Play Therapy dissertation. Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because of his/her exam results for the May/June 2010 exam. You as parent are also requested to take part in an interview.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is designed to investigate which factors play a role in academic underachievement and focus specifically on Grade nine learners.

2. PROCEDURES

If you allow your child to participate in this study, we would ask your child to do the following things:

- Your child will be asked to do a face to face interview with the researcher where he/she will be asked a few questions. While busy with the interview the researcher will need to video record the interview, to help the researcher to make notes afterwards of what was said. Your child's name will not be used on the interview schedule (form used to make notes during the interview) or on the video recording.

The interview will last 30 minutes and the questions your child will be asked to answer will be about his/her experience of Grade nine, school and how he/she

feel about his/her marks. We will decide on a time that will be agreeable for all parties involved. The researcher will conduct one interview.

- You as parent will be asked to do a face to face interview with the researcher where you will be asked questions. This interview will also be recorded for later record as above. Your name will not be used on the interview schedule (form used to make notes during the interview) or on the video recording. The researcher will give you the questions before the start of the interview and you will be allowed to answer the questions in any order.

The interview will last 30 minutes and the questions you will be asked to answer will relate to your experience as the parent of a Grade nine learner and your views on the achievement of your child. The interview will be conducted at school at a time convenient for all. The researcher will conduct one interview.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Talking about your child's underachievement might be uncomfortable. Remember though that you are an expert and will help the researcher to answer questions about Grade nines and will gain insight through your observations of your child.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This interview might impact your life very little, but would help in the future to develop possible solutions to help struggling Grade nine learners to achieve their academic goals.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

This interview will be completely voluntary and no payment will be made for participating in the research.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is gathered in connection with this study and that can be connected to you or your child will remain confidential and will be given to anyone only with your

permission or as the law states. Confidentiality will be kept by using codes instead of names on both the interview schedule and the video recording of the interview. The information will be kept in a lockable cabinet and only the interviewer will have a key.

The only other person that would have access to either the recording or the notes is the researcher's supervisor, employed by Huguenot College, and possibly the external examiners.

The recording will be destroyed after successful completion of the study.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study and allow your child to participate, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

Questions or concerns will be addressed by Riza Uys when she contacts you, after you have received this communication.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights of remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Dr Herman Grobler at the Institute for Child, Youth and Family Studies, Huguenot College.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to _____ by Riza Uys in English and the participant is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to the participant. The participant was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to his/her satisfaction.

CIRCLE APPLICABLE ANSWER.

I hereby consent that my child may participate in this study. **YES / NO**

I consent to voluntary participate in this study. **YES / NO**

I will be given a copy of this form at the interview.

Name of Parent/ Guardian

Name of Learner

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____. He/ she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Addendum 2d

HUGUENOT COLLEGE

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

INVESTIGATING THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT OF GRADE NINE LEARNERS: GRADE NINE TEACHERS.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Riza Uys from the Institute for Youth, Child and Family Studies at Huguenot College. The results of this research study would form part of her MDiac Play Therapy dissertation. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a Grade nine teacher.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is designed to investigate which factors play a role in academic underachievement and focus specifically on Grade nine learners.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

You will be asked to do a face to face interview with the researcher where you will be asked a few questions. While busy with the interview the researcher will need to video record what is said, to help her to make notes after the interview. Your name will not be used on the interview schedule (form used to make notes during the interview) or on the video recording.

The interview will last 30 minutes and the questions the researcher will ask will be about your experience as a Grade nine teacher, your observation of underachievement of the Grade nine learners in your class. The interview will be conducted at the school. The interview will be scheduled at a convenient time for all parties involved. The researcher will conduct one interview.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Talking about learners that underachieve might feel slightly uncomfortable. Remember though that you are an expert and will help the researcher to answer questions about Grade nines and will gain insight through your observation of Grade nines in class.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/ OR TO SOCIETY

This interview might impact your life very little, but would help in future to develop solutions to help struggling Grade nine learners to achieve their academic goals.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

This interview will be completely voluntary and no payment will be made for participating in the research.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is gathered in connection with this study and that can be connected to you will remain confidential and will be given to anyone only with your permission or as the law states. Confidentiality will be kept by using codes instead of names on both the interview schedule and the video recording of the interview. The information will be kept in a lockable cabinet and only the interviewer will have a key.

The only other person that would have access to either the recording or the notes is the researcher's supervisor, employed by Huguenot College, and possibly the external examiners.

You are allowed to request the editing of a part of the interview video. The recording will be destroyed after successful completion of the research.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The

investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Riza Uys when she visits your school.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights of remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Dr Herman Grobler at the Institute for Child, Youth and Family Studies, Huguenot College.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to _____ by Riza Uys in English and the participant is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to the participant. The participant was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to his/her satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntary to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____. He/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Addendum 2e

HUGUENOT COLLEGE

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

INVESTIGATING THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT OF GRADE NINE LEARNERS: GRADE NINE LEARNERS.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Riza Uys from the Institute for Youth, Child and Family Studies at Huguenot College. The results of this research study would form part of her MDiac Play Therapy dissertation. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because your average mark for the June 2010 examinations is a concern, at less than 38%.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is designed to investigate which factors play a role in academic underachievement and focus specifically on Grade nine learners.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

You will be asked to do a face to face interview with me where I will ask you questions. While we are busy with the interview I will need to video record what we say, to help me to make notes after the interview. Your name will not be used on the interview schedule (form used to make notes during the interview) or on the video recording.

The interview will last 30 minutes and the questions I will ask you to answer will be about your experience of Grade nine, school and how you feel about your marks. We will schedule a time when I will come to school and interview you. We will decide on a time that will be agreeable for the school, your parents and for you. I will do one interview with you.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Some of the questions about your academic achievement might feel a little uncomfortable to answer. Remember though that you are the expert being in Grade nine and will help me to answer questions about Grade nines, the way school is for Grade nines and the difficulties that Grade nines have.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This interview might change your life very little, but will help me in future to come up with solutions to help struggling Grade nine learners to achieve their academic goals.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

This interview will be completely voluntary and I will not be paying you for participating in the research.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is gathered in connection with this study and that can be connected to you will remain confidential and will be given to anyone only with your permission or as the law states. Confidentiality will be kept by using codes instead of names on both the interview schedule and the video recording of the interview. The information will be kept in a lockable cabinet and only the interviewer will have a key.

The only other person that would be allowed to see either the recording or the notes is my supervisor that works at Huguenot College and possibly the external examiners of my research dissertation.

You are allowed to ask me not to use certain parts of the video recording. The recording will be destroyed after the research has been completed successfully.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without punishment of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The

investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact Riza Uys at 072 366 7750.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights of remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Dr Herman Grobler at the Institute for Child, Youth and Family Studies, Huguenot College.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to _____ by Riza Uys in English and the participant is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to him/her. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntary to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ and or his/her representative _____. He/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Addendum 2f

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

INVESTIGATING THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT OF GRADE NINE LEARNERS: PARENTS OF GRADE NINE LEARNERS – QUESTIONNAIRES.

You are asked to allow your child to participate in a research study conducted by Riza Uys from the Institute for Child, Youth and Family Studies at Huguenot College (Unisa). The results of this research study would form part of her MDiac Play Therapy dissertation.

Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because he /she is a Grade nine learner.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is designed to investigate what factors play a role in academic underachievement and focus specifically on Grade nine learners.

2. PROCEDURES

If you allow your child to participate in this study, we would ask your child to do the following:

- Your child will be asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire about his/her experience of Grade nine, school in general and how he/she feels about his/her marks. The questionnaire will be completed during school hours as arranged with the principal of the school.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The fact that the questionnaire is anonymous will assist in removing the possible risk of discomfort for your child.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The outcome of the questionnaire might help in the future to develop possible solutions to help struggling Grade nine learners to achieve their academic goals.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

This questionnaire will be completely voluntary and no payment will be made for participating in the research.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is gathered in connection with this study and that can be connected to you or your child will remain confidential and will be given to anyone only with your permission or as the law states. Confidentiality is further improved by using anonymous questionnaires.

The only other person that would have access to the questionnaires is the researcher's supervisor, employed by Huguenot College and possibly the external examiners.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to allow your child to participate in this study or not. If you allow your child to participate, you may withdraw him/her at any time without consequences of any kind. The investigator may withdraw your child from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact Riza Uys at 072 366 7750.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a

research subject, contact Dr Herman Grobler at the Institute for Child, Youth and Family Studies, Huguenot College, 021 873 1181.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I hereby grant permission for my child to complete a questionnaire concerning academic achievement.

Name of Parent/ Guardian

Name of Learner

Signature of Parent/ Guardian

Date

Addendum 2g: Consent granted by Department of Education

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to T. J. WILLEMS official of the Department of Education by Riza Uys in English and the official of the Department of Education is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to the participant. The official of the Department of Education was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to his/ her satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntary to the participation of A. WESTERN CAPE SCHOOL School in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

SCHOOL IN WESTERN CAPE

Name of Participating School

T. J. WILLEMS

Name of Official – Department of Education

[Signature]

Signature of Official – Department of Education

CTM

Position held at Department

2010/09/15

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to T. J. WILLEMS. He/ she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

[Signature]

Signature of Investigator

15/09/2010

Date

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to T.J. WILLEMS official of the Department of Education by Riza Uys in English and the official of the Department of Education is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to the participant. The official of the Department of Education was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to his/ her satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntary to the participation of A WESTERN CAPE SCHOOL School in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

SCHOOL IN WESTERN CAPE

Name of Participating School

T.J. WILLEMS

Name of Official – Department of Education

T.J. Willems

Signature of Official – Department of Education

CTM.

Position held at Department

2010/09/15

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to T.J. WILLEMS. He/ she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

R. Uys

Signature of Investigator

15/09/2010

Date

Addendum 3: Interview schedules

Addendum 3a

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

GRADE NINE LEARNERS

Purpose and instruction

In the letter where I asked your permission for this interview I explained that I am doing research on the reasons why Grade nines do not do well at school. You agreed that I can do this interview with you. I just want to remind you that we are doing this interview today because I would like to know the reasons you think you struggle with your school work. I will only use the information you give me today to help me in my research and I will not put your name or anything by which you can be identified in this report. I want to remind you that I am recording this interview, to be able to make better notes after we have finished. Do you have any questions before we start with the interview?

1. How are you experiencing Grade nine?
2. What makes it difficult for you to do well in your school work?
3. What will need to change for you to get better marks?
4. Do you see yourself as an underachiever? Please motivate.

Addendum 3b

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

GRADE NINE PARENTS

Purpose and instruction

In the letter where I requested permission for this interview I explained that I am doing research on the reasons for underachievement among Grade nine learners. You consented to this interview. I would like to remind you that the reason for this interview is to get your views as parent of a Grade nine learner into possible reasons for your child's underachievement. The information I gain today will be used to assist me in my research and your name and/or that of your child would stay confidential and would not appear in my report. I want to remind you that I am recording this interview to be able to do a better data analysis afterwards. Do you have any questions before we start with the interview?

1. Who do you think is the most influential person in your child's life?
2. What do you think is your child's best qualities?
3. What are your concerns about your child's academic underachievement?
4. What, according to you, are the things that prevent your child from performing better?
5. What would you say is your role in your child's academic improvement?

Addendum 3c

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

GRADE NINE TEACHERS

Purpose and instruction

In the letter where I requested permission for this interview, I explained that I am doing research on the reasons for underachievement among Grade nine learners. You consented to this interview. I would like to remind you that the reason for this interview is to get your views as teacher of a Grade nine learner into possible reasons for underachievement among Grade nine learners. The information I gain today will be used to assist me in my research and your name, as well as the name of the learners, will stay confidential and will not appear in my report.

1. What have you noticed about underachievers' general behaviour in class?
2. In your experience what seem to be the differences between achievers and underachievers?
3. In your opinion, what might be contributing factors to underachievement in learners?
4. What role do teachers have to play in addressing the problems of underachievement?

Addendum 4: Coding and themes

■ – interview

Dialogue		Coding	
R	I	Possible themes	Emerging themes
R	Four questions on the paper. Let's just quickly read through the purpose and instruction. In the letter where I asked your permission for this interview, I explained that I am doing research on the reasons why Grade nines do not do well at school. You agreed that I can do this interview with you. I just want to remind you that we are doing this interview today because I would like to know the reasons you think you struggle with your school work. I will only use the information you give me today to help me in my research and I will not put your name or anything by which you can be identified in this report. I want to remind you that I am recording this interview, to be able to make better notes after we finish. Do you have any questions before we start with the interview?		
I	Ahmm, no.		
R	Let's just quickly run through the questions: 1. How are you experiencing Grade nine? 2. What makes it difficult for you to do well in your school work? 3. What will need to change for you to get better marks? 4. Do you see yourself as an underachiever? Please motivate.		
I	Okay.		
R	So, which question do you want to answer first?		
I	No. 3.	Sure of answer – decisive	
R	What will need to change for you to get better marks?		
I	Ahm	Unsure of answer	Development
R	Think big now if you had a magic wand what would you like to change?		
I	Ahm, this is my attitude to my work, I		

	think.	Takes responsibility for choices.	Personality
R	So that's the first thing, can you explain a bit about your attitude to me?		
I	My attitude now, aaah, is, I <u>don't really focus a lot on my work</u> (<i>hand to face, scratch chin</i>). It's probably why I don't get better marks, because <u>sometimes I do not do my tasks and that brings my marks down</u> , and then I learn like two days and <u>I am supposed to learn like two weeks before the exam and that's also what brings my marks down.</u>	Doesn't blame someone else Responsibility	Personality
R	Thank you for your honesty. So am I hearing you right, when you're working your attitude is, I'm not going to do my tasks, it is not that important?	Aware of poor planning.	Academic
I	Yes (<i>decisive</i>).		
R	Can you, what cause you to feel like that? You see, you don't hand in your task. What's behind that, tell me a little bit about that?		
I	It's probably I have a task and I am going to <u>meet some friends</u> to go to the mall or movies or I'm gonna play sport. So then I think, should I do the task or should I go with my friends, which one should I? So I think I rather go with my friends than do the task and <u>then I think I'll leave it for tomorrow</u> . Tomorrow comes there's other stuff also, so then I say, I'll <u>leave it for the day before and then the day before there is no time</u> . So I prefer, OK I just <u>leave it and make an excuse</u> .	Choose friends above school work Ignore responsibility – immaturity? Poor academic planning	Peer Development Academic
R	And then eventually do you do it? Or?		
I	<u>Sometimes I do do it because, ahh, you get an incomplete form to your parents, so then I choose to do it quickly. Doing it quickly, quickly it's also not helping because then you rush through it and then you don't do it properly and get bad marks.</u>	Realise responsibility and own choice	Personality

R	So am I hearing you right that you can actually do it better?	Admit underach.	Academic
I	Yes, mam! (with conviction)		
R	Then you are doing it now?		
I	(Shakes head affirmatively)		
R	I wanted to ask you something now. It sounds to like you say I have this choice do the task go out with my friends, the next day do the task, go play sports?		
I	Yes	Emotional maturity	Academic
R	And you pick the other one all the time. How important are your friends in all this?		
I	Actually they are not important at all. Is but, it always like, want to fun instead of doing the work.		
R	Okay. You were also talking about studying before the time. What stops you from studying before?		
I	Laziness probably (long pause).		
R	Anything else?	Aware of lacking work ethic	Academic
I	I don't have enough time to revise it and get it into my head, but then just two days and it doesn't work out.		
R	How can you do it differently?	How to improve marks	Academic
I	Ahm, yes I think so, I can do it, start early, revise Ahm (long pause). Ahm I think if I start early it will help me.		
R	To get things done?		
I	Yes.		
R	How long till your exams start?		
I	Two weeks, starting on the 8 th of November.		
R	So two weeks?		
I	Yes.		
R	I am gust going to leave it there. Shall we move on to a next question? Which one would you like?		
I	What makes it difficult to do well in your school work? number 2.		
R	So what does, what makes it difficult to do well in your school work?	Knows his own mind	Personality
I	Sometimes let's say there's a question, so I will never ask sir, I will never ask the teacher because I am		

	scared of the other kids. So I will never ask it, so it will stand at that, so I will never know what is the answer and when it comes to exams I will never know the answer or is when, if there's like a lot going through my mind, then the teachers teaching me I'm not into what she's teaching I will be thinking of other stuff.	Peer acceptance	Peer
R	May I ask what that lot would be, that other stuff for example?	Home environment?	Other field
I	(Long pause) Ahh, lets I think when I am in trouble, I think OK when I come home what's my mom gonna say? What am I gonna do? How am I gonna fix this? What excuse am I going to put, make? And how am I gonna defend myself to this situation? It's things like this that makes me not to concentrate. And makes me not do well.	Mother's opinion of importance	Parental
R	Are you often in trouble?	Who/what is getting the blame?	Personality
I	Not always, but I always want to fit in, so say if other kids let's say naughty, I want to join them and ...	Peer acceptance	Peer
R	These other kids who are they?	Disruptor type underachiever?	Types of underachievers
I	Wilbur, Shilo, and ...		
R	Are they just other kids? Or are they more important?		
I	They're just other kids.	Down play importance of peers	
R	Friends?		
I	Yes, my friends.		
R	And they also in 9?		
I	Yes.		
R	You want to fit in, tell me a bit about that?		
I	It's basically like, they making jokes, they making the class laugh. So now let's say, they famous about makes jokes now and stuff, so I feel like they more important now, because now everybody is talking about them. "You should have seen how he did this and that to the teacher and how he, how he was back chatting the teacher whatever and stuff". Then I think	Unsure of self and self-worth	Personality
		Possibly disruptor underachiever	Types of underachievers

	Okay, maybe if I try to do the same they will also talk about me like that they more positive about that person, and stuff.	Desire peer acceptance	Peer
R	Is it important to you that they talk about you?	Peer acceptance	Peer
I	Not really, but it is all about fitting in.		
R	What makes one fit in?		
I	(thoughtful long pause) It's just ahhh, to do what other people would do, what they would, you do, repeat it.	Recipe for acceptance by peers	Peer
R	OK. So it's important, so what makes one stand out? Is stand out a good thing?		
I	Ah, it mam, people are naughty you get into that and stuff.		
R	So yes, you said it's important for you to fit in. It's OK it's an honest desire. Anything else you would like to tell me about what makes it difficult for you to do well in your school work? You spoke about fitting in and wondering of you said you think about now I have to go [REDACTED], talk to my mom. How am I going to make it right? Not asking questions because then the other people are going to look at you funny. Anything else that makes it difficult for you to do well in your schoolwork?		
I	(Long thoughtful pause) Not that I can think of.		
R	You did well. That what you already told me is very valuable. So we've done question 2 and 3. Which question would you like to look at next?		
I	I think let's do question 4.		
R	Do you see yourself as an underachiever? Please motivate.		
I	I think when I'm doing my best there will be a difference. Because I'm obviously not doing my best at the moment.	Aware of ability to achieve better.	Academic
R	What makes you say that?		
I	Because the marks I get is not good.	Takes responsibility	

	my exam marks, the tasks.	for poor performance	Personality
R	So you would be able to do better?		
I	Yes.		
R	How much, how big is the gap on how you're doing now and how you're able to perform?		
I	Ahmm, I would say there's a 70% chance that might let's say get, from now in English, I think my report mark was 49 or something, and I think that there's a 70% chance that I might get in the sixties for English if would work harder, study more because I am not always do what I am told to do.	Locus of control – internal?	Personality
R	In English?		
I	Yes.		
R	So in English you are able to perform better.		
I	Yes.		
R	Am I hearing you right, you had 49 but you could get in the sixties, and the reason, the thing that has to change is that you will have to do your work more, I like that. Interesting to me that you mentioned English specifically. What made you think of English?	Seem to enjoy English	
I	It's because it's my fourth language.		
R	Is it your fourth language, so what comes before that?		
I	I was for 6 years in an Afrikaans school, it first Xhosa and then Afrikaans, then Isizulu and then sign language.	Language ability	Academic
R	So you are fluent in sign language?		
I	Yes.		
R	You say English, you say it is your fourth language? That's why you picked English to focus on? But it sounds to me like 49% it's a pass. What about your other subjects, is there a gap?		
I	Yes. Let's say maths.		
R	And what do you think makes that gap?		
I	The teacher will always advise us to		

	practice and revise maths every day. Should at least half an hour every day. She doesn't think so, it's so! You should practice it half an hour. If you don't you will not be able to remember it. Every week we do different things, so if you do not practice what you did last week and decide to forget about it, the exams is going to be difficult. So you have to go back.		
R	Yes, and practice it. Is it working for you?	Taking responsibility for poor performance	Personality
I	It's not, because I am not doing it. I am not doing what she told me to.		
R	So that gap, of Maths now and what Maths could be, what is it?		
I	Ahm, first of all if I practice it more and if I don't get it in class, go to extra Maths and ask the questions because Maths you need to ask a lot.	Growing self-support?	Personality
R	What prevents you from asking?	Peer ridicule – incapacitating	Peer
I	(Breaks eye contact) I'm always scared of what other children think of me. (pause, rub ear) and say I'm dumb, laugh at me and stuff. Because when the teacher's explaining, they say "I get it, I get it, I get the whole thing, it's easy" and I don't and she just goes on.		
R	Is that what the other kids are saying?	Doubting self-worth	
I	Yes.		
R	And what are you thinking and feeling if you hear that?	Protection from peer ridicule in silence	Peer
I	First of all they were listening and mostly they are clever. And I am thinking if I ask now, they will think of me as a stupid person because of them already get it and I'm not even close!		
R	How does that make you feel?		
I	Bad.		
R	Anything else that you want to say on the fourth question?		
I	(Very long pause, no eye contact,		

	<i>becoming emotional. Takes a moment to compose himself</i>		
R	Remember that there is no right or wrong answers here. Are we finished with question 4 you think? So what do we have left?		
I	Number 1.		
R	So how are you experiencing Grade nine?		
I	Grade nine for me is <i>(pause)</i> , it's nice <i>(not convinced)</i> but it's also <u>it's quite a difficult year</u> , because <i>(pause)</i> first of all, teachers if you give them a hard time, they will also give you a hard time, they don't really tolerate nonsense <i>(pause)</i> but ahmm, <i>(still emotional)</i> but ahmm I think <i>(pause)</i> I think that Grade nine is quite a difficult year for me.	Admits struggle with academic work	Academic
R	Would you care to give me some examples of difficult things?		
I	I think comparing to other grades I think in Grade nine <u>I really struggled with my school work</u> , I think the gap between grade 8 and 9, yes there's <u>more work</u> , everything's changed. <i>(Pause)</i>	Aware of inability to access school work	Academic
R	That everything you talking about. Can you give names to it? You said everything's changed?		
I	Like last year, I wasn't so bad, but this year, I don't know if it's me or if it's the work, but this. <u>But all I know is that the work has changed</u> , the teachers, the children, they are ...	No longer feels in control	
R	Were you in the school, last year?		
I	Yes, I was.		
R	So you started here in Grade 8?		
I	Yes.		
R	But even within the school, if I'm hearing you right now, the children changed you said, and the teachers changed. How did the children change?		
I	<u>Now the children are more mature than last year, because now</u> <i>(long</i>		

	<i>pause, looking for a word) ...</i>		
R	You can even say it in Afrikaans if it's easier for you.	Questions his own maturity because of different priorities from peers	Peers
I	<i>(Long pause)</i> It is like now, all of a sudden they all big and more into girls and girls into boys.		
R	And what about you?	Development taking place slower than peers – specifically emotional, but maybe also cognitive?	Development
I	Well me, I don't really know what's changed for me, I'm still the same person.		
R	And what does that person want. You say, they've changed, am I hearing you right?		
I	<i>(Long pause, no eye contact, fidgeting with hands)</i>		
R	So the other people changed, the other children. And how did the teachers change?		
I	Now, the teachers are more strict and <u>(pause) ahm, but is like actually the same, they want what's best for us, they want to prepare us for the next grade, because it's more difficult and it like compared to last year. They pushing the children if you not doing that good they try to help you, get you to extra classes all those things.</u>	Shows some maturity – in realisation of positive role of teachers	
R	Thank you for being so completely honest with me.		

Developmental factors

- Formal operational cognitive mastery
- Decision making styles

Personality factors

- Self-support
- Locus of control
- Academic identity

Academic factors

- Admittance of underachievement
- Language

- Study organisation

Examination factors

- Exam anxiety
- Self-talk prior to exam

Peer factors

Parental factors

- Parental involvement
- Family composition

Other field factors

Types of underachievers

- Withdrawers
- Disruptors

Addendum 5: Questionnaire

Addendum 5a

Grade 9 Questionnaire									
This questionnaire is part of a research study about learners' academic achievement in Grade 9 and their experience thereof. The information you give will be used to develop a programme to help Grade 9 learners to perform better in school. This questionnaire is anonymous, which means that nobody will know the specific answers that you have given. Please answer all the questions honestly. Please answer every question by making an [X] in the block with the most correct answer. Mark only ONE answer at each question. Are you willing to answer? [IF NOT STOP HERE]									
SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION									
Q101	Age								
Q102	Gender	1 Male				2 Female			
Q103	I currently live with	1 Both mother and father	2 Only father	3 Only mother	4 Stepfather and mother				
		5 Stepmother and father	99 Other Please explain:						
Q104	Number of siblings? (brothers and sisters)								
Q105	I am the ...	1 Oldest child	2 Second born	3 Third born	4 Fourth born	5 Youngest	99 Other		
Q106	My average for the June 2010 exams was:	1 Below 20 %	2 20% to 30%	3 31% to 40%	4 41% to 50%	5 51% to 60%	6 61% to 70%	7 Above 70%	
SECTION 2: GENERAL FACTORS									
Q201	How did you find Grade 9?	1	Easy.						
		2	I'm coping.						
		3	I'm not coping.						

Q202	When I have to answer a question in a test and is unsure of the answer I ...	1	pick the first thing that comes to mind.
		2	consider all the options before making a choice.
Q203	When I made subject choices for next year I ...	1	could not decide which subjects to take.
		2	chose the subjects my parents told me to.
		3	considered all the options but still found it difficult to make a choice.
		4	considered all the career options and then made a subject choice.
Q204	The language the teacher uses in class ...	1	is understandable.
		2	is sometimes difficult to understand.
		3	is not understandable.
Q205	I will describe myself as ...	1	someone who enjoys doing arty things.
		2	someone who enjoys being active.
		3	someone that is always surrounded by friends.
		4	someone who likes to sit quietly doing nothing.
		5	someone who likes being alone.
		99	other. Please explain:
Q206	When I study I ...	1	have a study plan that works.
		2	have a study plan that does not seem to work.
		3	do not study according to a study plan and I do not do well academically.
		4	do not study according to a study plan, but I do well academically.

Q207	When I think about myself and my schoolwork, I think I mostly am ...	1	clever.
		2	hard working.
		3	lazy.
		4	stupid.
Q208	When I get bad marks in a test it is usually because ...	1	there was too little time to answer all the questions.
		2	I could not study like I wanted to, because I had too many things to do at home.
		3	my friends kept on interrupting me in my studying.
		4	my teacher did not explain the work well.
		5	I do not want to look stupid by asking a question in class.
		6	I do not feel free to approach the teacher when I do not understand.
		7	I did not study hard enough.
		8	I did not understand the work.
SECTION 3: EXAMINATION FACTORS			
Q301	When I sit in the exam room, one of the following happens to me ...	1	I feel calm and in control.
		2	I feel a bit afraid.
		3	I freeze up.
		4	I do not understand any of the questions.
		99	Other. Please explain:

Q302	When I struggle during my exam I ...	1	just write anything.
		2	start thinking about other things.
		3	sleep.
		4	can not care to complete the exam.
		99	other. Please explain:
Q303	The thing that I am most worried about before the exams is ...	1	that I won't have enough time to complete the exam.
		2	that I won't understand any of the questions.
		3	that I won't be able to remember any of my work.
		4	that I might not have prepared well enough.
		99	other. Please explain:
SECTION 4: FIELD FACTORS			
Q401	The most important thing my parent/s does/do for me in my school life is to ...	1	regularly be in contact with the school.
		2	show an interest in my schoolwork.
		3	help me with my homework.
		4	encourage and support me.
		5	believe in my ability.
		6	My parent/caregiver does none of the above.

Q402	The one thing that makes it most difficult for me to do well in my schoolwork is that I have ...	1	nobody to help me.
		2	too many chores to do at home.
		3	brothers and/or sisters that bother me when I try to study or do my homework.
		4	problems with transportation to school.
		5	no money to buy the things I need for school.
		6	no library, computer or internet that I can use to do my schoolwork.
		7	I do not struggle with anything.
		99	Other. Please explain:

SECTION 5: ORGANISMIC SELF-REGULATION

Q501	When I struggle with my schoolwork/ homework I mostly ...	1	ask my teacher for help.
		2	ask my parent/caregiver for help.
		3	ask my friends/classmates for help.
		4	copy the work from my friends.
		5	go spend time with my friends and forget about my schoolwork.
		6	just stop caring.
		7	lie to keep myself from getting into trouble.
		99	Other. Please explain:.....

Q601 **If I underachieved** and I could give one reason for my academic underachievement it would be:

.....
.....

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE. YOU ARE FREE TO HAND IN YOUR COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE AND LEAVE.

Addendum 5b

Grade 9 Questionnaire							
This questionnaire is part of a research study about learners' academic achievement in Grade 9 and their experience thereof. The information you give will be used to develop a programme to help Grade 9 learners to perform better in school. This questionnaire is anonymous, which means that nobody will know the specific answers that you have given. Please answer all the questions honestly. Please answer every question by making an [X] in the block with the most correct answer. Mark only ONE answer at each question. Are you willing to answer? [IF NOT STOP HERE]							
SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION							
Q101	Age	14 8/81 (10%)	15 66/81(81%)	16 5/81 (6%)	17 1/81 (1%)	No reply 1/81 (1%)	
Q102	Gender	1 27/81 (33%)			2 54/81 (67%)		
Q103	I currently live with	1 40/81 (49%)	2 2/81 (2%)		3 20/81 (25%)		
		4 8/81 (10%)	5 3/81 (4%)		99 8/81 (10%)		
Q104	Number of siblings? (brothers and sisters)	0 4/81 (5%)	1 25/81 (31%)	2 25/81 (31%)	3 12/81 (15%)	4 5/81 (6%)	5 3/81 (4%)
		6 0/81	7 1/81 (1%)	8 0/81	9 1/81 (1%)	No reply 5/81 (6%)	
Q105	I am the ...	1 25/81 (31%)	2 18/81 (22%)	3 10/81 (12%)	4 0/81	5 24/81 (30%)	99 4/81 (5%)

Q106	My average for the June 2010 exams was:	1	2	3	4
		0/81	2/81 (2%)	11/81 (14%)	14/81 (17%)
		5	6	7	No reply
		24/81 (30%)	17/81 (21%)	11/81 (14%)	2/81 (2%)
SECTION 2: GENERAL FACTORS					
Q201	How did you find Grade 9?	1	11/81 (14%)		
		2	65/81 (80%)		
		3	5/81 (6%)		
Q202	When I have to answer a question in a test and is unsure of the answer I ...	1	9/81 (11%)		
		2	72/81 (89%)		
Q203	When I made subject choices for next year I ...	1	6/81 (7%)		
		2	4/81 (5%)		
		3	17/81 (21%)		
		4	54/81 (67%)		
Q204	The language the teacher uses in class ...	1	66/81 (81%)		
		2	15/81 (19%)		
		3	0/81		
Q205	I will describe myself as ...	1	15/81 (19%)		
		2	25/81 (31%)		
		3	32/81 (40%)		
		4	4/81 (5%)		
		5	3/81 (4%)		
		99	2/81 (2%)		

Q206	When I study I ...	1	24/81 (30%)
		2	9/81 (11%)
		3	12/81 (15%)
		4	36/81 (44%)
Q207	When I think about myself and my schoolwork, I think I mostly am ...	1	9/81 (11%)
		2	47/81 (58%)
		3	22/81 (27%)
		4	2/81 (2%)
		No reply	1/81 (1%)
Q208	When I get bad marks in a test it is usually because ...	1	4/81 (5%)
		2	12/81 (15%)
		3	8/81 (10%)
		4	4/81 (5%)
		5	2/81 (2%)
		6	3/81 (4%)
		7	39/81 (48%)
		8	9/81 (11%)
SECTION 3: EXAMINATION FACTORS			
Q301	When I sit in the exam room, one of the following happens to me ...	1	31/81 (38%)
		2	41/81 (51%)
		3	7/81 (9%)
		4	1/81 (1%)
		99	1/81 (1%)

Q302	When I struggle during my exam I ...	1	41/81 (38%)
		2	19/81 (23%)
		3	2/81 (2%)
		4	0/81
		99	19/81 (23%)
Q303	The thing that I am most worried about before the exams is ...	1	10/81 (12%)
		2	17/81 (21%)
		3	33/81 (41%)
		4	19/81 (23%)
		99	2/81 (2%)
SECTION 4: FIELD FACTORS			
Q401	The most important thing my parent/s does/do for me in my school life is to ...	1	1/81 (1%)
		2	11/81 (14%)
		3	8/81 (10%)
		4	27/81 (33%)
		5	30/81 (37%)
		6	4/81 (5%)

Q402	The one thing that makes it most difficult for me to do well in my schoolwork is that I have ...	1	18/81 (22%)
		2	7/81 (9%)
		3	33/81 (41%)
		4	0/81
		5	1/81 (1%)
		6	4/81 (5%)
		7	7/81 (9%)
		99	9/81 (11%)
		No reply	2/81 (2%)

SECTION 5: ORGANISMIC SELF-REGULATION

Q501	When I struggle with my schoolwork/ homework I mostly ...	1	26/81 (32%)
		2	15/81 (19%)
		3	27/81 (33%)
		4	7/81 (9%)
		5	1/81 (1%)
		6	0/81
		7	4/81 (5%)
		99	1/81 (1%)

Q601 **If I underachieved** and I could give one reason for my academic underachievement it would be:

Answer:	
Too lazy to do the work.	10/81 (12%)
Difficulty understanding the work.	9/81 (11%)
Did not study enough.	31/81 (38%)
Spent too little time studying, too many other activities.	5/81 (6%)
Situation at home prevented me from doing my best.	4/81 (5%)
Does not care much about schoolwork.	9/81 (11%)
Classroom situation makes it difficult to work.	2/81 (2%)
No reply.	11/81 (14%)

NOTE: A slight deviation for 100% might be present because of the influence of rounding off of decimals to the nearest number.

Addendum 6: Author Guidelines

South African Journal of Education

Information for Contributors:

The South African Journal of Education (SAJE) publishes original contributions from any of the disciplines in Education in any of the official languages of South Africa. The following categories of contributions focusing on education will be published:

Research articles reporting on research that fulfils the criteria of a generally accepted research paradigm; review articles, intended for the professional scientist and which critically evaluate the research done in a specific field in education; book reviews, i.e. concise evaluations of books that have recently appeared; and letters in which criticism is given of articles that appeared in this Journal.

Research articles of localised content, i.e. of interest only to specific areas or specialists and which will not appeal to the broader readership of the Journal, should preferably not be submitted for consideration by the Editorial Committee.

All articles will be submitted to referees (national and/or international). If an article is submitted in a language for which it is difficult to find suitable referees, the author can be requested to submit a translation of the article (in English) for refereeing purposes. The consulting editors/ referees will have documented expertise in the area the article addresses. When reviews are received, an editorial decision will be reached to either accept the article, reject the article, request a revision (in some cases for further peer review), or request arbitration.

As a rule not more than one article per author or co-author will be accepted per year for refereeing and possible publication.

Authors bear full responsibility for the accuracy and recency of the factual content of their contributions.

A signed declaration in respect of originality must accompany each manuscript. On submission of the manuscript, the author(s) must present a written undertaking that the article has not been published or is not being presented for publication elsewhere.

The author(s) must ensure that the language in the manuscript is properly edited and the name and address of the language editor must be supplied.

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Figures should be clear, good-quality originals. No fill or grey shading may be used. Tables or figures should be numbered consecutively, with a brief descriptive heading or caption. Information should not be duplicated in the text and tables. Each table/figure must be referred to in the text by number — not 'above' or 'below'. These will be placed at a suitable position after the first reference.

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SECTION E:

CONSOLIDATED LIST OF REFERENCES

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