CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

Firstly, this chapter summarises some of the key discussions of this study (cf. 5), linking these to the theoretical and empirical insights that emerge from the study. Secondly, it addresses policy issues specifically relating to SASA; thirdly, it addresses the need to invest in second-chance education for the youth; and, finally, it raises issues of significance in the area.

In responding to the critical questions of the study, the above issues are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework of the study (cf. 2), which argues for education as an investment in human capital.

This chapter is divided into four critical sections. Firstly, the experiences, characteristics and factors influencing out-of-school youth transition are further interrogated. Secondly, the interplay between the youth labour market and youth drop-outs is further discussed, looking specifically at the skills and the youth, the character of the labour market and implications for their finding successful destinations in the labour market, and their employability. Thirdly, a view of the psychological effects of prolonged transitions is expressed. Lastly, youth development and policy issues are discussed.

6.2. EXPERIENCES, CHARACTERISTICS AND FACTORS INFLUENCING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH TRANSITIONS

6.2.1. The youths' experiences of school-to-work transitions

This section highlights the experiences of the youths as they (a) attempt re-entry into the ETD system and (b) enter the labour market.

(a) Dropping in: the education and training system experience

It is evident that some of the reasons why youth drop out are complex and intertwined, and the youths themselves are unable to pinpoint one single reason for their dropping out. For Lee and Lee (2003) many factors contribute to dropping out. The association between a family's weak financial situation (Fuller & Land, 1999) and poverty as an overriding factor in dropping out (ESAR, 2000) and a lack of family support (Te Reile, 2004) were evident in the reasons cited for dropping out.

The female participants in the study tended to get pregnant, and financial challenges independent of the affordability of schooling worsened their chances of being able to drop back into the ETD. The latter was also the case with the male participants, who tend to dropout for financial reasons and then end up in destructive activities like crime and drug abuse. It was noted that while the male participants possibly impregnated girls at some point, this was not one of the reasons leading to their dropping out. This supports the literature that suggests that dropping out is a socioeconomic issue. The youth drop out for economic reasons (affordability) and for social reasons (pregnancy and poor health, etc). The youth in this study articulated similar reasons. Socioeconomic realities directly and indirectly affect youth's transition.

Judging from the data, a lack of academic success (which the DoE's ministerial committee refers to as school failure) and 'helplessness' are mentioned as some of the reasons why young people drop out of school. This concurs with the research by the DoE (the ministerial committee) on retention, which suggests that:

> Grade repetition has been identified as the single most powerful predictor of dropping-out. Studies conducted internationally have revealed that learners who have repeated a grade in their schooling career are most likely to drop out of school. Learners become disillusioned, and generally disengaged from school activities. The fact that grade repeaters are taken through exactly the same material and content when repeating the grade, exacerbates the situation (Ministerial Committee, 2007: XV).

Lack of family support continues to be a challenge and a factor contributing to dropping out. Most of the young participants in the study are from single-parent and less supportive households. They need a ssense of identity and a sense of belonging, and the lack of support seems to play a role in their decisions to leave their school. School principals in the study supported this view by suggesting that parental involvement is a necessity for youth's retention in school. This concurs with the perspectives within the rational decision-making model which suggests that dropping in and dropping out decisions are largely influenced by or based on factors which include family background and the personal lives of individuals seeking the transitions (Oreopoulos, Page & Stevens, 2003).

The reasons for dropping out have been researched by writers like Aloise Young (2002), and Batten & Russell (1995). Understanding the underlying reasons has been a huge research endeavour given the complexity of the reasons why young people actually dropout. While the reasons given accord with most of the research data, the literature shows that youth who drop-out of school either want to or attempt to re-enter the system, especially the school system (Community Agency for Social Inquiry, 2000).

I found that the youth participants in this study recognised the value and benefits of education and associated it with accessing employment. They viewed ETD as their main poverty alleviation strategy or the single most important strategy that would ensure that they were able to provide for themselves. For them, re-entry into the ETD system is their most desirable option and the possible bridge for their successful transition from school to work. The participants' reflections emphasise the importance of education and the need for them to get some form of qualification in order to gain entry into the labour market. This opinion concurs with the human capital school of thought that recognises schooling as an investment with direct and indirect benefits.

The young participants in the study recognised the value of education, and some had attempted to drop back into the ETD system. However, the views they hold about

their academic capabilities inhibit their progression to successful destinations. This lack of academic self-esteem is one of the major constraining factors to successful school-to-work transitions for out-of-school youth. There is no evidence of direct experience of failure at school. Instead, the lack of self-esteem relates to their previous failure to stay within the school system. Experience has affected their self-belief, and as a result they tend to think they cannot achieve academically. Prolonged absence from the school system is a contributory factor to the wounded self-belief of these young people.

The environment, within which their learning happens or is supposed to happen after re-entry is not helpful. The teachers and their classmates tend to marginalise them directly through their negative comments, and indirectly by frequently making them aware of the age differences between themselves and their peers.

Their experiences of economic and socio-psychological constraints make their re-entry experiences even more problematic. The system of dealing with these older learners should be an integrated strategy which includes the attending to their emotional needs as well as to the relevant social and economic factors. In the absence of such strategies, avoidance sometimes becomes an option for the principals. For some young people these challenges and the lack of a supportive schooling environment encourage them to drop out a second time.

Their previous activities or experiences tend to stigmatise the re-entering learners, thus interfering with their schooling experience. This stigmatisation has a lot to do with their belief that they can change, given that the authorities that are meant to ensure that change happens still carry the past into the new rehabilitation processes. For example, youths with a criminal record are often treated with suspicion and are seldom given the chance to believe in themselves and demonstrate their ability to change.

The literature complements this view by showing that most drop-outs do recognise the importance of education and training, want to re-enter the ETD system, and

believe that education and the acquisition of qualifications are the major bridge to the labour market.

The pathways young people can take into the ETD system are both formal and informal. The formal include re-entering schooling as a route to higher education, and the informal include short courses training them for employment. For some, dropping back into the system has yielded positive outcomes, others have been less successful.

Economic or financial factors are the main reasons for dropping out and a constraint when attempting to drop back in. Financial and poverty-related constraints have been at the forefront of policymaking and priorities for poverty alleviation globally. It is against this backdrop that South Africa committed to the Millennium Development Goals. However, for the young participants in this study, destitution traps them and insulates them from successful participation in the national economy.

This remains a concern, given that policy in South Africa suggests that learners cannot be 'refused' education based on their lack of resources. The 'no-fees' policy, information about which is not always readily available to those who need it, addresses part of the problem, but there are other e expenses associated with schooling, such as the need to buy a school uniform. 'Free education' thus addresses one component of education financing and the rest is still the responsibility of the family. This remains a challenge for policy makers.

Their financial problems drive learners to drop out of school and are an impediment when they try to re-enter. The only way in which they can overcome these problems at the moment and acquire the social capital they so strongly desire is to break out of the poverty cycle.

According to the participants, prospective employers are more interested in their qualifications/certification than in the skills they possess. Those with a higher level of education suggest that there is intrinsic value in education. One participant suggests that young people with higher levels of education are more aware of issues

around them, and are more thoroughly socialised.. But for most of the participants the intrinsic value of education is of less value than its potential financial benefits. The human capital view suggests that highly educated people are generally highly skilled too, and skilled workers tend also to be more productive. This focus on the relationship between levels of education in a society and levels of social and economic development has become more pronounced as the world economy has shifted to areas of economic activity that depend on knowledge and skills. This construct is supported by the belief that societies with well-educated labour forces tend to have higher levels of economic and social development (World Bank, 1999; Coleman, 1988; and Becker, 1975). In particular, studies of knowledge- and-skills based economies clearly illustrate the importance of education for the progress and wealth of nations.

The social conceptualisation and the policy construction of schooling ages confine youth into categories which become problematic when they attempt to drop back in. Age gaps between the current learners and those who re-enter the schooling system remain one of the factors limiting re-entry. Youth who have been out of school for a lengthy period find it difficult to adjust to the new circumstances and tend to experience or assume they are experiencing marginalisation within the schooling environment when attempting re-entry. The age gap and the differences in the curriculum are factors constraining re-entry and contribute to the drop-ins' frequent lack of success. This concurs with the perspective of the social environmentalists,, who believe that the youths' expectations and their actual experiences in schooling influence their decisions.

Whereas some of the participants had negative experiences, others had positive re-entry experiences. These were associated with building positive social relationships, fresh motivation, and the associated outcomes. A sense of belonging and enhancement or developments of academic self-esteem are affirmative experiences associated with dropping in.

A sense of belonging seems to be one of the positive factors associated with dropping back into schooling. The youths who dropped back in had a chance to rebuild

relationships with the youths within the schooling environment. These relationships yielded positive results as they developed a sense of belonging to a more progressive group. These relationships also motivated them to work hard so as to sustain their positions in the group.

Success raised the participants' academic self-esteem and provided them with a new self belief. Those who completed short courses had new hope, and aspired to achieve even more. However, for these participants, the short courses they attended did not act as pathways to successful career destinations.

The young participants tended to make choices that in the hope of successfully reaching their destinations rather than choosing courses that matched their interests. These youths are less likely to choose postgraduate diplomas and degrees when re-entering. This phenomenon differs from the suggestion in the literature that the youth generally aspire to obtain a post secondary education (Raymond, 2008). The youths in the study would settle for any qualification that would ensure that they gained entry into the labour market.

(b) Attempted entry into the labour market experienced

Some youth participants in the study did try to enter the labour market. However, their entry was constrained by their circumstances. Their level of education, certification or qualification and the limited number of jobs available to the unskilled in the area in which they live are the main constraints for the out-of-school youth participants. The participants suggested that the labour market demands a Matric qualification as the minimum requirement for access, while the possession of a higher education qualification puts one at an advantage.

Because of their lower levels of education, the young participants had unsuccessful experiences when attempting to enter the labour market. They could find only underemployment or casual employment mainly in the local taxi industry or in short-term construction work.

Most of these youth have adult responsibilities as parents. However, they have no or very limited experience in an adult role, provisioning and financial independence. As shown in Chapter 5, most of the young participants are parents but cannot fulfil the financial responsibilities of being parents (cannot support their children). If family (social) background really does have an impact on dropping out, as suggested by the literature, then the socio-economic conditions within which these young people live are drivers for their chronic dropping out.

Those who opted for self employment did not have sustainable businesses due to their lack of management skills, the limited customer base available to them as a result of the high rate of unemployment in the area, and a lack of the financial support needed to grow the business.

Young South Africans with lesser levels of education tend try to make a living on their own terms in the informal economy. However, the second economy in South Africa is still problematic and unsustainable. Research has shown that tit is populated by the marginalised groups in the country, those that they are located in rural or peri-urban areas, unskilled, unemployed or unemployable. Kisten (2006:2) suggests that the participants in the second economy are 'caught in a poverty trap', are 'unable to benefit from growth in the first economy', are 'difficult to assist', and are 'underdeveloped'.

6.2.2. Factors influencing the out-of-school transition of the youth between school and the labour market

The findings of this study are interpreted within the framework of the human capital theory, which links investment to education and considers the direct and non-direct returns of educational attainment. It is evident that the choices of transitions made by people such as the participants in this study are strongly influenced by their perceptions of what constitutes a better life. Their qualifications, networking, their altruism, their desire to care for their families,, their employability or lack of employability, the extent of their training in the ETD system, and personal agency

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[2] DBSA SA Second Economy Presentation (Nov 2006)

are the major factors influencing school-to-work transition (see Chapter 5) for the youth participants in the study.

Financial independence remains the main factor influencing school-to-work transition for out-of-school youths. Their need for a better life and altruism are the main reasons why they consider re-entry into the system. For the young participants income-generating activities like employment are regarded as the main route to financial independence. For these youths, participating in voluntary projects is not seen as a long-term or a short-term option for employability or financial independence.

The youth's progression from childhood to adulthood should sociologically be aligned to their progression from dependent to independent adults, or from moving from school to work. Their unemployability, however, forces them to remain dependent even when they should be providers. Unemployment for these youths affects not only their economic and social status but also impacts on them psychologically and affects their transitions from childhood to adulthood. These factors create identity crises for these youth, who get stuck in roles where they cannot perform or 'measure up' to the institutionalised characteristic associated with these roles.

6.2.3. Information poverty and transitions to both the ETD system and the labour market

The key factor in the unsuccessful school-to-work transitions is information poverty. The challenges are two-fold. Firstly, the young from disadvantaged backgrounds have no access or only limited access to information media (the radio, television, adverts on the roads, etc). Secondly, the young do not have the capacity to receive and assess the impact or the potential role of the information on their situations. One participant states that people with lower levels of education tend to have very limited knowledge of current affairs.

The young participants in the study 1) did not know of the alternatives or points of entry for them (which do exist), and 2) either did not know about the development agencies (like the Umsobomvu Youth Fund and the National Youth Commission[3]); or the role or potential role these agencies could play in helping them to reach their destinations.

The reasons for their lack of access to information are firstly structural in the sense that the structures that are the holders of information do not translate the information into comprehensible levels for these youths. Secondly, the challenges are related to the economic status of these youths and the resources they can or cannot afford. These are operational in the sense that the structures and agencies that implement and advocate these do not reach some of the levels and locations within which the youths are based.

Whilst there was a lack of access to information for those participants who were relatively educated compared with the rest of the participants, the troubling lack of information for the less educated ones (those who dropped out of school much earlier) was worse. This suggests that this group of the youth would have to try pathways to the youth labour market and different destinations within the labour market other than the programmes, structures and agencies established by government policies. Their lack of access to information challenges their constitutional right to information.

Access to information and knowledge has been associated with improved chances of poverty alleviation and improving living standards. Warah (2004) suggests that development agencies have recognised the role of information and knowledge in alleviating the poverty risk and improving the livelihoods of poverty-stricken people.

This view is shared by scholars such as Brito (2006), who suggest that breaking out of the cycle of poverty starts with gaining improved access to resources such as

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[3] This merged in 2009 into National Youth Development Agency

information and education. This is the case in most developing countries, including South Africa.

6.2.4. Characteristics of the career pathways taken by youths who drop out, or drop back into the ETD system after dropping out

For youth participants in the study, transitions are multidimensional. They struggle with the intertwined movement back and forth in schooling while young, while also dealing with the responsibilities associated with being young adults. Successful pathways from schooling to the labour market tend to be linear, however. Participants struggle with these multidimensional transitions while they exist within the context of linear transitions.

These changes in the level and extent of responsibilities include moving out of home, attaining skills and education, creating and changing relationships (Ross, 2004), changes in their education and training, their lifestyles, their marital status, and moving from dependence to independence. However, the intertwined changes are dependent and influenced by the economic status of the individual or family. Youth transitions are strongly influenced by their level of education and their employment prospects.

The nature of such transitions has changed from the swift transitions of the 60s and the 70s, and is currently influenced by the current global economic, social, political and technological order. *Ross et al* (2004) suggest that:

- in the 1960s the metaphor of filling society's 'niches' reflected the emphasis on successful integration into adult roles;
- in the 1970s the emergence of the 'pathways' metaphor captured changes in the youth transition process, which was now perceived to be longer and more complex as a result of an increase in participation in education, due to a decline in youth employment;
- in the 1980s the term 'trajectory' indicated that social forces (not government-designed pathways) were a powerful influence in determining the availability of resources to the young person, and the momentum of the transition itself; and

- in the 1990s the metaphor of 'navigations' suggested that through the exercise of personal agency, individuals tried to actively shape their lives within the opportunities and constraints that they encountered.

It may be argued that within the current context both internal and external policies pull together these eras (1980s and 1990s) and while in the 60s integration into adult roles was central to transitions, the emphasis was more on social aspects like fitting into the institutionalised gender roles of being providers (for males), and caretakers (for females). Currently adulthood is associated with material provisioning and is thus linked to the ability to access income, whether through employment by others or self-employment. The challenge for the young participants in the study is their limited integration into adulthood and the fact that have overstayed the role of being a young person. They then struggle with identifying the roles within which they are integrated.

Their attempts to re-enter the system, whether the school system or employment, are constrained by structural issues rather than personal failings. After dropping out they are inclined to recognise the value of education and the benefits associated with investing themselves in education, firstly in terms of their improved chances of employment and secondly in terms of their increased ability to be productive. However, the lack of an established system of second-chance education, the lack of clear entry points to alternatives, their lack of access to alternatives and their limited access or absence of access to finances are structural barriers preventing them from succeeding in their endeavours.

The transitional pathways required here should not be clear-cut 'school-to-work' routes, as this notion excludes the social context and the complex dimensions of youth livelihoods and transitions. Social issues compel the young participants in this study to follow a multidimensional youth-to-adulthood transition model.

As previously stated, information poverty is a major re-entry constraint. Alternatives exist for some of the youths, but they lack access to the necessary information: accessing FET in schooling or college (National Vocational Certificate bursaries),

Higher Education (National Skills Fund), Recognition of Prior Learning, and accessing relevant programmes, learnerships and skills programmes, and funds for entrepreneurship (from Umsubomvu Youth Fund). Lack of information about these alternative contributes to the difficulties they have with school-to-work transitions. They do not know how to access these pathways and whether or not they qualify to do so.

The competitive nature of the alternatives for the out-of-school youth is one of the barriers to school-to-work transitions. For entrepreneurship, one needs to put together a business plan before accessing financial assistance. For acceptance into learnerships and skills programmes (even as an unemployed youth beneficiary) one needs (1) to meet minimum entry requirements, (2) to have particular knowledge and skills and (3) an employer as a host. The young participants in the study do not have sufficient skills with which to compete in most government-related programmes and thus are structurally marginalised by the competition associated with access.

6.3. THE YOUTH LABOUR MARKET AND YOUTH DROP-OUTS

6.3.1. Skills and the youth school-to-work transitions

Skills development is crucial to the development of South Africa as the country moves further and further away from its history of apartheid. In order for the country to truly develop and provide its citizens with opportunities for prosperity and comfortable livelihoods, the country must provide the necessary framework for the development of skills, specifically the type of skills that are critical and would contribute towards the socioeconomic development of the country. The development of skills and an effective second chance for all is the main argument in this thesis. I move from the premise that youth who seek entry into the labour market or the ETD system should be given an equitable chance and access regardless of their level of education and skills, or theoretical knowledge.

The lack of skills further marginalises the youth who experience information poverty, are from disadvantaged backgrounds and who have few productive social networks.

They need to possess skills to be able to keep up with changes in society, contribute to their own wellbeing as well as their wellbeing in their social milieus, and to cope with changes in their immediate and global environments.

The development and enactment of policies, strategies and processes for school-to-work transitions is crucial for effectively enabling the employability of the youth, who are presently discouraged and are dependent on random transitions. While these policies and strategies should be all encompassing, emphasis should be given to the localities and backgrounds of the youth, including their academic strengths and self esteem. The development of the out-of-school youth is especially crucial in the country's poorer locations, particularly the rural and the semi-rural areas.

6.3.2. The characteristics of the labour market and the implications for the youth's achieving successful destinations

The employer's view of the employable individual has been transforming in line with global industrial and technological trends. Labour market segment theory (Tchibozo, 2002) has described the attributes associated with the employment of an individual. These include personal and behavioural attributes, stability, the cost of recruitment training and retention, and the protection of competitive intelligence. Productivity is associated mainly with the filter theory, which uses qualifications as an indicator of whether or not the individual is productive or has the potential to be productive, the individual's adaptability and potential to cope with technological changes, and the individual's personal context (gender, marital status, social activities, etc).

For those attempting entry to the labour market, however, the main attribute or indicator is the qualification indicator. This is largely because, even before a prospective employer invites an applicant to an interview, the level and relevance of the applicant's qualifications impacts on the employer's view of whether or not that individual has the skills and attributes which will ensure that the employee is adaptable, productive and a good return on investment for the employer.

These youths, as suggested before, do not have experience of environments outside their immediate contexts, their homes and their community. In view of the poverty of the area there are few adult role models for them to follow, and they therefore have few opportunities to learn and copy positive adult behaviour. An association with positive adult role models could assist them youth to develop intrinsic values and emulate the values of these adults, thus contributing to their own development.

As youths struggle to acquire status within their environment, they tend to be prone to emotional gratification rather than progressive behaviour. This is essentially an attempt to fit in, to be recognised and to have a sense of belonging. While this gives them status within their social contexts, it does little to improve their chances of progression to positive career destinations.

6.3.3. The labour market's view on employability

An important attribute of the school-to-work transition is how the labour market decides what makes an individual an asset. This could be the individual's qualifications, personal attributes or behavioural characteristics. The checklist depends on the demands of the employer at a given time. What distinguishes one person from the rest is the needs of the labour market.

How can individuals with no qualifications, a meagre view of their own capabilities or a lack of the knowledge of what they are capable satisfy the criteria of the market place?

6.3.4. Youth drop-outs and skills demand and supply

In the South African context, skills challenges are felt more strongly in the higher skills bands than on lower skills levels. There is a shortage of skilled labour in the country, both in quantity and in quality. While different institutions advocate skills development, the out-of-school youth (the drop-outs) do not stand a chance of accessing the institutionalised skills development programmes and progressing into the higher skills band.

- Despite the fact that there are many young people in the country who are within the labour system and stand a chance of having the skills levels needed in the labour market, a larger number of the youth will not be absorbed or retained by the system due to their low skills levels. A higher number of these youths will not acquire the skills on demand for absorption into the labour market.

6.4. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF PROLONGED AND INEXPERIENCED TRANSITIONS

The young participants regret the actions that led them to their current status, the reasons they are where they are, and the lack of progress in their lives. Firstly they lament leaving school and secondly they lament their inability to provide for themselves and their families. Regret, within their context, is associated with prior experiences and the instability in their lives. This is evident in the way they view themselves and their peers. One participant suggests that it is only after dropping out that they realise that their lack of education is the main reason for their not reaching their desired destinations. Also the recognition of the value of education in creating a better life makes the young participants regret leaving school.

The analysis shows the interplay between hope and hopelessness for the young participants from their low socioeconomic backgrounds. These youths contemplate their futures in terms of hope rather than of a planned progression. Given their experience and the gap between their previous activity and their current status, they are hopeful that their destinations will be reconfigured - and yet they do not have a plan for re-entry or entry into the labour market.

Youth participants within the Folweni context tend to associate with persons from the same environment. Their exposure to other environments is limited. This marginalises and excludes them from environments and agencies that would assist their transitions. They have little experience of development agencies and the

structures established to assist with their development. These institutions are essential for their fundamental development.

The youths with unsuccessful destinations develop a 'failure syndrome'. This is defined by psychologists mainly as a feeling of incurred failure associated with one's environment and the recurrence of that failure within one's context. This would be associated with a history of failure in one's family and peers. This syndrome affects the personal and behavioural characteristics of these young people. As a result their desired destinations are built on quicksands, as they believe they will fail even before attempting to succeed.

These youth believe that they are the victims of who they are, their family backgrounds, and their locations, and thus feel self-pity. However, they have little or no determination to change their circumstance. This self-pity affects their personal and behavioural characteristics.

6.4.1. The 'forgotten' skills

The many unemployed young people in South Africa has potential to develop skills to meet the demand in the labour market, but these are neither explored nor maximised. While these youths think of themselves as being simply unemployed, the labour market views them as being unemployable, and demands of them as a condition for entry qualifications that they do not have. This makes sense in terms of the human capital view used in the theoretical framework, which suggests that skilled individuals tend to be more productive than unskilled individuals. The youth have also suggested that their lack of the qualifications needed in the labour market, especially Matric, is one of the main reasons they are unemployed. In their view, their lack of higher levels of education is the main reason why they are 'unacceptable' for employment. While the labour market looks for other related indices, like personality, attitude and values, entry is largely related to qualifications as an indicator of productivity (Tchibozo, 2002).

The youths believe that success for them, after dropping out, would have to be mostly based on luck, hope, and being at the right place at the right time. For example, one of the participants suggests that his accessing employment was the a result of his knowing someone. The other participants hope they will be lucky enough to get employment. These are positions in line with notions contained in the random approach (Glover & King, 1997). This approach suggests that the transition from school to work has little to do with what one does and more to do with being lucky. The participants' limited experience of social and economic variety affects the depth and extent of t heir learning, whether formal or informal. As their environment shrinks, their capacity to broaden their learning context shrinks as well.

6.4.2. Delayed or void transitions

Youths who drop out of school either take longer periods to drop back in or do not drop back in at all. This makes their transition from school to work take longer than it should WHY? or it could prevent this transition from occurring at all. These youths tend to have delayed or void school-to-work transitions until their late 20s. This trend is different from the usual trend of human development from childhood to adulthood and the transition from learner to worker.

The youth in Folweni, most of whom come from disadvantaged families which can offer them little in the way of support, experienced their adulthood before their attainment of economic self-sufficiency. These youths become parents before they have had experience of taking care of themselves financially. This creates a confused transition for them, as they try to find their identities as adults (as parents) who are still dependent on their own parents or grandparents.

The destructive encounters with which the youths involve themselves while grappling with the attempt to reach successful destinations also contribute to their failure to progress. The outcomes of these encounters are seldom positive. For example, pregnancy results in their becoming parents; the use of drugs results in despondency; and crime results in jail. These events complicate their transitions and create a cycle of challenges for them to overcome.

6.4.3. Youth, adult dependency and grant dependency

Unsuccessful transitions affect the family structure and have an undesirable effect on the government's ability to provide for them. Youths from poor socioeconomic backgrounds develop dependency characteristics as a result of their unsuccessful or prolonged school-to-work transitions. The youth in the study depended on pensioners or their parents for their basic needs. The extent of their dependency is evident from their view that they are entitled to use their children's grants for themselves.

Their dependency is dragged into adulthood, given that they enter that phase without the means to provide for themselves and their children. This has a huge impact on the older members of their families. Furthermore, the unemployed status of these youths creates a characteristic of grant dependency in the area.

6.4.4. Transition conceptions

The school-to-work transitions in the South African context are determined mainly by one's social background. For the young participants in this study, the lack of family support, their financial conditions and their location played a massive role in their intertwined transition experiences. According to Tchibozo this is clear evidence of what he calls the determinist approach to transitions (Tchibozo, 2002), which suggests that transitions are determined by the individual's social background. There is little evidence for random transitions (transitions dependent on chance) (Glover & King, 1997), chaotic transitions (the individual's past experiences influencing the transition despite the social background) (Gardecki & Neumark, 1998), or strategic transitions (transitions influenced by a person's decisions) (Tchibozo, 2002) in this context.

6.5. POLICY AND CHANGE

6.5.1. Youth development in South Africa, policy and change

Youth development is South Africa has faced a lot of criticism from academics, the media, political parties and the youth cohort. The criticism arises from the fact that very little development has taken place since the inception of the development programme, which is the responsibility of the National Youth Commission. The Commission, by its nature, has no powers to implement anything. The co-ordination and monitoring of the programme is the responsibility of other departments, which have not been greatly active in this regard. (Until the establishment of the National Youth Development Agency (the NYC) in 2009, youth development in democratic South Africa had had structural, policy and implementation challenges and had been mainly *ad hoc*. One has to hope for better things in the future.)

Everatt (2000) suggests that the NYC 'lacked power', given that while they could design policies, the endorsement, funding and implementation of those policies depended on the Cabinet. Everatt's submission is an example of how policy design and implementation is reliant on power relations. He further suggests that the concerns of the youth were not at the heart of the design of the policy. The experiences of the past years seem to have given good grounds for such concerns.

There has been broad consensus from academia on the disjuncture between the intended and the implemented policy, whether around the policy as it influenced political intentions and pressures (Levinson, 2001), as authoritative matter or allocation of values (Ball, 1990), or representing public needs and interest (Levinson, 2001). It is clear that the disjunctures between the formulation of the policy, its endorsement, its funding and its implementation challenge the empowerment of the recipients; in this case, the youth. As the government has changed, political demands have necessitated policy changes, and youth policies were among those. In the case of youth development, the haphazard formulation of policies, structures and institutions has resulted in the establishment of a commission instead of an implementation agency for youth development.

The researcher's discussion follows the line that policy should be informed by 'policy action' and that issues of infrastructure and resources should be taken into consideration in policy design. The policy implementers tend to ignore aspects of policy that necessitate the allocation of infrastructure and resources (for example resources to monitor the implementation of SASA and compulsory schooling). They concentrate therefore on aspects of policy that are not only understandable but also don't involve huge changes in the *status quo*, and that require the allocation of few resources in both management and administration. And lastly, policy design and implementation in South Africa tend to be unidirectional and to lack accountability, thus limiting the feedback that might give rise to the realignment of policies.

The challenge of bringing about integrated youth development is both a structural and a policy challenge in that: (1) the State's youth development policies have not been responsive to the youth issue, and (2) there has been no specific department responsible for the implementation of youth programmes. The National Youth Development Agency has been one of the few recent successes in the field of integrated youth development.

The ETD system has not been an exception. The gap in the education, training and development policies addressing the challenge of out-of-school youth and youth at risk is one of the contributing factors to nation's problems with labour supply and demand. SASA, the stipulation of nine years of compulsory education and the age specification are some of the policies that are based on international trends and which are divorced from the local context.

6.5.2. Policy and out-of-school youth

The Department of Education is the main agent and custodian of youth skills and knowledge development from entry level into schooling, until the learners are qualified for work. It is for this reason that what goes on in the development and implementation of youth-related policy in the other government departments should be closely linked to the education policies in South Africa.

That said, the Department of Education should ensure that the compulsory years of education in South Africa are the most effective and efficient for eliminating the challenges of dropping out. If effectiveness and efficiency is   met, the challenges of dropping out between Grades 1 and 9 would decrease, leaving the country with the challenge of learners dropping out of Grades 10 and 11.

While compulsory schooling applies until Grade 9 or age 15, and the Basic Conditions of Employment Policy (DoL, 1997) suggests that these learners are fit for employment, employers still marginalise these youths due to their poor skills levels. If the policies see these youth as ready for the labour market, the transition policies should effectively advocate for these and provide incentives for the labour market to be receptive to new job seekers. Skills development initiatives should also be driven in a less competitive process and thus provide equitable chances for young people to attain skills and theoretical knowledge.

When skills development happens for the young drop-out, the focus should be mainly on developing situations in which the level of skills developed is adequate to meet the needs of the labour market and matches the individual's strengths. For example, the participants in the study believe that the current training programmes occasionally provided in the area are not sufficient for them to get sustainable employment or incomes.

Skills development in South Africa is targeted mainly at satisfying the demands of the labour market rather than the individuals' needs. A skills shortage is defined as 'a situation in which employers are unable to fill, or experience difficulty in filling vacancies in a specific occupation or specialisation due to an insufficient number of workers with the required qualifications and experience' (Labour, 2003). The challenge for South Africa is to coin a favourable term from the point of view of individuals who have no skills or qualifications to make them employable, so that when South Africa develops strategies for skills development it will be for the benefit of the individual rather than the employers. If that is achieved, youth school-to-work

transitions will slot into those strategies so that their needs determine their development.

While the analysis of the demand and supply of skills in South Africa concentrates on the range of skills needed in the field and quantifies them, (DoL, 2003) the view should extend to looking at the availability of people who can develop those skills. Not only is the skills front in South Africa threatened by the lack of field-specific skills, but there is a limited number of individuals who can develop these skills. For example, there is a pool of individuals who are targeted for field-specific skills development mainly for the skills needed by the labour market. This excludes the youth who do not have the basic skills to qualify to be in this pool. But if the 'pool' does not have enough individuals in it, then that is a very significant threat to skills development and the labour market.

Skills development should thus look at strategies for the development of youth who are discouraged, in order to qualify them to be in the 'pool' and stand a chance for field-specific skills development. This, however, cannot be achieved without the strategic nurturing of the youth who have no work experience, have limited knowledge, have not attained enough skills to compete for selection in the learnerships and other programmes, and who may have only functional literacy.

While SASA aims to ensure that the young attend school, it establishes no process to ensure that the DoE is accountable for the implementation of the policy. While the policy suggests that the HOD has to investigate the circumstances of learner absence and take action in that regard, school principals believe that the department has no processes in place to investigate dropping out between Grades 1 and 11.

One of the challenges hampering the development of the youth is the lack of learner knowledge and experience of the labour market environment amongst people in late 20s. These youths have to compete for jobs with peers who have had some level of labour market experience, who have some knowledge, and who have higher levels of education and productive social networks. While the game is the same, the playing fields are not level and not all players in the game start on an equal footing.

6.5.3. Policy and the school principal

Interviews conducted with high-school principals yielded interesting perspectives on education policy. Principals were asked to provide insight into what their experiences were at their respective schools, describe the experiences and pathways of out-of school youth and make recommendations from a policy perspective.

The Principals articulated that the Department of Education could do more to educate parents on the South African Schools Act (SASA) so that they understand more clearly the stipulations made around compulsory education especially for children under the age of fifteen. This said it is the view of this study that the Principals themselves have a very limited understanding of the South African Schools Act (SASA) and what it advocates. This is evident in the manner in which Principals deal with the issue of learner readmission, their role in the implementation of the Act and their understanding of the role of the Department of Education at district level.

Principals generally readmit youth back to school and in some cases observe that learners who re-enter the schooling system are more committed and therefore work harder. Principals verbalised that the only learners that are not readmitted to school are those who have a criminal record. The Act however does not state that a learner should be disqualified on the basis of a criminal record and therefore this disqualification is unconstitutional. There was a strong sense from the interviews conducted with Principals that learners who are readmitted into the schooling system were being granted a favour as opposed to its being a right for learners to have access to second-chance education.

The principals also did not understand that according to the SASA Act, the HOD of the schools is responsible for ensuring the following:

> "....investigate the circumstances of the learner's absence from school; take appropriate measures to remedy the situation; and failing such a remedy, issue a written notice to the parent of the learner requiring compliance with the subsection" (SASA,1996: Chapter 2, Section 1).

The principals did not recognise that they were responsible for following up on learners who were not attending school by communicating with parents and if no correspondence is received from parents; their role involves reporting these cases to the Department of Education. It was also evident when interviewing the principals that they had very little understanding of the role of the Department of Education in enforcing conditions as stipulated in the SASA Act. The principals believe that more could be done to train educational managers regarding the implementation of SASA.

The principals do not have a standardised method to track learner drop-out rates but do so by looking at learner figures at the beginning of the school year and comparing them with figures at the end of that school year. Unfortunately there is no indication of whether these learners end up in other schools or at FET colleges in the area so the magnitude of the drop-out statistic is questionable. However, subsequent to the introduction of the learner tracking system, LURITS, the magnitude of the learner drop-out statistic will be better understood. This said, being able to quantify the learner drop-out statistic does not aid in retaining and managing learner drop-out rates.

6.6. CONCLUSION

The reasons for why youths drop out of school are complex and intertwined, and in many instances the youths themselves struggle to articulate the main reasons. Those they identify include poverty, pregnancy, having dysfunctional family units, a lack of support from their families, a lack of educator commitment, and the pursuit of economic opportunity. They come to realise the value of education after experiencing the hardships of being out of school and thereafter attempt to re-enter the ETD system or to enter the labour market.

Dropping into the ETD system and the labour market is largely constrained. The circumstances that led to their dropping out tend to hinder them from dropping back into school successfully. Dropping into the labour market is constrained by their low levels of education and their lack of qualifications. As a result of the challenges

associated with re-entry into the ETD system or entry into the labour market, these youths are prone to experience psychological difficulties.

An evaluation of the school principals' understanding of the SASA and their role in the implementation thereof yielded the fact that school managers have a very limited understanding of the Act. Also they do not have an understanding of the role of the DOE in this regard. It is the opinion of this researcher that this can largely be attributed to the lack of empowerment by the department for school managers (including principals) and the lack of monitoring of the implementation of this policy.

Different government departments have different programmes aimed at assisting the youth. Unfortunately these initiatives are not integrated to the extent that they should be, resulting in duplication and the non-alignment of their interventions. Kraak (2003) argues sensibly that the successful implementation of youth policy requires an integrated approach. However, with the introduction of the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) the intention is that these initiatives will be synergised to a much larger degree.