CHAPTER 3
EXPLORING AND EXPLAINING THE MANIFESTATIONS OF LEARNING SUPPORT

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the procedure used in the research, with a description of the site for the research, as well as the method of selection of participants and co-participants. Also presented are a description of data collection strategies employed in the study, a description of the background of participants and co-participants, as well as a theme analysis of the data collected.

3.2   THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The proposed study is a qualitative explanation of the ways in which learning support manifests itself in the lives of high school learners. Bos and Richardson (1994:180) maintain that one purpose of qualitative research, especially for educational researchers, is to identify the problems and the processes that will be effected to improve education. Leedy and Ormrod (2001:147) explain that qualitative research methods centre on the 'real world' or the natural settings in which events occur, and approach the study of the events in these settings with the understanding that there may be different dimensions to the events being studied. As this research is qualitative in nature, the researcher will be dealing with learners in the classroom environment at work. The researcher will also adhere to Terre Blanche and Kelly's direction (2004:128) to disrupt the circumstance and flow of events only minimally and to intermingle as a part of the environment where the incidents occur.

The following advantages of a qualitative research method resonated in this study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:148 & 149):

1.   It is descriptive as it can show the make-up of certain circumstances, surroundings, practices, connections and structures.

2.   It is interpretive, for the researcher is able to obtain an understanding of the make-up of a certain incident, establish new ideas about the incident and may uncover the problems that this presents.

3.   It permits the researcher to verify or corroborate the strength or legitimacy of certain assertions and beliefs.

4.   It may enable the researcher to evaluate the efficiency of certain schemes, systems and changes.

Informing this study are the assumptions that learners can experience barriers to learning both intrinsically and extrinsically and that some form of learning support may be available to assist those who will require it. Hence, the purpose of this study is to explain the ways in which learning support manifests itself in the lives of high school learners, and thereby increase our knowledge and understanding of learning support for high school learners who experience barriers to learning. To achieve this, the researcher employed a multiple case study design, as this type of study is best suited to acquiring knowledge on circumstances or conditions that are little known (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:149). Data was collected from learners through interviews, observation, documents/records and site visits/field work. Consult Figure 3.1 on the following page for a summary of the research process.
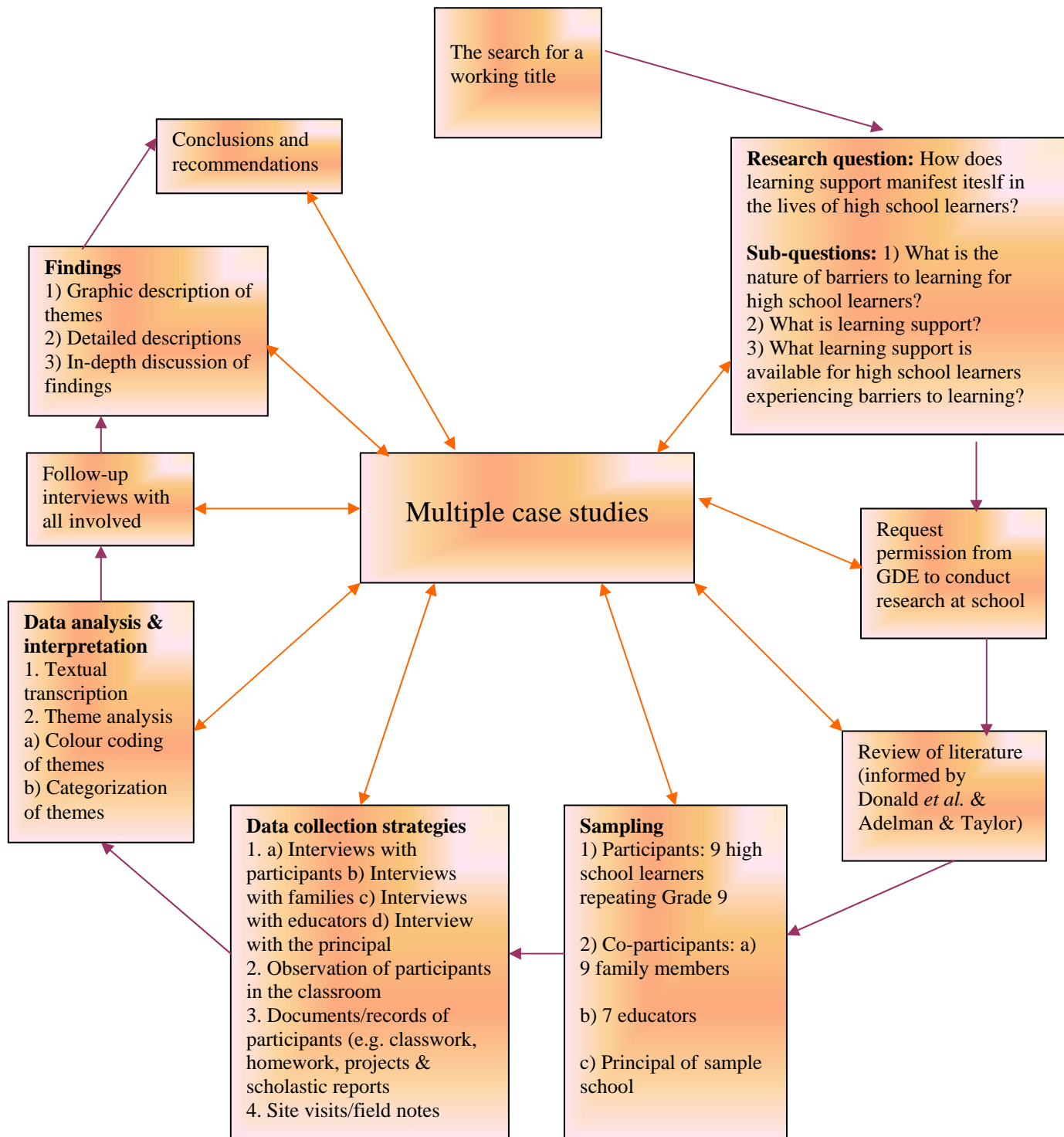
The search for a working title

Conclusions and recommendations

Findings
1) Graphic description of themes
2) Detailed descriptions
3) In-depth discussion of findings

Research question: How does learning support manifest iteslf in the lives of high school learners?

Sub-questions: 1) What is the nature of barriers to learning for high school learners?
2) What is learning support?
3) What learning support is available for high school learners experiencing barriers to learning?

Follow-up interviews with all involved

Multiple case studies

Request permission from GDE to conduct research at school

Data analysis & interpretation
1. Textual transcription
2. Theme analysis
a) Colour coding of themes
b) Categorization of themes

Review of literature (informed by Donald *et al.* & Adelman & Taylor)

Data collection strategies
1. a) Interviews with participants b) Interviews with families c) Interviews with educators d) Interview with the principal
2. Observation of participants in the classroom
3. Documents/records of participants (e.g. classwork, homework, projects & scholastic reports)
4. Site visits/field notes

Sampling
1) Participants: 9 high school learners repeating Grade 9

2) Co-participants: a) 9 family members

b) 7 educators

c) Principal of sample school

FIGURE 3.1:   RESEARCH PROCESS

3.3   PARADIGM

As mentioned in Chapter One, the interpretive research paradigm is deemed to be well suited to this study, since this approach deals with understanding and describing what participants make of incidents in particular circumstances (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2004:123; Bos &

Richardson, 1994:182). It also helps to understand participants' actions in specific contexts (Bos & Richardson, 1994:182). According to Terre Blanche and Kelly (2004:124), the interpretive approach depends on first-hand information, achieved through interviews, observation and analysis of documents (Bos & Richardson, 1994:182). This study aims to amass data through first-hand information obtained from interviews, observations, and scholastic documents and field notes.

3.4   PLACE OF RESEARCH

The setting for this research is Atteridgeville, a beautiful and homely community in the West of Pretoria. The town was named after a city council member, Mrs M. P. Atteridge. Founded in August 1939 following the forceful dislodgement of people dwelling in Marabastad, Newclare, Lady Selborne, Bantule and Hoves Ground, Atteridgeville has a current population of about two hundred thousand inhabitants. The community maintains a rich culture, with jazz as the most popular music, thus earning the title of 'the jazz capital of South Africa', in some circles.

In the town are several heritage sites such as the 'Ga-Mothakga Resort, Second World War Plaque, Mendi Memorial, Ou Staad Houses, Black Rock House, Schurveberg and Mrs Moloto's House Padi Street', as well as the Atteridgeville Super Stadium.

However, the town suffers a lot of environmental hazards such as dumping and littering as a result of many open undeveloped spaces. The special foods of the inhabitants of this town include *sphatlo, mogodu and maotwana*. See Figure 3.2 for the location of Atteridgeville on the map of the City of Tshwane.
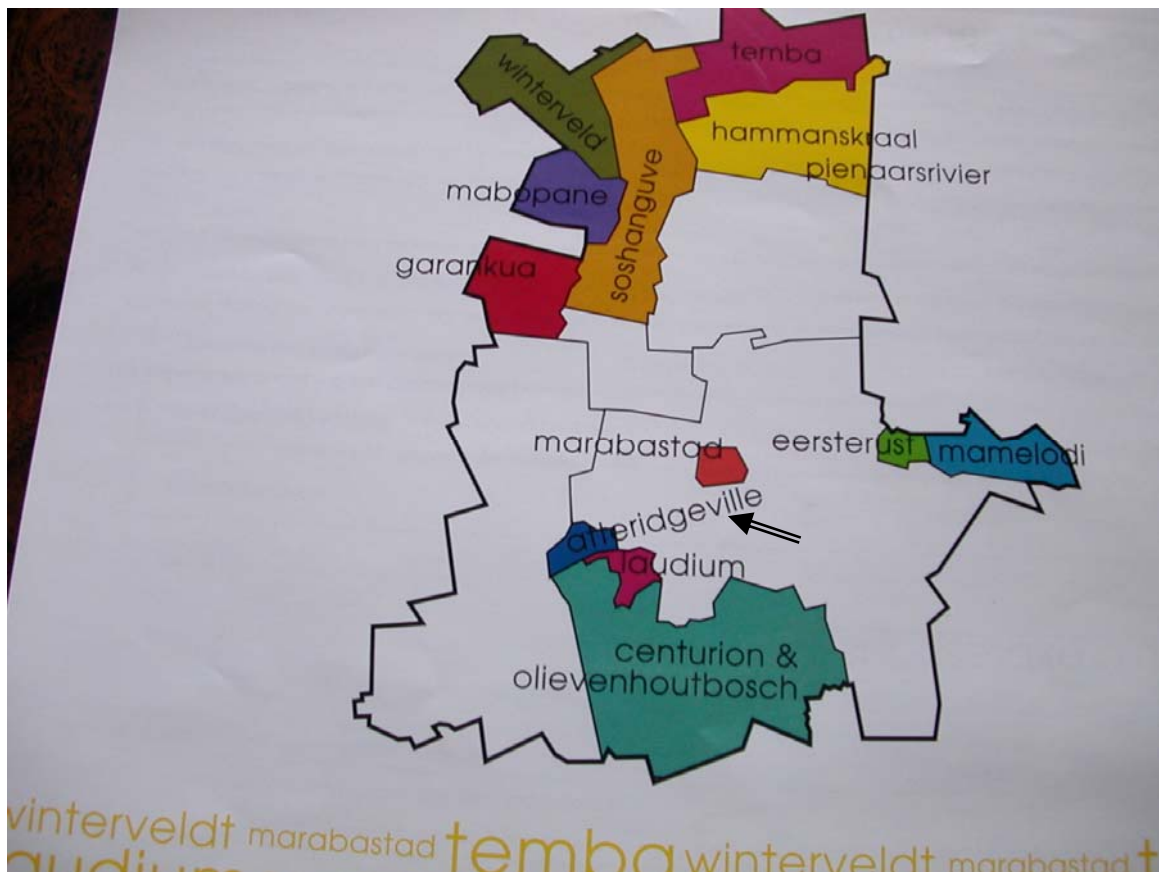
FIGURE 3.2: **MAP OF THE CITY OF TSHWANE INDICATING THE GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION OF ATTERIDGEVILLE**

Learners from Atteridgeville and other surrounding communities populate the sample school and they come mostly from disadvantaged homes. As one of the educators commented, 'It is a disadvantaged school'. The researcher had the opportunity to visit the school before the start of a school day and was able to observe learners as they came to school. A good percentage of the girls came in extremely faded uniforms and some boys in mismatched stockings. Some children also wore tattered clothes.

Also observed was that the school has no playground where learners can unwind during break. They sit around in groups to eat and then go back to class. When the researcher enquired as to what they do for play, the reply was that they do not really play, and that very few schools in the town have playgrounds.

3.5   SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

In the opinion of Van Vuuren and Maree (2004:274), the exercise of selecting participants in a study is an important feature of research, as it may affect the outcome of the research. Judgmental sampling was employed in this study. This means that an authority such as the educator was assigned to carry out the selection while bearing in mind a particular aim (Van Vuuren & Maree, 2004:281). The learners repeating the ninth grade were accorded precedence, as they had not achieved the required scholastic scores to be promoted, which could be indicative of the manifestation of learning difficulties. These consisted of nine learners from the ages of fifteen to eighteen, and scoring thirty to thirty-nine per cent in three or more learning areas.

The inclusion of learners in the selected group was confirmed through the following criteria:

1.   Confirmation by parents and family members with whom they live, that they are experiencing learning difficulties.
2.   An indication from their academic performance records that they may be experiencing learning difficulties.

The sample consisted of five male and four female participants, while the co-participants included three parents and six family members (comprising of aunts, sisters, brothers and a grandmother), seven educators (two females and five males) and the principal of the school.

3.6   RESEARCH DESIGN

3.6.1   PRE-PROCEDURAL MEETINGS

Having obtained the required permission from the Department of Education (Appendix A), the researcher proceeded once again to the community and school of study. The Vice-Principal, under the instruction of the Principal, appointed the School's Head of Department of Life Skills to give guidance and assistance through the duration of data collection. The participants were identified and introduced to the researcher (on 17 February 2005), who spoke to them, explaining what the study is about and requesting that they be part of it. The request was willingly granted. The researcher, however, also asked to speak to their parents. It was thus arranged that she be present at the Parents/Teachers' meeting on Sunday morning,

20 February, 2005. Unfortunately, only one parent out of nine was present. Hence the request was made that parents endorse the consent forms.

3.6.2   DATA COLLECTION

According to Yin (2003:98), the use of multiple sources of evidence makes the findings of a case study more credible and authentic. Stake (2000:443) is of the opinion that this method may be used to clarify meanings, as well as to validate repeatability, thereby limiting the chances of misinterpretation. For this study, the use of different sources of information was employed so as to make the conclusions of the research more convincing and accurate.

Interpretive researchers tend to endow feelings, events and social circumstances where incidents happen with meaning (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2004:127). Hence, widespread information was gathered on participants in this study through interviews with learners, educators, parents/family members and the principal. Observation of learners in the classroom environment, analysis of documents/records such as class-work, home work and scholastic reports, and finally site visits/field notes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:149) were also strategies employed in collecting the data (see Figure 1.2). Notes were made of the physical environment (social context) where the research took place, as this might help in determining how far the findings may be generalised in respect of alternative circumstances (even though generalisation is not a purpose or goal of this study).

The interview sessions for the participants, as well as the educators and the principal (co-participants) were conducted on the school premises, while those with the other co-participants (families) were conducted in their homes. Co-participant A, however, was interviewed in one of the classrooms in the school after the Parents/Teachers' meeting, and co-participant G was interviewed telephonically, as it would have been difficult to conduct the interview otherwise.

The first two sessions of the interview were carried out in the new staff room, with an area of 84.9 square metres and walls painted in light sunny yellow. On the six windows in this room were dark red blinds. Also in the room were eight metal and wooden standing cabinets, three drawer cabinets, a wooden bookshelf and eleven tables and chairs arranged on the four sides of the room for educators. Although the researcher was promised a quiet room in which to conduct the interviews, this was not quite the case, as there was a steady stream of learners

and educators coming in and out. Fortunately, the venue was changed and the sessions continued in the office of one of the Vice-Principals. The walls of this room were painted in light yellow and in the office were file cabinets, a standing fan, a table and three chairs in the centre of the room. The interviewer and the interviewees sat side by side, facing each other. The interview with the principal took place in her office, which was a large room with file cabinets, bookshelves, a table and several chairs.

Co-participants B to F and co-participants H to I were interviewed in their residences. The houses were identical in structure and size. Appendix E (picture a) shows an example of the houses in which they live. Although co-participant G was interviewed telephonically, a visit was made to the informal settlement where he lives. Appendix E (pictures b & c) is an example of the type of structure he lives in.

Twenty-six interviews were conducted in total, and three sessions of observation were performed. Seven of the participants were observed at work during classes. Classes were carried out in clean and convivial classrooms, in which learners' desks and chairs were nevertheless tightly packed due to the high density of learners in class. Although the actual proceeding started on 17 February 2005 with the physical introduction of participants to the researcher, all the interviews and observations were carried out over a period of three weeks (between 20 February and 15 March 2005). The duration of the sessions varied between thirty minutes and fifty minutes for each interviewee and these sessions took place at eight in the morning and 13h00 on weekdays. Follow-up interviews were conducted between 27 and 30 March 2006 and 3 April 2006.

3.6.2.1   Interviews

The interview is a valuable and reliable source of evidence in qualitative research (Yin, 2003:89), as it is a natural way of interacting socially (Henning *et al*., 2004:66; Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2004:128). This method of collecting evidence could also provide the sequence of vital incidents leading to barriers to learning, as well as the subsequent learning support and information regarding the learner's attitude to tasks and settings (Smith, 1998:308).

The interpretive research paradigm in this study blends with the use of interviews as a source of evidence as this affords one the opportunity of getting to know the participants well and of understanding their feelings (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2004:128), particularly because

interviewing involves face-to-face verbal interaction (Fontana & Fey, 2000:645). The view of Breakwell (1998:238) is that collecting evidence through interviews depends on the willingness of the participant to supply authentic answers to questions. On this basis, the researcher established some level of rapport with participants during the first meeting, at which the aim of the research was explained to them.

The participants were given semi-structured interviews, although these were laced with some unstructured questions evolving from the interchange between the researcher and each participant. The co-participants in this study (educators, parents/family members and the principal) were also given semi-structured interviews. Seven educators (two females and five males) who were interviewed, were selected based on the learning areas in which participants were experiencing barriers to learning. Three parents (mothers), as well as some family members and the principal of the school were also interviewed. Each interview session lasted half an hour to fifty minutes, and all sessions were tape-recorded, in addition to some note-taking.

3.6.2.2 Observation

The use of observation as a form of collecting evidence is deemed important in the interpretive approach, as this takes place while responses are in progress (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2004:135). In this study, observation is used as a data collection strategy in order to establish trustworthiness. The researcher agrees with Wilkinson's thoughts (1998:216) that it will be impracticable to observe everything and that what is observed should depend on the objective and hope of the research or on the research questions. Terre Blanche and Kelly's advice (2004:137) to never lose sight of the research questions was heeded by the researcher during the interview sessions and observations in class.

Direct observation of participants in the classroom was carried out while educators taught. In agreeing with Wilkinson's thoughts above, observations were made on the following: the general atmosphere (mood) in the class; the classroom setting (arrangement of desks and chairs); the attitude of all learners and particularly the participants in the study, that is, gestures such as facial expressions and general body language; attentiveness to educators; level of participation; and finally, level of interaction between participants and educators. Notes were made in a note pad as observations were in progress, and these included the

researcher's thoughts and impressions of occurrences in the classroom. The data collected during observation will be discussed in the next chapter.

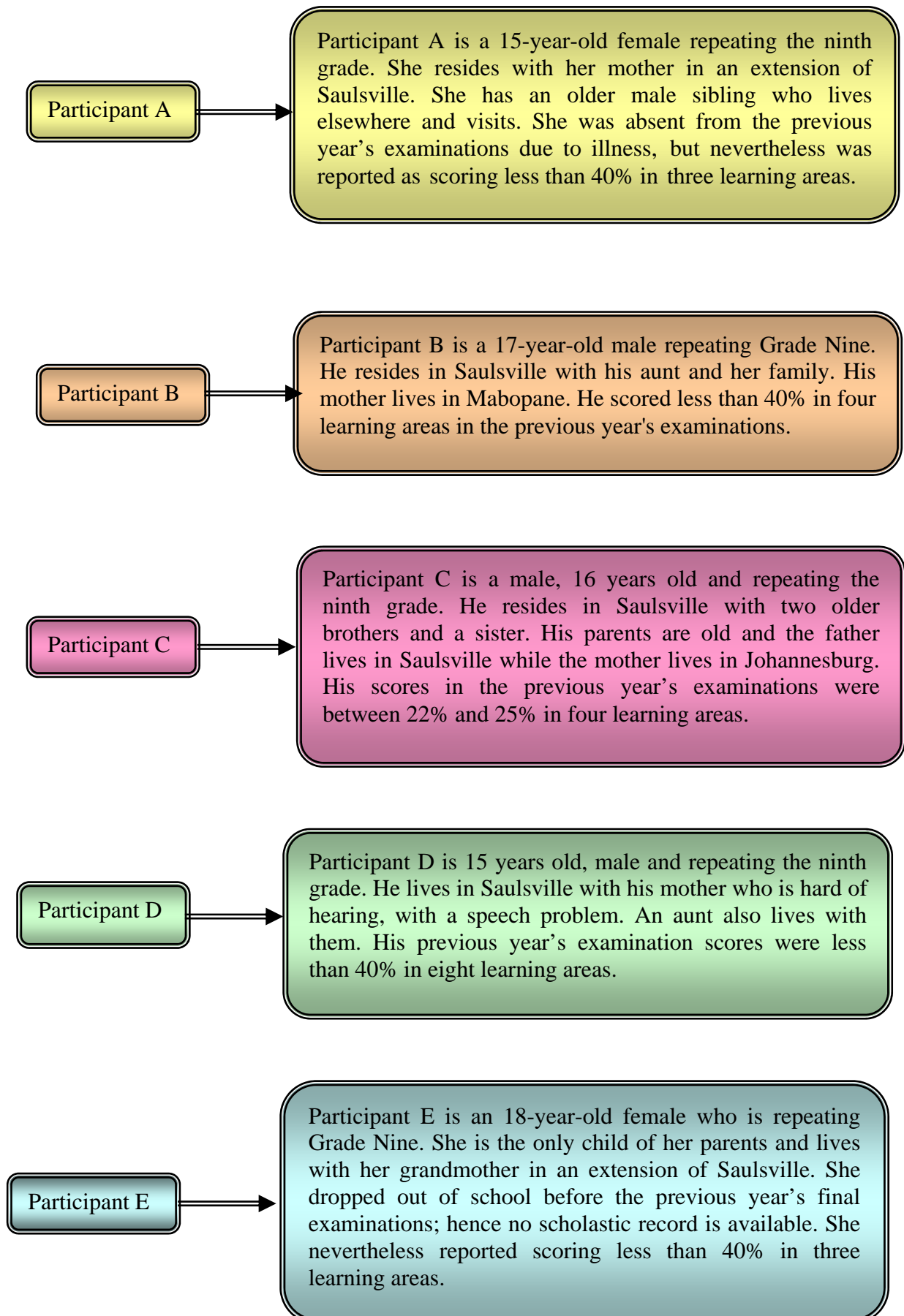### 3.6.2.3   Documents and records

Documents and records were also used in this study as a data collection strategy, mostly to corroborate and substantiate the evidence obtained from the other sources. The documents and records assessed include participants' class-work, homework, projects and scholastic reports (Appendix C).

3.6.2.4   Field notes

These formed a part of the data collection strategy, as the researcher made a general observation of activities and experiences during visits to the school, as well as taking notes of impressions and of what was heard or discussed before and after the interview sessions. Also noted were impressions while observing participants in the classroom, as well as the general atmosphere of the community (Appendix D).

3.7   DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS AND CO-PARTICIPANTS

A total of twenty-six individuals participated in this study. Nine of these were the learners and are regarded as the PARTICIPANTS, hereafter named after the first nine letters of the alphabets. Also, nine family members consisting of three mothers, three older siblings, two aunts and one grandmother are referred to as CO-PARTICIPANTS, and hereafter named after the first nine letters of the alphabets. The seven educators who are equally CO-PARTICIPANTS are hereafter to be identified by the name 'Educator, plus the first seven Roman numerals'. The principal, who is also a co-participant, will remain The Principal. The full description of participants and co-participants follows in Figures 3.3a, 3.3b and 3.3c.
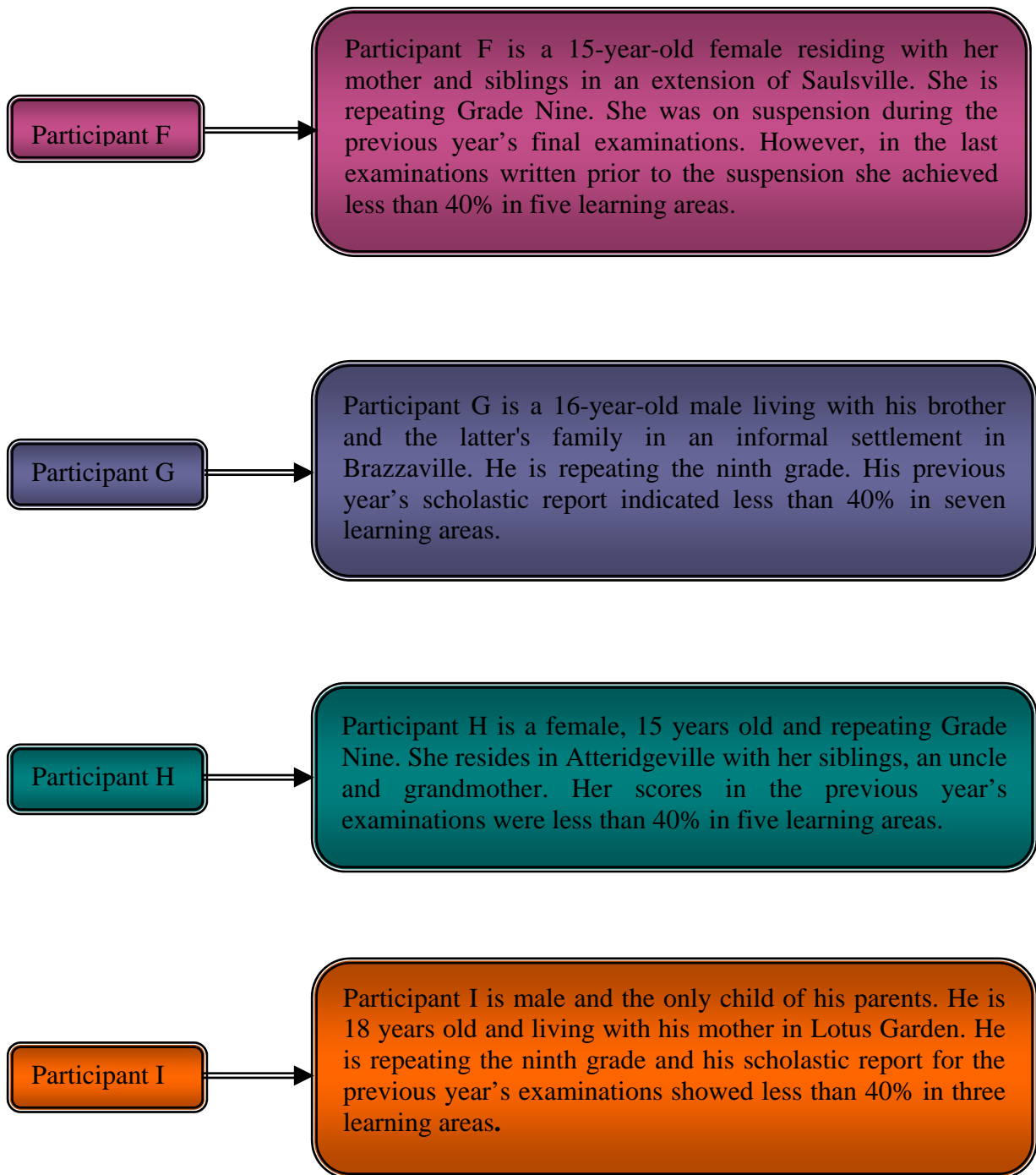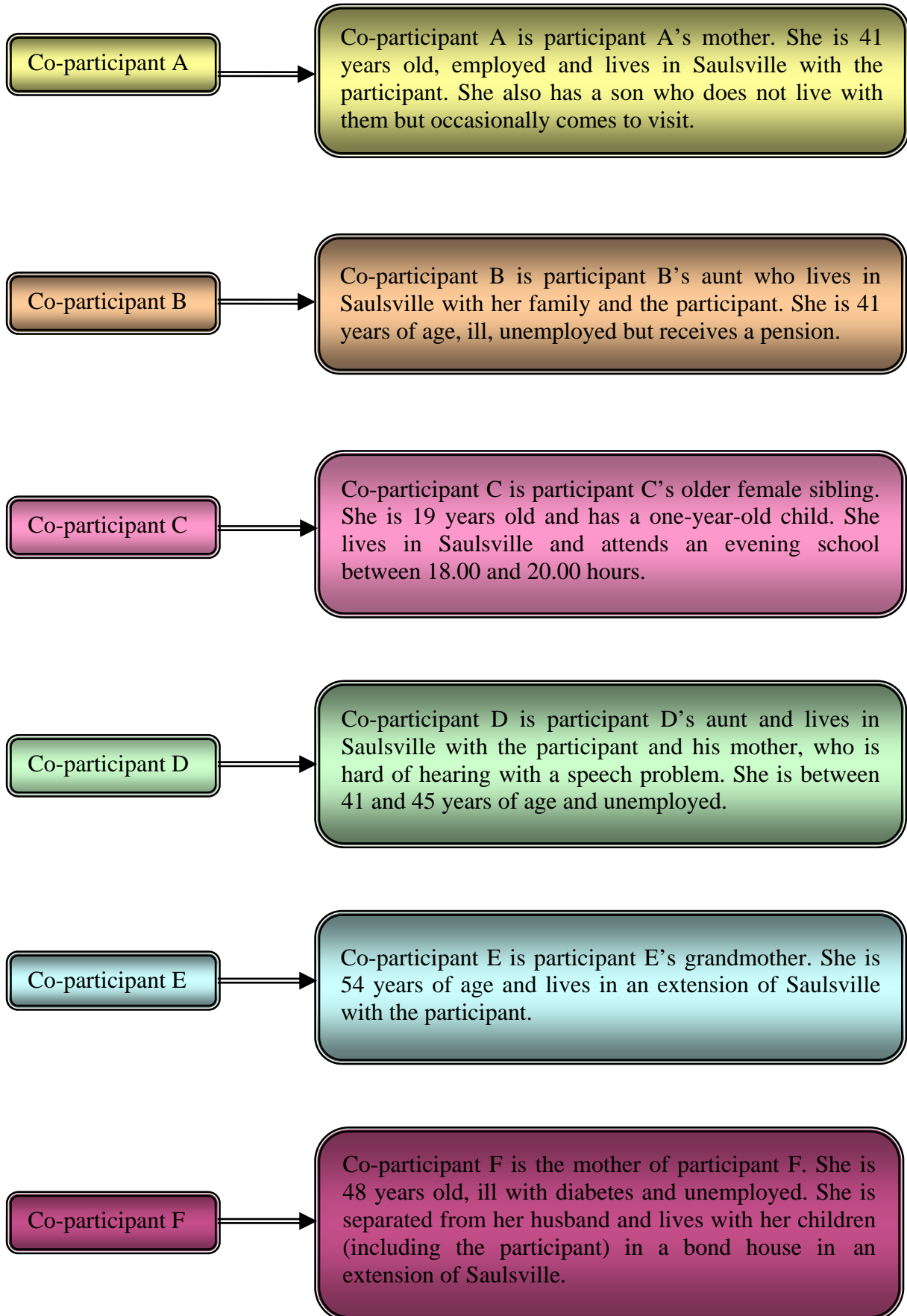
Participant A

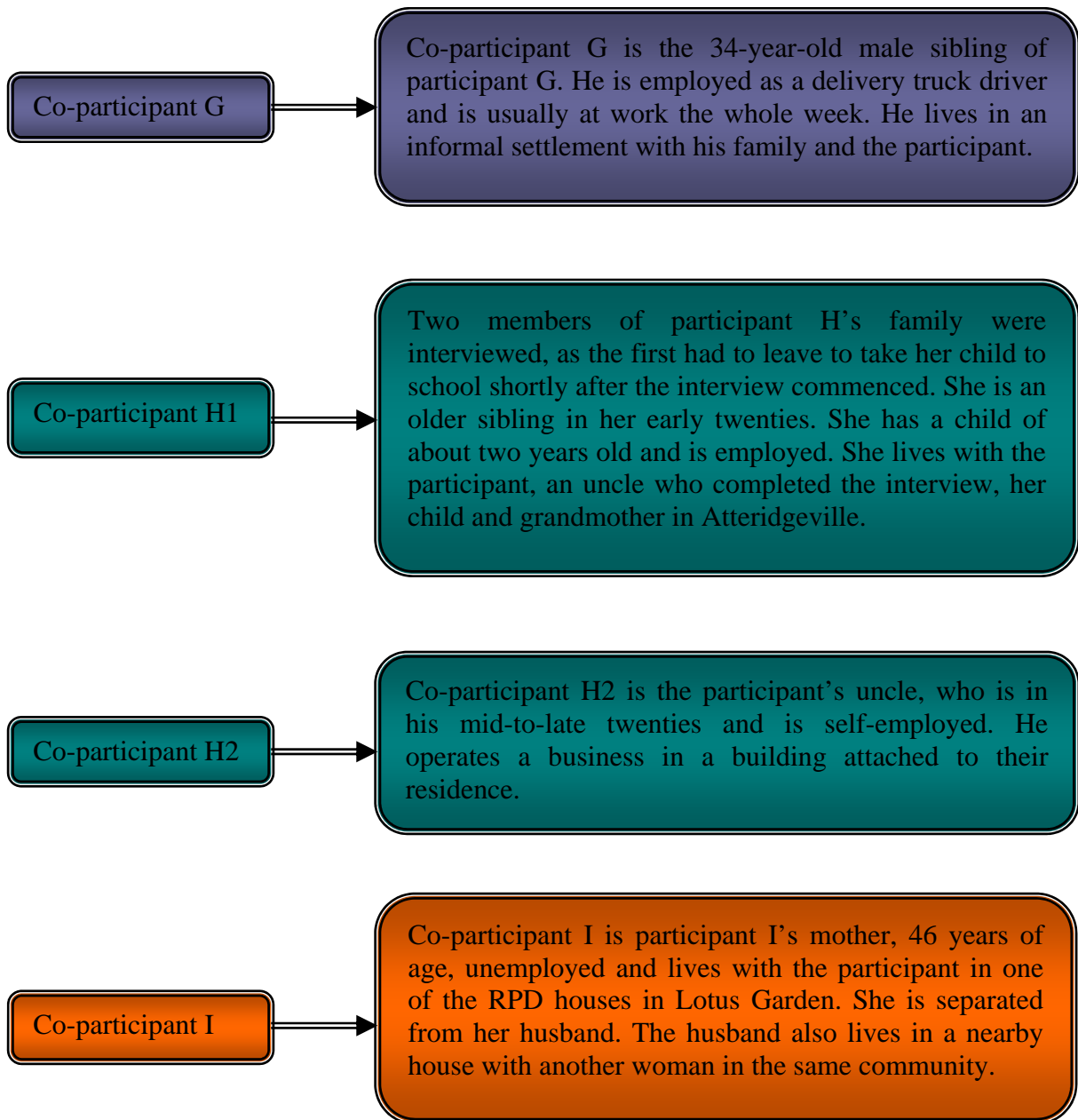> Participant A is a 15-year-old female repeating the ninth grade. She resides with her mother in an extension of Saulsville. She has an older male sibling who lives elsewhere and visits. She was absent from the previous year's examinations due to illness, but nevertheless was reported as scoring less than 40% in three learning areas.

Participant B

> Participant B is a 17-year-old male repeating Grade Nine. He resides in Saulsville with his aunt and her family. His mother lives in Mabopane. He scored less than 40% in four learning areas in the previous year's examinations.

Participant C

> Participant C is a male, 16 years old and repeating the ninth grade. He resides in Saulsville with two older brothers and a sister. His parents are old and the father lives in Saulsville while the mother lives in Johannesburg. His scores in the previous year's examinations were between 22% and 25% in four learning areas.

Participant D

> Participant D is 15 years old, male and repeating the ninth grade. He lives in Saulsville with his mother who is hard of hearing, with a speech problem. An aunt also lives with them. His previous year's examination scores were less than 40% in eight learning areas.

Participant E

> Participant E is an 18-year-old female who is repeating Grade Nine. She is the only child of her parents and lives with her grandmother in an extension of Saulsville. She dropped out of school before the previous year's final examinations; hence no scholastic record is available. She nevertheless reported scoring less than 40% in three learning areas.

Participant F

Participant F is a 15-year-old female residing with her mother and siblings in an extension of Saulsville. She is repeating Grade Nine. She was on suspension during the previous year's final examinations. However, in the last examinations written prior to the suspension she achieved less than 40% in five learning areas.

Participant G

Participant G is a 16-year-old male living with his brother and the latter's family in an informal settlement in Brazzaville. He is repeating the ninth grade. His previous year's scholastic report indicated less than 40% in seven learning areas.

Participant H

Participant H is a female, 15 years old and repeating Grade Nine. She resides in Atteridgeville with her siblings, an uncle and grandmother. Her scores in the previous year's examinations were less than 40% in five learning areas.

Participant I

Participant I is male and the only child of his parents. He is 18 years old and living with his mother in Lotus Garden. He is repeating the ninth grade and his scholastic report for the previous year's examinations showed less than 40% in three learning areas.

FIGURE 3.3a: PARTICIPANTS

| Co-participant A | → | Co-participant A is participant A's mother. She is 41 years old, employed and lives in Saulsville with the participant. She also has a son who does not live with them but occasionally comes to visit. |

| Co-participant B | → | Co-participant B is participant B's aunt who lives in Saulsville with her family and the participant. She is 41 years of age, ill, unemployed but receives a pension. |

| Co-participant C | → | Co-participant C is participant C's older female sibling. She is 19 years old and has a one-year-old child. She lives in Saulsville and attends an evening school between 18.00 and 20.00 hours. |

| Co-participant D | → | Co-participant D is participant D's aunt and lives in Saulsville with the participant and his mother, who is hard of hearing with a speech problem. She is between 41 and 45 years of age and unemployed. |

| Co-participant E | → | Co-participant E is participant E's grandmother. She is 54 years of age and lives in an extension of Saulsville with the participant. |

| Co-participant F | → | Co-participant F is the mother of participant F. She is 48 years old, ill with diabetes and unemployed. She is separated from her husband and lives with her children (including the participant) in a bond house in an extension of Saulsville. |

| Co-participant G | → | Co-participant G is the 34-year-old male sibling of participant G. He is employed as a delivery truck driver and is usually at work the whole week. He lives in an informal settlement with his family and the participant. |

| Co-participant H1 | → | Two members of participant H's family were interviewed, as the first had to leave to take her child to school shortly after the interview commenced. She is an older sibling in her early twenties. She has a child of about two years old and is employed. She lives with the participant, an uncle who completed the interview, her child and grandmother in Atteridgeville. |

| Co-participant H2 | → | Co-participant H2 is the participant's uncle, who is in his mid-to-late twenties and is self-employed. He operates a business in a building attached to their residence. |

| Co-participant I | → | Co-participant I is participant I's mother, 46 years of age, unemployed and lives with the participant in one of the RPD houses in Lotus Garden. She is separated from her husband. The husband also lives in a nearby house with another woman in the same community. |

FIGURE 3.3b: CO-PARTICIPANTS (FAMILIES)

Educator I

> Educator I is a 46-year-old male who teaches in one of the learning areas in which participants experience barriers to learning.
>
> *Teaching qualification*: He has a Senior Teacher's Diploma obtained in 1984.
>
> *Teaching experience*: He has 18 years of teaching experience and currently teaches the ninth grade.
>
> Apart from his primary assignment as an educator, he is a member of the Sports, Security and safety, and Maintenance committees.
>
> He resides in Orchards, Pretoria North.

Educator II

> Educator II is 23 years of age, male and teaching in one of the learning areas where participants exhibit learning difficulties.
>
> *Teaching qualifications*: 1) National Diploma in Technical Education, obtained in 2003. 2) Advanced Certificate in Education, obtained in 2005.
>
> *Teaching experience*: He has 2 years of teaching experience and currently teaches Grade Nine.
>
> He resides in Atteridgeville.

Eductor III

> Educator III is male and 38 years old. He is responsible for one of the learning areas in which some of the participants experience barriers to learning.
>
> *Teaching qualification*: BA obtained in 1995.
>
> *Teaching experience*: He has 8 years of experience in teaching and is currently teaching the ninth grade.
>
> Apart from his primary assignment as an educator, he is a member of the Sports committee and resides in Atteridgeville.

Educator IV

Educator IV is a 32-year-old male teaching in one of the learning areas where some participants experience barriers to learning.

Teaching qualification: Diploma in Education, obtained in 1999.

Teaching experience: He has 4 years of experience in teaching and currently teaches Grade Nine.

Apart from teaching, he is a member of the Teacher Component of The School Governing Body. He lives in Atteridgeville.

Educator V

Educator V is a 54-year-old female handling one of the learning areas where some participants exhibit learning difficulties.

Teaching qualifications: 1) Matric Exemption, 2) Senior Certificate Diploma (Vista) obtained in 1992, and 3) Senior Education Diploma (Vista) obtained in 1995.

Teaching experience: She has 24 years of teaching experience and currently teaches Grade Nine.

Aside from being an educator, she is a member of the Feeding Scheme, Greening the Environment and Gymnastics committees. She lives in Philip Nel, Danville extension.

Educator VI

Educator VI is a 46-year-old male, teaching in one of the learning areas where some participants experience barriers to learning.

Teaching qualification: He holds a Secondary Teacher's Diploma obtained in 1984.

Teaching experience: He has 18 years of teaching experience and currently teaches the ninth grade.

Aside from teaching, he is involved with the Feeding Scheme, Greening the Environment and Disciplinary committees. He resides in Atteridgeville.

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<td>Educator VII</td>
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Educator VII is 46 years old, female and handles one of the learning areas in which some participants experience barriers to learning.

Teaching qualifications: 1) Senior Teacher's Diploma (STD) obtained in 1984. 2) Further Diploma in Education (FDE) obtained in 1996.

Teaching experience: She has 20 years of teaching experience and currently teaches Grade Nine.

She has no extra responsibility apart from teaching, and she resides in Atteridgeville.

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<tr>
<td>The Principal</td>
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The Principal is a 50-year-old female and is the principal of the sample school.

Qualifications: 1) BA in Pedagogics obtained in 1981. 2) B.Ed obtained in 1990.

Teaching experience: She has 25 years of experience and resides in Atteridgeville.

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FIGURE 3.3c: CO-PARTICIPANTS (EDUCATORS)

3.8   DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Mouton (2001:108) stated that the purpose of analysis is to fathom the divergent bases that make up collected data, by examining the connections between the assembled ideas or notions in order to create themes. Mouton (2001:109) maintained in addition that interpretation, on the other hand, involves connecting and comparing the researcher's findings to other works already in existence. According to Neuman (2000:420), 'a qualitative researcher analyzes data by organizing it into categories on the basis of themes, concepts or similar features… and examines the relationship among concepts'. The next step is thus coding, as its use is an important aspect of analyzing the data collected, and this of course is influenced by the research questions.

Reflections on impressions, relationships and connections, as well as field notes collected at interviews and observations are aimed at assisting the researcher in the identification of themes and patterns (Henning *et al*., 2004:127; Bos & Richardson, 1994:90). In analyzing the evidence gathered in this study, the researcher, through inductive reasoning, has sorted and categorized the data into manageable themes and patterns (Leedy & Ormrod, 2000:160). Two key themes have emerged through applying three coding systems. These include open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

In analyzing the evidence collected, the researcher first performed open coding by reading through and examining all the data sources, thus identifying possible themes, doing preliminary clustering of similar responses, as well as indicating initial codes (Neuman, 2000:241; Henning *et al*., 2004:131).

Axial coding was the second level of analysis performed, in which linkages were made and connections between the initial codes identified. At this stage of the analytical procedure the initial codes were re-examined in search of responses or concepts that formed clusters. Related themes were merged while some were divided into sub-themes (Neuman, 2000:423; & Henning *et al*., 2004:132). The preliminary coding yielded five key themes and twenty-five sub-themes.

Selective coding was performed as the final level in the analysis of data in this study. All identified themes were integrated into two core themes on barriers to learning and the manifestations of learning support. The themes were further categorized into eight sub-themes and fourteen categories emerged from the theme on barriers to learning, all given code names in colours. Figure 3.4 illustrates the emerging themes, sub-themes and categories as follows:

THEMES

BARRIERS TO LEARNING:

Sub-themes

1. Learner-related barriers to learning

Categories:

- Play and leisure activities

- Peer influence/adolescence

- Low motivation for learning

- Inability to read and write

- Drug abuse, sex, smoking and crime

2. Educator-related barriers to learning

Categories:

- Method of instruction

- Educator absenteeism

- Perceived uncaring attitude of educators

3. Family-related barriers to learning

Categories:

- Poverty (associated with limited financial resources)

- Family problems

- Lack of sibling support and non-involvement of parents

4. Education system and society related barriers to learning

Categories:

- Inappropriate curriculum and the Outcomes-based Education system

- Classroom sizes

- Poverty

MANIFESTATIONS OF LEARNING SUPPORT:

Sub- themes

1. Knowledge and availability of learning support

2. Guidance, advice, motivation, encouragement and one-on-one support

3. Extra classes, extra work and assistance with schoolwork

4. Creation of support by mobilizing resources

FIGURE 3.4:   THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

3.9   THEME ANALYSIS

As is evident in Figure 3.4, two core themes emerged from the information collected, with each bearing sub-themes. The researcher will discuss these themes and sub-themes by substantiating them with evidence from the raw data. In the next chapter, she will integrate the themes identified in this study by relating them to the broader literature.

3.9.1   THEME ONE: BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Barriers to learning can manifest themselves in various forms. There is usually a tendency to apportion the blame for the cause of learning problems to the learner when, in fact, the problem often lies in the relationship between the learner and all levels of the system. It is a ripple effect, where all phenomena are interdependent, so that what happens at one level affects all the other levels (Donald *et al*., 2002:236 & 237). The reasons for the manifestations of barriers may therefore range from the learner to the environment, the family, peer influence and the society at large, as the researcher has indicated in earlier chapters. However, learners experiencing barriers to learning do not necessarily encounter similar difficulties, as the factors that bring about these barriers may differ from one learner to another. Various writers such as Speece *et al*. (2003:38), Adelman and Taylor (1993:14) and Donald *et al.* (2002:31 & 55) have expressed views on the factors that create barriers to learning. These views will be employed in the interpretation of the data amassed in this study.

The information gathered in the study reveals that barriers to learning originate from different factors. Hence the emergence of the sub-themes as follows:

1.   Learner-related barriers to learning
2.   Educator-related barriers to learning
3.   Family-related barriers to learning
4.   Education system and society related barriers to learning.

3.9.1.1   Sub-theme one: Learner-related barriers to learning

Learner-related barriers to learning were revealed as manifesting themselves in diverse ways in the participants in this study. The categories that emerged from the data collected on learner-related barriers to learning include:

- Play and leisure activities

- Peer influence/adolescence

- Low motivation for learning

- Inability to read and write

- Drug abuse, sex, smoking and crime.

3.9.1.1a Play and leisure activities

Prominent among the barriers to learning encountered by the participants and Grade Nine learners are *play and leisure activities*. Both participants and co-participants (families) identified these as factors impacting negatively on the learning of participants. Table 3.1 shows excerpts from the interview transcripts as they were reported by the participants and co-participants. The whole quotation may sometimes be given to show nuanced meaning:

TABLE 3.1:   EXCERPTS ON PLAY AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
227 / 7 / Participant B	'I'm playing too much. Yes I'm playing too much'.
354 / 11 / Participant C	'They play too much…'
442 / 15 / Participant D	'I play soccer almost everyday. I come from school when I find my mother sleeping and my brother sleeping, I just drop my bag quick and change and then I go. And when I come back home…I just sleep'.
670 / 26 / Participant G	'…maybe time some are playful'.
926 / 39 / Co-participant A	'Maybe they are playing…'
1109 / 46 / Co-participant C	'…I'm going to the street to play with my friends'.
1126 / 47 / Co-participant D	'I see his problem D is he is playing too much…He like the streets. He goes around the streets…every time he like to play. He like to play too much'.
1139 / 48 / Co-participant D	'They are playing too much…She like the street. She like to go to street…You can see maybe the teacher she wrote, maybe you are thinking about the streets you will see you will never learn…'
1215 / 54 / Co-participant G	'He plays too much with girls. He jumps the fence at school to go away'.
1219 / 55 / Co-participant G	'They are playing…'
1221 / 55 / Co-participant G	'Yes, he is playing…'
1247 / 56 / Co-participant H	'…just go to the all streets with ventures boys'.

Play and play-related behaviour, which could possibly have been influenced by peer pressure, came up twelve times during the interview sessions as constituting barriers to learning. The researcher, however, thinks that play and leisure activities can be positively applied with supervision in support of learning, as these could be therapeutic. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. This nevertheless draws attention to the next category.

3.9.1.1b Peer influence and adolescence

The peer-group effect is a strong factor in adolescent learning. It can be beneficial, negative or sometimes mixed, depending on the ideals of the group, as well as the needs of the particular learner. The degree of the power wielded by the group is often reliant on the 'inadequacies' of the family and school, as the learner is likely to seek what he lacks at the levels of family and school from his peers (Donald *et al*., 2002:244).

This was identified as a major barrier to learning for the ninth graders in this study. These learners are at an age when they begin to seek answers to the question 'to what group do I belong?' (Shaffer, 1996:483). This is also the phase during which the adolescent learner begins to detach himself from parents, as he regards peer acceptance as more important. Thus there is increased involvement with peers (Louw, 1997:518), of either a positive or a negative kind. Group identity is built up and the group is treated as a world apart from that of parents and other adults. Social acceptance by peers matters to the adolescent. The extracts in Table 3.2 revealed how strongly peers could influence each other, and how identifying with friends is regarded as being more important to the adolescent than anything else, including studying.

TABLE 3.2:   EXCERPTS ON PEER INFLUENCE/ADOLESCENCE

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
568 / 21 / Participant F	'…We used to tell each other very naughty stuff. We didn't give each other good advice. Only bad advice'.
1132 / 48 / Co-participant D	'They are not all right. I'm not liking them because I know they are not all right. These friends, shuh! He will never learn all right'.
584 / 22 / Participant F	'Peer pressure. My friend and I thought we were the best looking girls and we had everything…'
570 / 21 / Participant F	'…and we started not going to school'.
442 / 15 / Participant B	'…At school I find my friends "ah, don't do it" and I follow

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
	them'. (Referring to homework not done).
1336 / 63 / Co-participant I (educator)	'The biggest barrier is peer pressure. Some of the learners got involved in activities which they themselves are not sure whether they are right or wrong because of the peer group, the age group. They want to associate'.
245 / 8 / Participant B	'Friends at home they use to play too much'
246 / 8 / The researcher had to ask	'Haven't you seen that this is not helping you?'
247 /8 / Participant B	'I see but my friend is my friend'.
1247 / 56 / Co-participant H	'She likes to go outside with girls and boys, group. Go there, sleep there, don't come back…'
1263 / 57 / Co-participant H	'I think the problem is their age now, 16, 17…They are just going out and make some friends, different boyfriends'.
1267 / 57 / Co-participant H	'I sometimes listen to her and her friends talking about boyfriends and stuff'.
1302 / 60 / Co-participant I	'Maybe the friends. He is got lot of friends. Everytime he is with friends'.
1308 / 61 / Co-participant I	'…some girls and boys they are having affairs in school'.
1375 / 68 / Co-participant II	'Some of the learners have difficulties because of their friends. They are listening to their friends…"
1482 / 79 / Co-participant IV	'Peer pressure…'
1627 / Co-participant VII	'So maybe they spend most of their time with their friends'.

Participants and co-participants (families and educators) acknowledged that peer influence is a core source of barriers to learning, because at this stage in their lives, Grade Nine learners who are in the adolescent phase want to identify with their peers.

3.9.1.1c Low motivation for learning

That learners in this study exhibit a lack of eagerness to learn has diverse results. These include lack of listening in class or at home, lack of studying and lack of interest in active participation in class activities such as writing of homework, classwork and projects. Table 3.3a depicts excerpts from the interview transcriptions:

TABLE 3.3a: EXCERPTS ON LOW MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1428 / 73 / Co-participant III	'…Some learners don't even want to do those portfolios. We just force them to do the portfolios'.
1434 / 73 / Co-participant III	'Eish! Our learners sometimes are not eager to do their work'.
1436 / 73 / Co-participant III	'…more learners are not willing to learn'.
1471 / 76 / Co-participant III	'…they run away from the difficulties in between the subjects…'
1588 / 89 / Co-participant VII	'…our learners are very, very, very, very lazy'.
1618 / 90 / Co-participant VII	'Our children are very lazy. They don't want to learn'.

Learners' low motivation for learning may have resulted in a lack of listening in the classroom to educators, or at home to family members who mean well, as shown in the following excerpts in Table 3.3b.

TABLE 3.3b: EXTRACTS ON LACK OF LISTENING

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
104 / 4 / Participant A	'Maybe they don't listen'.
802 / 31 / Participant H	'When the teacher is teaching they doesn't listen…they eat, they doesn't listen to what the teacher says'.
962 / 39 / Co-participant A	'Maybe they don't concentrate'.
1050 / 43 / Co-participant B	'When talking to him he don't (sic) listen to me'.
1130 / 48 / Co-participant D	'He don't (sic) want to listen surely. Sure he don't (sic) want to listen'.
1242 / 56 / Co-participant H	"She is stubborn…She don't want to listen".
1128 / 47 / Co-participant D	'…D come I must learn you…he don't understand. 'How do you learn me …you are not my teacher'…So a chap like that is hard to say'.
1151 / 49 / Co-participant D	'I say do like that you say I'm not your mother. So I leave him'.
1155 / 49 / Co-participant D	'…You never tell him nothing D'.

In the researcher's view, listening is a vital aspect of learning. A learner's inability to listen in class or to be attentive to educators could result in a diverse range of difficulties, which include inability to study, inability to write homework and inability to participate fully in various class activities. Participants and co-participants identified the inability of some

participants and Grade Nine learners to study and write homework as constituting barriers to learning. Excerpts are presented in Table 3.3c.

TABLE 3.3c: EXCERPTS   ON   THE   INABILITY   OF   LEARNERS   TO   STUDY   AND   WRITE HOMEWORK

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
243 / 8 / Participant B	'I'm not reading'.
354 / 11 / Participant C	'They are not reading'.
364 / 11 / Participant C	'When they give us homework I didn't achieve'.
438 / 15 / Participant D	'Some of them they do not study'.
442 / 15 / Participant D	'…Ah! I forget the homework'.
457 / 16 / Participant E	'I didn't write the homeworks. I'm just sitting'.
802 /31 / Participant H	'They doesn't (sic) read. When they give them homework they don't write homework'.
953 / 39 / Co-participant A	'Maybe she is not doing her studies for that subject'.
1107 / 46 / Co-participant C	'They don't give themselves time to read, they don't study'.
1109 / 46 / Co-participant C	'You must do your homework because of he knows that when I'm at home I can't have the time to write the homework. I'm going to the streets to play with my friends…'
1126 / 47 / Co-participant D	'…I didn't see D reading the books at home'.
1221 / 55 / Co-participant G	'…and does not study'.

A lack of listening may possibly result in a lack of understanding. Nevertheless, an exception to this is participant G, who reported a lack of understanding when he studies the learning areas in which he is experiencing barriers to learning.

Extract:

Unit 634 / page 24 Participant G: *'I do take some time to try to study but things that I'm trying to study I just don't get it going to mind'.*

3.9.1.1d Inability to read and write

A co-participant (an educator) and the Principal identified the above as a barrier to learning for some ninth graders. Even though this was just mentioned by two of the co-participants in

this study, the researcher still extracts it as a category because it may point towards broader systemic issues relating to learning support. Extracts appear in Table 3.4.

TABLE 3.4:   EXCERPTS ON LEARNERS' INABILITY TO READ AND WRITE

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1515 / 82 / Co-participant V	'We have some learners who are not able to read or write…Even when they are writing you can't really make sense of what they have written'.
1660 / 94 / Principal	'Some of the Grade Nine learners in particular come from the primary schools unable to read'.

So much of a learner's learning activities depend on his ability to read and write, as these form the foundation for academic success or failure. The questions that thus bother the researcher are: What went wrong? How was it that the learner got to the ninth grade from the lower grades while obviously exhibiting the inability to read and write? Who is to blame? Is it the learner, the parents, the educators or the education system?

3.9.1.1e Drug abuse, sex, smoking and crime

The influence of drug abuse, sex, smoking and crime is all around high school learners, who are at a vulnerable age. They witness these activities at home (for some), at school (for others) or see them dramatised on television and in books/magazines. This situation is worsened by the fact that most of the learners come from challenging socio-economic environments, which may compound the negative effects of drug abuse, sex, smoking and crime. Sometimes lacking in guidance and direction, some of the learners regard indulging in some or all of these activities as a pastime. Table 3.5 indicates extracts from the interview transcriptions on the manifestation of drug abuse, sex, smoking and crime as barriers to learning for Grade Nine learners.

TABLE 3.5:   EXCERPTS ON THE MANIFESTATIONS OF DRUG ABUSE, SEX, SMOKING AND CRIME AS BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
356 / 11 Participant C	'Some of them they are smoking dagga…'
438 / 15 / Participant D	'…"Oh I must buy cigarette" and they stand there and smoke'.

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
580 / 21 & 22 / Participant F	'Smoking, having sex, the pills, sleeping with sugar daddies, they don't want small boys. Boys they smoke, committing crime, talking naughty things like swearing, smoking in toilets and teasing other children'.
1008 / 42 / Co-participant B	'He go (sic) to smoke cigarettes'.
1236 / 55 / Co-participant H	'She like to go see the boyfriend and whatever and I don't like that because of she is still young'.
1302 / 60 / Co-participant I (family)	'I think those cigarettes and…are making him not to learn well. He will take 50cents to buy draw draw' *(cigarettes)*.
1369 / 67 / Co-participant II	'…Learners have drugs and sex because of if you're taking drugs, more especially involving in sex life, it will be affecting you…If you are taking drugs your mind is not with you…and she can sleep with someone without being aware'.
1484 / 79 / Co-participant IV	'…There are so many things happen with these kids because they do drugs…'
1561 / 86 / Co-participant VI	'…They indulge too much in sex life, you see, going to clubs and this really create a problem…'
1660 / 94 / Principal	'…experimenting in drugs, experimenting sex…'

The above were the dominant learner-related factors reported by participants and co-participants as constituting barriers to learning for the Grade Nine learners in this study. These barriers sometimes culminate not only in failure and repeating a grade, but also in the learners exhibiting a negative attitude towards life and education and sometimes in the learners experiencing a drop in the standard of their work or even dropping out of school. Extracts are presented in Table 3.6.

TABLE 3.6:   EXTRACTS ON THE OUTCOME OF BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1338 / 63 / Co-participant I (educator)	'The barriers impact very negatively then the children become very negative towards life and towards their education…'
1340 / 63 / Co-participant I (educator)	'Some of the learners their standard drops…'
1484 /79 / Co-participant IV	'Obviously, the learner don't attend the school, he will be disrupted because he is going to stay at home…doing things that promote the diseases that we encounter, Aids, sexual diseases…'
1527 / 83 / Co-participant V	'…So when they see that this section is very difficult they just leave it, without putting more effort maybe to pass that chapter'.

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1563 / 86 / Co-participant VI	'…always the manner in which the child answers the question is not related to whatever will bring progress to her. One can say it is a negative answering, then you find yourself almost at loggerhead with the child…'
1623 / 90 / Co-participant VII	'We have drop out'.

As presented in the extracts above, the influence of drug abuse, sex, smoking and crime turns out to be harmful, since the resultant effects are barriers to learning for the participants in this study.

3.9.1.2   Sub-theme two: Educator-related barriers to learning

It is the responsibility of an educator to create and manage a teaching and learning process in an inspiring and motivating environment (Vakalisa, 2002:179), while bearing in mind the uniqueness of each learner. As a facilitator, the educator needs to review his instructional strategies frequently, promote productive learning and stimulate learners' interest to learn (Muthukrishna, 2002:149).

Participants in the study sometimes encounter barriers to learning that are educator-related. Some of the participants and some co-participants identified various barriers to learning that can originate from educators' attitude to work. These include:

- Method of instruction
- Educator absenteeism
- Perceived uncaring attitude of educators.

3.9.1.2a Method of instruction

In the researcher's view, the method of instruction is an important aspect of the teaching process. The failure of educators to apply an effective method of instruction could result in various types of maladjustment in the classroom. This could possibly have led to participants reporting an inability to understand educators in the classroom. Table 3.7 displays excerpts from the interview transcriptions.

TABLE 3.7:   EXTRACTS ON METHOD OF INSTRUCTION: LACK OF UNDERSTANDING

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1656 / 93 / Principal	'…Then the other thing is the medium of instruction. It looks like it is not well developed…educators in particular, their methods of teaching also maybe causing barriers to learning'.
968 / 39 / Co-participant A	'The child is pretending. The teacher is teaching maybe the child doesn't understand something or maybe the teacher ask her the question, you know that maybe the child doesn't understand the teacher, the other learner they are happy but they…oh my God. I just want to remember the word'.
833 / 32 / Participant I	'The subject is too difficult for me to understand because we don't have any serious teacher who is teaching the subject…'
754 / 29 / Participant H	'The others they just give us work and just get up and go. They don't explain anything. That is why we don't understand the subjects'.
527 / 19 / Participant E	'Some they didn't understand and they are afraid to tell maybe teacher…because some who understand are laughing…teasing, saying "stupid, you don't understand"…'
964 / 39 / Co-participant A	'Maybe sometimes the other learners do not understand but they are smiling to somebody, but you are not happy'.
102 / 4 / Participant A	'Because they not understand while the teacher is teaching'.
231 / 7 / Participant B	'I don't understand Mathematics. Serious!'
262 / 8 / Participant B	'Eish! I'm afraid to tell that teacher'.
264 / 8 / Participant B	'I'm so scared. Eish!'
457 / 16 / Participant E	'When the teacher was teaching in the class I didn't understand'.

Sibaya and Kruger (2002:125) maintain that effective learning could be achieved if there is a solid understanding of learners' ways of learning, the factors that could control learning, and the disposition of learners, and they are kept interested in the process. Therefore, when learners report a lack of understanding of educators in the classroom, one is left wondering if the method of instruction is to blame. For some learners in this study, the fear of the educator makes it difficult to admit a lack of understanding, and for some others it is the fear of ridicule by peers.

3.9.1.2b Educator absenteeism

Three of the participants in the study reported educator absenteeism from lessons as being a barrier to learning, as shown in the excerpts in Table 3.8.

TABLE 3.8:   **EXTRACTS ON EDUCATOR ABSENTEEISM**

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
410 / 13 / Participant D	'…he didn't come to class. Let me say he comes Monday, give us work and go out. Then we don't understand what to do because it is too long he is not coming to class. That make us fail'.
644 / 24 / Participant G	'Often time they are not in class'.
646 / 24 / Participant G	'We spend most of the time alone in the class. Maybe times two days they see us, maybe times I can carry on to practice on my own…'
658 / 25 / Participant G	'If they were always in the class I think I could here try to explain my problems to them. Maybe times two to three days we don't see one of them those who teach us subjects like those we are having difficulties to'.
660 / 25 / Participant G	'…But they take long time not coming in the class. I just don't understand…I don't know what is the problem that make them not to come to class'.
686 / 27 / Participant G	'The main thing is that we don't get the chance to talk to them because of they are not always available, you see…'
688 / 27 / Participant G	'…giving us notes and he is out…He tell us 'I'm gonna be right now back' but he never gets back…'
831 / 32 / Participant I	'…because most of the time those teachers who teaches us the subject don't quite meet the timetable. They don't follow the timetable. So that is why I'm not quite good'.
833 / 32 / Participant I	'That is why certain group of people does not understand the subject. I'm not alone'.
841 / 33 / Participant I	'They come sometimes when they feel to come to class. We can stay double periods without a teacher'.
849 / 33 / Participant I	'…he or she will tell that 'I was busy doing stuffs'. We try to understand because he is a teacher or she is a teacher. We can't question what business and how busy they are'.
887 / 36 / Participant I	'…and then when we need some jobs they are not around'.

Although only three of the participants identified educator absenteeism as constituting a barrier to learning, the researcher regards this as serious enough to be addressed. Teaching being an educator's primary assignment, the researcher believes that educator absenteeism may mean not completing the syllabus and consequently, learners not acquiring the full and scheduled knowledge for the year. The researcher did wonder if educator absenteeism could be linked to the next category that emerged from the data.

3.9.1.2c Perceived uncaring attitude of educators

The perceived uncaring attitude of some educators was reported as causing disillusionment among learners. Co-participants mostly expressed this lack of care, while a co-participant (the principal) also reported lack of self-development by some educators. These were presented as constituting barriers to learning for participants and Grade Nine learners. The questions the researcher wonders about are: If self-development is lacking, how do they keep abreast of educational development in the country and internationally? How does an uncaring attitude impact on the learners in their classrooms? Table 3.9 contains the excerpts on the above.

TABLE 3.9:   EXTRACTS ON THE PERCEIVED UNCARING ATTITUDE OF EDUCATORS

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
851 / 33 / Participant I	'…Some of them they don't give a damn about us…'
1168 / 51 / Co-participant E	'…there were other teacher there. Maybe I can say it is her who have made my child like this. You know, to shout her…'
1196 / 53 / Co-participant F	'…There was some teacher member calling again F shouting shouting "you will never pass go away from this school". So F told me "I don't want anymore that school. I don't want to go anymore"…'
1369 / 67 / Co-participant II	'…Another thing even us teachers, some of the teachers who are taking these drugs, who are coming into school being drunk. It is a very big problem…They are sleeping with Grade Nines. They are sleeping with the learners. It is really demoralizing and is really demoralizing other learners…'
1658 / 93 / Principal	'…lack of development- both self-development and development by the school…' *(Refer to Figure 3.3c on the description of co-participants (educators) for their qualifications and the years these were obtained).*

The researcher thinks that learners are often highly sensitive to the attitudes of educators towards them. A perceived negative attitude could produce in the learner low self-esteem and/or a lack of confidence in his abilities to carry out tasks given by the educator in question. Hence caution should be exercised in dealing with learners, especially if these learners are already experiencing barriers to learning. Also, the importance of self-development cannot be over-emphasized, as this will not only benefit the educators but the learners too. It is noteworthy that it was the co-participants who mostly expressed the views on uncaring attitudes of educators. The research design for this study is such that data was collected from a

variety of participants and co-participants, yet the dominance of co-participants' views in this regard may need further explanation (in another study).

3.9.1.3   Sub-theme three: Family-related barriers to learning

The vulnerability of the core family sometimes leads to family life being shattered (Prinsloo, 2005a:33). According to Donald *et al.* (2002:56), a child's learning could be affected at the level of the family due to various reasons. These range from the family's limited funds, the home language spoken, which fails to relate to the language of instruction at school, values regarding educational achievements, and the ability of family members in relation to the degree of motivation and support available to the child with regard to school activities.

The evidence collected in this study indicates the manifestation of barriers to learning for participants and Grade Nine learners due to some vulnerability at the family level. Three categories have issued from the data:

- Poverty (associated with limited financial resources)
- Family problems
- Lack of sibling support and non-involvement of parents.

3.9.1.3a Poverty (associated with limited financial resources)

Poverty, which is associated with limited financial resources in the family, could be linked to a contextual disadvantage, where parents or family members are unemployed and thus facing economic challenges and inequalities. Some participants and co-participants identified finance as a barrier to learning for the ninth graders. Table 3.10 contains excerpts on lack of finance as constituting a barrier to learning.

TABLE 3.10:   EXTRACTS ON LIMITED FINANCIAL RESOURCES AS A BARRIER TO LEARNING

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
604 / 22 / Participant F	'Because sometimes my mother doesn't have money for me to eat at school…'
861 / 34 / Participant I	'…He just pay the maintenance money. But it doesn't feel enough. Three hundred Rand per month. He is paying money that I don't feel satisfied about'.

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
863 / 34 / Participant I	'…I am wearing clothes, eating and stuff like that for with R300. It doesn't cover all those things. I got no socks, I got nothing…'
1048 / 43 / Co participant B	'When I work I can do something. Now I don't work…I have no nothing to help her'.
1168 / 51 / Co-participant E	'…Also the things which make her so sometimes I can't pay this for her at school and sometimes, you see neh, they say they want this as school money…'
1178 / 51 / Co-participant E	'…and also to that spiritual man. Now he wants money and I haven't got money to pay for her…'
1205 / 54 / Co-participant F	'Maybe when I'm suffering about money to carry on with the school…'
1209 / 54 / Co-participant F	'My problem must go to my work and then can I help F with the things she want from the school…'
1317 / 61 Co-participant I (educator)	'…lack of financial support or lack of support of buying some of the materials we are using in Mathematics, then that particular child starts to be reserved…'
1336 / 63 / Co-participant I (educator)	'…Some of them are coming from very, very needy families whereby nobody is working in the family…Finance also is one of the biggest barriers because some of the activities which we are doing need the child to go and buy, needs a child to go to town to visit places of interest whereby they get information. So you find out the learner doesn't even have five Rand to go to town'.
1533 / 84 / Co-participant V	'…and some of the parents do not have money to pay the professional people to help their kids…'
1592 / 89 / Co-participant VII	'…No individual textbooks. They can't buy because they don't have money. They are from the former settlements so the parents are not working…'
1596 / 89 / Co-participant VII	'…They don't have material at home. They can't buy newspaper, magazines. It is difficult because they don't have any income'.
1548 / 85 / Co-participant VI	'…we know it is socio-economic problem. They come from homes where they did not even have breakfast and we know that a learner will not even grasp anything with an empty stomach…'

The financial constraints experienced by a Grade Nine learner's family impacts on their learning on many levels. It is problematic when a learner is unable to purchase materials to carry out tasks or projects in school, or when he has to walk long distances to and from school every day due to lack of transport fare. It becomes problematic when the learner has to sit in class hungry because he cannot buy lunch or snacks at break. A tired and hungry learner will often turn into an inattentive learner and this influences learning.

3.9.1.3b Family problems

Different types of problems in the family, including parental squabbles and illnesses befalling family members were pinpointed as causing barriers to learning for participants in the study. Excerpts on the reports are presented in Table 3.11.

TABLE 3.11:   EXTRACTS ON FAMILY PROBLEMS

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
608 / 23 / Participant F	'…but my mother doesn't want him back. Every time I tell her about my father she doesn't want to talk about him'.
883 / 35 / Participant I	'…my parents are fighting. They always do stuffs'.
1286 / 59 / Co-participant I (educator)	'…what I can say to you is I's problem as I have a problem in the house here right now so that is why I is having problem. Because why me and the father we are fighting a lot. So that is why I can't cope at school…me and my husband we fight a lot. He parted and stays with other woman somewhere next to us. This thing hurt him so he can't even read…'
674 / 26 / Participant G	'…because at home I'm the one who do some house work, you see, and I'm looking after kids…'
1254 / 57 / Co-participant H	'…and then eish, we don't support each other. Our family is not that tight'.
1258 / 57 // Co-participant H	'…maybe even now she is not at home. Maybe the problem like now is that we are not supporting each other…their father is not supporting them…'
1336 / 63 / Co-participant I (educator)	'…Some of them have very serious family problems; some of the learners are learners and parents at the same time. Some of them are coming from very, very needy families whereby nobody is working in the family. Some of the other barriers are abuse – sexual abuse, physical abuse by parents…'
1369 / 68 / Co-participant II	'…They tell you 'no I don't have time to play my mum is always after me even if I'm trying to play soccer'. And some will say my mum is sleeping with other men in front of me. Some say my mum has killed my father or my father has killed my mum in front of me…'
1373 / 68 / Co-participant II	'I can say it is domestic violence…'
1482 / 79 / Co-participant IV	'…Domestic violence at home do contribute as well. The learner come to the school full with everything that happened, or if there is a business at home the learner don't get a chance to study after school because he has to take the wheelbarrow with crates to buy beer or crates of drinks with the wheelbarrow. You see, all these things they disturb so many things…'

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1592 / 89 / Co-participant VII	'…some of them are staying alone in shacks without support of parents. They are their own parents and they take care of little ones'.
1660 / 94 / Principal	'…some of them are heads of those families unfortunately at 15…'
1664 / 95 / Principal	'…Another thing is migration. We have come to notice something, observe something in the school, that we are getting two primary languages- Sepedi and Setswana and we are now getting more Sepedi learners than Setswana…you find out they come from rural areas and they migrate to urban areas and that creates a problem…They end up playing truant and even absconding and no longer coming to school'.
893 / 36 / Participant I	'It was disturbing my learning because my mother she is a person who is sick with high blood pressure and stuff. She wasn't going to work anymore so I had to stay at home to help her with all the stuffs, take her to the clinic... Eish! We are living in a ghetto'.
970 / 40 / Co-participant A	'She just got the disturbance about the ear…'
974 / 40 / Co-participant A	'She was feeling something in the ear and then the ear was swollen'.
1048 / 43 / Co-participant B	'…I must get the pension money because I'm sick'.
1209 / 54 / Co-participant F	'…because I'm single parent. I got heart attack, high blood and sugar diabetes…'
1658 / 94 / Principal	'…And disease is catching up also with our learners. You find that they are heads of the family sometimes, and in other times you find they are home nurses of their own parents. So they really get exhausted in some cases…'
1662 / 95 / Principal	'The HIV / Aids. It is affecting them in their families'.

Quite often, a wide range of problems plagues families from disadvantaged environments. These often create barriers to learning. Problems such as domestic violence, which includes sexual and physical abuse, learners becoming heads of families and the breadwinners in the family, turning into parents and nurses for their sick parents, were reported to be rampant among Grade Nine learners. Difficulties in learning for the participants in this study seem almost inevitable then.

3.9.1.3c Lack of sibling support and non-involvement of parents

Some of the participants reported a lack of support from siblings, although this was sometimes due to lack of education or mere nonchalance. The non-involvement or non-commitment of parents to the educational affairs of Grade Nine learners was also reported.

TABLE 3.12:   EXTRACTS ON LACK OF SIBLING SUPPORT AND NON-INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS

Units / page / speaker	Quotes
98 / 3 / Participant A	'He don't help me'.
211 / 7 / Participant B	'They don't help me with schoolwork'.
225 / 7 / Participant B	'They don't want to help'.
332 / 10 / Participant C	'They do not help'.
334 / 10 / Participant C	'…They didn't get to school'.
650 / 24 / Participant G	'…He works every week Monday to Sunday. So he doesn't get the chance to be with me'.
1213 / 54 / Co-participant G	'…I left school in Grade Two…so I cannot teach G what I myself don't know. I can't help G'.
1250 / 56 / Co-participant H	'Ah! So far we are not doing anything'.
1258 / 57 / Co-participant H	'…and their father is not supporting them…'
1265 / 57 / Co-participant H	'…we don't support her very well. She is going out there and trying to explore…'
1369 / 67 & 68 / Co-participant II	'…Even parental involvement is a very big problem. Parents should be aware of everything that is happening in school because of he or she sent them here to be taught…how can you send a child here, finishing twelve months without consulting with teachers 'how is the progress of my learner'? Some of the parents are irresponsible and immoral because of they don't even take care of their children…'
1379 / 69 / Co-participant II	'…lack of commitment from parents…'
1438 / 73 / Co-participant III	'…but when they arrive at home there is no one to guide them to do their job'.
1474 / 77 / Co-participant IV	'…if the involvement of parents is not positive enough, obviously…'
1656 / 93 / Principal	'…Parental involvement is still some sort of barrier…'
1658 / 93 / Principal	'…It is lack of knowledge, lack of involvement because you find that if learners are being encouraged to read newspapers, newspapers are at home. But parents don't encourage them to read newspapers, parents don't monitor what they watch, parents don't monitor what they read and what they listen to over the radio…'

Support from family members for a learner could result in effective learning. It might be demoralizing for a learner experiencing barriers to learning when he does not receive assistance from some family members, and it may also be depressing to realise that parents sometimes do not participate in the academic lives of their children. Nonetheless, one cannot

overlook the fact that parents, siblings and other family members are subject to the same environmental stressors as the participants. The implication of this is that the progress of these learners may often not be monitored, thus making it difficult or even impossible for parents and or family relations to detect when quick and adequate support could have averted learning difficulties. However, some co-participants reported that the refusal of some of the participants to listen to the advice of older family members resulted in the members' decision not to render support. Participant D's lack of cooperation made Co-participant D resolve never to give him support until he asked for it.

Extract:

Unit 1151 page 49 Co-participant D- *'...I will never run after him because she don't hear all right...No I'm nothing. He answer me "leave me alone you are not my mother"...'*

3.9.1.4   Sub-theme four: Education system and society related barriers to learning

As has been explained in the previous chapter, the barriers to learning that learners encounter may sometimes be connected to the circumstances in which they find themselves as they go through growth and the learning process. There is a likelihood of encountering barriers to learning as a result of factors pertaining to the educational system and the society as a whole. The evidence collected in this study indicates that the participants and Grade Nine learners often experience barriers to learning caused by 'inadequacies' in the education system and the society. The identified factors are categorized as follows:

- Inappropriate curriculum and the Outcomes-based Education (OBE) system
- Classroom sizes
- Poverty.

3.9.1.4a   Inappropriate curriculum and the Outcomes-based Education (OBE) system

The data, as reported by some co-participants and a participant, portrayed the issue of inappropriate curriculum and the Outcomes-based Education system as leading to barriers to learning for participants and Grade Nine learners. Learners often encounter topics that they perceive not to be practicable or that are too difficult for them to grasp at their level of thinking. Also, frustration may set in when the number of learning areas learners are confronted with is unmanageable, especially if they have to carry out tasks in all of them, as

the Outcomes-based Education system stipulates that learners perform eighty per cent of the work (according to a co-participating educator).

Furthermore, the Outcomes-based Education system arose from the 'competence-based movement in education', where emphasis is placed on the learner's skill. In this structure, the focus is on the learner's actual achievement, on his ability to demonstrate and apply the acquired knowledge, and not on being better or worse than others are. This system is different from the traditional teacher-centred method of teaching, where knowledge is transferred from the educator to the learners, irrespective of their previously acquired knowledge or skill (Le Grange & Reddy, 1998:6).

Some co-participants (educators) and the principal in this study identified the Outcomes-based Education system as a barrier to learning, and saw it as a promising venture except for the difficulties in its implementation. Thus, the above category was identified from the interview transcription as resulting in barriers to learning. Excerpts on the above as barriers to learning are contained in Table 3.13.

TABLE 3.13: EXTRACTS ON INAPPROPRIATE CURRICULUM AND THE OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION SYSTEM

Unit / page/ speaker	Quotes
1375 / 68 / Co-participant II	'…And also the subject content as a whole. You find out that here the subject content is not in the same level as the thinking capacity of the particular learner…'
1519 / 82 / Co-participant V	'I think the barriers that they have is some of the lessons that they have in their books. They cannot understand what it is saying. The level is too high. They have this examination that they call Common Task Assessment. That one is very tough for them. It is not for their level because at the end there is nothing they write'.
1529 / 83 / Co-participant V	'Other factors are that some of the things that are in those books they are not available in our area, like the swamps. They talk about the swamps…And even some of the diseases connected to a lack of nutrition that we do in grade nine we don't know a person who has maybe Erasmus or Kwashiorkor and we can't take them from school and let them see those people in hospital…So they only do things that they won't be able to see in real life'.

Unit / page/ speaker	Quotes
1660 / 94 / Principal	'…Grade Nine they start to see the light, and unfortunately we have to work hurriedly because they are writing external examinations. Now they have great pressure. The educator has that pressure of completing the syllabus and seeing to it that he covers the syllabus and so forth'.
887 / 36 / Participant I	'On the subject, you know the subject…because on the grade nines we got too many subjects. For sure there are twelve of them. There is confusion because teachers sometimes when they give jobs they give many jobs the same day… Unexpected some they give us too many jobs so we don't focus on what we are looking at… So we can't cope with what they are giving us'.
1415 / 72 / Co-participant III (educator)	'…OBE is hard to us; it is difficult to apply in class. Some of us are not used to this kind of method of teaching so it is very much difficult…'
1453 / 74 / Co-participant IV (educator)	'They rarely do well because now since the structure is now OBE and they did not know about this before. It is a new structure in our schools. Most of learners and sometimes teachers do not do understand this or to give it out, to convey it to the learners…partially do not; I cannot say totally. It is a new structure because most of the teachers have studied the old structure…It is a good structure but it is just that we lack material. We do not have enough resources to handle the new structure…'
1476 / 78 / Co-participant IV (educator)	'…They know they are no longer going ahead with the OBE *(in the next grade)*, so they become discouraged saying why OBE, Why should we do this Grade Nine'.
1660 / 94 / Principal	'…OBE is very good I must say. I have seen it is very good but it has its flaws because they come from the primary and they are being taught by us educators who are not so well trained in as far as OBE is concerned. Maybe the educator learner ratio might be not affording educators the opportunity to express themselves OBE wise…'

Although only one of the participants in the study indicated the worrisome nature of the inappropriateness of the curriculum, the researcher regards this as important in the light of the Outcomes-based Education system, which encourages learner-centeredness, where the learner performs approximately eighty per cent of the work. Thus the Outcomes-based Education system could result in barriers to learning, especially as educators are not in all instances yet adequately trained to implement this new system. This could also explain its association with barriers to learning for participants in the study.

3.9.1.4b Classroom sizes

Both the learning environment and the population of learners in the classrooms were identified as causing barriers to learning for the ninth graders. Learning is inhibited when the learning environment is not conducive to learning, when the required number of desks and chairs are not provided and the classrooms are not spacious enough for free movement. Table 3.14 shows excerpts from the interview transcription that illustrate this point.

TABLE 3.14:   EXCERPTS ON CLASSROOM SIZES

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1359 / 66 / Co-participant II (educator)	'…The problem is that maybe the environment inside the classroom is not suitable for him or her…'
1531 / 83 / Co-participant V (educator)	'We haven't used much to help those kids because we have a lot of kids in our classes. Classes are full up to the brim and there is no time for individual attention'.
1533 / 83 / Co-participant V (educator)	'Fifty-five to sixty. So when one child or two children of them have difficulty you cannot, because when you concentrate on them alone the remaining fifty-five will be disrupting the class…'
1588 / 89 / Co-participant VII (educator)	'…And the number of learners in our classes, we can't just have individual attendance on learners. So it is difficult even for us as teachers to find out the children who are not doing their work… And the number of learners we have in classes is too much. For instance we may be having fifty-five learners to sixty learners in class. So it is very difficult'.

An over-populated classroom makes it challenging for educators to monitor learners' participation during the teaching process. Giving individual attention to a learner exhibiting difficulty becomes ruled out, as this may imply leaving the rest of the learners unattended and the classroom chaotic. This inevitably creates an unfavourable teaching and learning environment. It is important to note that co-participating educators and not participants expressed concern about the issue of over-population. The researcher's thought on this is that the system of over-population seems to be what operates in schools in their environment, and being the environment that participants are familiar with, it probably explains the lack of mention of this aspect by participants. It could be on this account that participants did not regard over-population in the classroom as an issue to dwell on or as constituting a barrier to learning. On the other hand, educators who have to deal with the situation saw it as a problem that might hinder effective learning.

3.9.1.4c Poverty

A disadvantaged community is generally associated with poverty. This may be because within such a community there is often 'ill health, under-nourishment, a deprivation of privileges, backlogs in education…limited social status and a negative view of the future' (Prinsloo, 2005a:28). Learners in communities assailed by poverty may exhibit disorderliness, as well as indifference towards their education. Poverty as a barrier to learning came up in different forms in the data. Apart from stark poverty, there was mention of the effects of poverty, such as a lack of play facilities, insufficient clothing and scarcity of textbooks. Excerpts are presented in Table 3.15.

TABLE 3.15:   EXTRACTS ON POVERTY

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1379 / 69 / Co-participant II	'…Lack of food and then poverty, they can't learn at the same time'.
1395 / 71 / Co-participant II	'…If we had money I can take them to these companies so that they can practice…'
1482 / 78 / Co-participant IV	'…and the poverty in our country. As the poor learner will see her or himself being expelled or not being considered because the pressure. The poor learner from a poor family or poor background will think he or she is not recognized at the school because if he looks at himself he will see a difference between him and other learners from advantaged background. His is dressed in torn uniforms and tearing shoes, he will not be able to eat anything on break…A learner who is hungry cannot concentrate in class…'
1592 / 89 / Co-participant VII	'…They are from the former settlements…some of them are staying in shacks…'
1627 / 91 / Co-participant VII	'…Maybe poverty…poverty under general. Poverty is the main issue'.
1656 / 93 / Principal	'It could be the socio-economic. That could be one of the greatest barriers…'
1660 / 94 / Principal	'…some of them are heads of those families unfortunately at 15…'
1342 / 63-64 / Co-participant I (educator)	'Outside school in the area of Atteridgeville facilities are not there, educational facilities for these learners. And you know a healthy body gives a healthy mind, so outside school whereby they should be playing and enjoying themselves and mixing, for example as I'm a sports person, meeting on sports grounds in the afternoon. That affects them in school because there is nowhere they can go and play as children, then they start to indulge in unnecessary things'.

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1379 / 69 / Co-participant II	'…You can see some of the environment in schools are not for learners because when learning desks are broken, obviously the learners won't be motivated. We don't have learning materials, lack of learning materials…Even the Department sometimes they don't deliver materials for learners. When we send something to them, we send a request to them saying please send materials for this subject and that. If they don't send the materials what are we supposed to do…'
1592 / 89 / Co-participant VII	'…And we don't have textbooks. No individual textbooks…'
1598 / 89 / Co-participant VII	'…And the material is not there. We don't have books to give each and every learner in class. For instance, the grade nine we don't have textbooks on grammar and then we don't have literature books… We don't have other materials, just the one textbook that I'm having'.
1658 / 93 / Principal	'In as far as educators are concerned it is a question of not affording educators to specialize in subjects they have done at college. For example a teacher majors in English, when he comes to school besides teaching English he teaches say Biology. You find that for a long time he is not specializing. So that is lack of specialization, and sometimes whilst the teacher has not specialized in the subject…'
1658 / 93 / Principal	'…Lack of development – both self-development and development by the school. It is not up to the standard…'
1658 / 94 / Principal	'…And then the other thing is community at large. It depends what they read and it depends what they do and how do they monitor our children outside the school…'

Poverty has a detrimental effect on any society. As it manifests itself in various ways and affects learners differently, it can easily result in an academically promising learner dropping out of school. Socially, this could increase crime rates and personally, it could limit long-term job opportunities.

3.9.2   THEME TWO: MANIFESTATIONS OF LEARNING SUPPORT

As different authors have shown (Donald *et al*, 2002:55; Adelman & Taylor, 1993:14), the reasons for barriers to learning arise from the relationship between the learner and the whole social system. Hence, combating barriers to learning takes different forms and should involve all stakeholders in the life of the learner experiencing barriers to learning. Learning support manifests itself in the lives of the participants at home and at school in various ways, as registered in the data collected thus:

- Knowledge and availability of learning support
- Guidance, advice, motivation, encouragement and one-on-one support
- Extra classes, extra work and assistance with schoolwork
- Creation of support by mobilizing resources.

3.9.2.1 Knowledge and availability of learning support

In this study, a wide-ranging interpretation of what learning support means, was presented to the researcher at the interview sessions. It seemed that each co-participant viewed learning support from a different perspective. Some, however, did not express adequate knowledge of learning support, while others discussed families and educators when learning support was mentioned. Three of the co-participants (families) went on to list the types of support their children receive, and a fourth did not understand the term after it was explained. One co-participant (educator) tried to explain the term but then mainly reported the support strategies used in her learning area.

However, even though very few of the co-participating educators acknowledged receiving some form of support from the Gauteng Department of Education, the availability of learning support to the other educators in their various learning areas was reported to range from 'not much' to 'non-existent'. Hence they often resort to creating learning support for learners in need of it themselves. Excerpts are contained in Table 3.16.

TABLE 3.16:   EXTRACTS ON KNOWLEDGE AND AVAILABILITY OF LEARNING SUPPORT

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1069 / 44 / Co-participant C	'Learning support is to help someone to learn in many things'.
1190 / 52 / Co-participant F	'Learning support like me I can help F when she ask me "mum, what is this", I must know and I must help her'.
1286 / 59 / Co-participant I	'Me as I's parent I need to support him by helping him like at school when they give him homework, helping him where he doesn't know what is this all about…'
1315 / 61 / Co-participant I (educator)	'*Learner* support I think is assisting the learners where they've got problems. Supporting them if they don't understand. Giving them assistance. Giving them extra materials to help them understand Maths'.
1324 / 62 / Co-participant I (educator)	'*Learner* support for a learner is when a learner struggles in certain aspects…and assistance and giving her extra work where she struggles…'

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1353 / 65 / Co-participant II	'Learning support is all about being accountable to each and everything, like in teaching situation…'
1400 / 71 / Co-participant III	'…when talking about learning support you might be talking about the material that we have supported to the learners and not only the materials but support from other stakeholders. Maybe talking about the support from different peoples in education'.
1451 / 74 / Co-participant IV	'Learning support I can say is the materials that the learners use in order to understand the subject. Or the sources from outside school that tend to help them to understand the subject…'
1497 / 81 / Co-participant V	'Learning support means anything that can be used to help the kids to understand…'
1542 / 84 / Co-participant VI	'Learning support I think is a program whereby a learner if he's got a problem in whatever learning area, his problems will be identified and then he will be able to be helped only in the parts he's got problems'.
1642 / 92 / Principal	'Learning support is encouragement capacitating, mentoring and everything that will enable effective learning taking place'.
1319 / 61 / Co-participant I (educator)	'There is support from the Education Department. Most of the time it comes in the form of work programs or work sheets…Also with the school sometimes if funds are available…'
1406 / 72 / Co-participant III (educator)	'From the GDE (Gauteng Department of Education) we have got teachers development here and we work in clusters (groups)…'
1357 / 65 / Co-participant II (educator)	'We do have them but some of them we have to create…'
1553 / 85 / Co-participant VI (educator)	'What is available to me is not that much. One uses the present textbooks that we have, you see…'
1592 / 89 / Co-participant VII (educator)	'Not much. The only thing that we are having right now is the library. And we don't have textbooks. No individual textbooks…'
1598 / 89 / Co-participant VII (educator)	'Unfortunately there is not much…And the material is not there. We don't have books to give each and every learner in class. For instance, the grade nine we don't have textbooks on grammar and then we don't have literature books. I only have one copy, come to class, read for the learners. Theirs is just to listen and meditate. We don't have other materials, just the one textbook that I'm having'.

Participants in the study were required to outline what supports their learning, while co-participants were required to describe what learning support means to them. Although some family members could not explain what learning support is, it may not be accurate to say that

they have no knowledge or understanding of the term. Some of the co-participating educators also exhibited limited knowledge of the concept 'learning support', which could possibly have resulted from a number of reasons, one of which is not having understood the interviewer's question. Interestingly, those co-participants who attempted to explain the term gave different perceptions that shed more light on the term and their understandings of it. Examples are when Educator II described learning support as *...being accountable to each and everything like in teaching situation...* (Unit 1353, page 65), and Educator IV said *...materials that the learners use in order to understand the subject...* (Unit 1451, page 74). There may be a tendency to view learning support as only that which is employed to assist learners, such as guidance, but there are other kinds of learning support that manifest themselves. It is for this reason that the researcher regards Co-participant II's description above as a different dimension of learning support. The researcher nonetheless thinks that knowledge and perhaps an understanding of the term may impact positively on knowing when and where to provide learning support for learners experiencing barriers to learning. The researcher perceives the use of the term 'learner support' by an educator to imply the individualization of support and assistance for a learner experiencing barriers to learning. This may be closely linked to one-on-one support strategy. However, the alternate use of the terms 'learner support' and 'learning support' by co-participating educators in this study may be an avenue for further inquiry in this field.

On the issue of availability of support, the researcher realized at a point during the interview that the educator who reported that not much support is available to her was not referring to the unavailability of what should have been provided by the Gauteng Department of Education, but to what she could employ as learning support in her learning area. The researcher also discovered that the library is not a source of support to everyone (as mentioned in the extract above). Examples are: *No. There are no textbooks unfortunately.* (Unit 1600, page 90), Co-participant VII (educator), and then, *Not even in the library.* (Unit 1602, page 90, Co-participant VII (educator).

3.9.2.2   Guidance, advice, motivation, encouragement and one-on-one support

Most of the participants pointed out that they received support from family members, educators and friends, such support often manifesting itself in guidance, advice, motivation and encouragement. The support received from co-participants (educators) is sometimes in the form of one-on-one support, thus giving special and motivating individual consideration to

Grade Nine learners who are in need of such attention. Table 3.17 shows excerpts from the interview transcripts.

TABLE 3.17: **EXTRACTS ON GUIDANCE, ADVICE, MOTIVATION, ENCOURAGEMENT AND ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT**

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1389 / 70 / Co-participant II	'…The principal gave me guidance period to go and guide them, tell them about their skills. Sometimes I just go to them during technical period and say let's talk about your skills…'
511 / 18 / Participant E	'My mother she guide me. She say I must go to school, learn, no future without school, no work without school…'
871 / 35 / Participant I	'…Many things I can see as a person this guy is giving me guide…' *(Friend)*
869 / 34 / Participant I	'…So I get knowledge from him'. *(Friend)*
873 / 35 / Participant I	'It is helping me with my studies because most of the time when I talk to him many things that happen I get from him. I can see that there is a difference between this and this'. *(Friend)*
459 / 16 / Participant E	'I told myself "ok this year I want to be a learner, a good learner, I want to listen in class"…'
495 / 17 / Participant E	'She said I must come to school everyday and I must participate in the groups and I must write classworks and homeworks. If I didn't understand come to her told her and she help me'. *(Educator)*
505 / 18 / Participant E	'…Eish! She said I must listen and then try by all means so that I can know and I can learn'. *(Educator)*
187 / 6 / Participant B	'They ask me to read and practice…' *(Educators)*
348 / 11 / Participant C	'…He tell me I must read this and this…' *(Educator)*
895 / 36 / Participant I	'…The Deputy Principal told me that I must reach the goal level…'
885 / 35 / Participant I	'…so he gave me some advices…' *(Deputy Principal)*
426 / 14 / Participant D	'…If you have problem don't go to study. Tell your brother to help you to study…' *(Mum)*
461 / 16 / Participant E	'…and my grandmother told me I must go to school, no future without school…'
521 / 19 / Participant E	'…She told me I must go to school like her…I must go to school and learn'. *(Friend)*
560 / 20 / Participant F	'My mother she tells me to learn because she hasn't had the chance to learn…'

Unit / page/ speaker	Quotes
404 / 13 / Participant D	'…my granny can't read now but she ask my brothers and sisters to help me on how to read and how to do my homeworks. And then my friends at my class, we do group us after school and then we do the work…'
1119 / 47 / Co-participant C	'…When he gets back from school I'll tell him that 'eih, give me your books', I check if there is any homework and if I can't see any homework I'll tell him 'eih, don't go to sleep today, just to read your books…' *(Sister)*
1168 / 51 / Co-participant E	'…I say no you are behind. At least you must make standard nine…' *(Grandmother)*
1238 / 56 / Co-participant H	'I will tell him to learn and concentrate in school'. *(Sister)*
1240 / 56 / Co-participant H	'…like I will tell him like "you see, so many girls they don't have work, they don't have anything, they are staying at home, they have children, they don't have anything. So you must go to school and learn so that you can have whatever you want; the work and everything…' *(Sister)*
1288 / 59 / Co-participant I	'…just read your books and leave my problem…' *(Mum)*
1361 / 66 / Co-participant II	'Sometimes I'm just coming out with my own models, you know, coming to class and saying in Technology don't think you won't be able to make it. Just go for it, try it, it is been made by myself…'
1344 / 64 / Co-participant I (Educator)	'…I encourage also some of the learners in the class to assist… And I try to motivate the learners not to despair… I tell them to come to me if they've got problems'.
1296 / 60 / Co-participant I	'Trying to make him happy, buy him some nice things…' *(Mum)*
666 / 25 / Participant G	'…and she tries to tell me I must not be stressed, I'll be okay when I continue to want to know where am I getting problems and when I get it right'. *(Mum)*
507 / 18 / Participant E	'They are not teasing me or shout at me. They just talk nice to me'. *(Educators)*
925 / 38 / Co-participant A	'I'm encouraging her to study the books after school…' *(Mum)*
1213 / 54 / Co-participant G	'I just encourage G to read…' *(Brother)*
1223 / 55 / Co-participant G	'…encouraging him and helping him to find what I couldn't find…' *(Brother)*
1328 / 62 / Co-participant I (Educator)	'…and I encourage them to work as groups and to help one another'.
1359 / 66 / Co-participant II	'…I'm encouraging my learners not to laugh at another student…'
1383 / 69 / Co-participant II	'…I'm just making an individual accountability, calling them and say come and help me... I know learners well so I say come so that I can be able to teach you to demonstrate because some of the learners they are very shy… I bring them into my office and say how do you do this…'

Unit / page/ speaker	Quotes
1463 / 76 / Co-participant IV	'…calling the learner alone to the staff room, talking, asking the difficulties. Sometimes you see the problem that I think is that the learner does not understand…'
1546 / 84 / Co-participant V	'We do it by individualization…'
1555 / 85 / Co-participant V	'We communicate like father and child so they can trust me. As soon as they trust me they now become open then I'm able to help them in whatever way…'

As has already been pointed out, some participants do not have siblings, or may have them but do not receive support from them. There are nevertheless some siblings who render assistance, along with friends and mothers. Although some co-participants complained that parents do not commit themselves or show a sense of involvement in the school lives of their children, there are a few identified by some of the participants as providing assistance in various forms, such as guidance, advice, motivation and encouragement. Even though the use of one-on-one support was reported by a few of the co-participants (educators) who implemented this form of support, the researcher finds this important because of its individuality. It also seems that some participants and some Grade Nine learners are inclined to exhibit shyness; and the fear of being ridiculed by others may inhibit opening up about experiencing learning difficulties in class.

3.9.2.3   Extra classes, extra work and assistance with schoolwork

Participants and co-participants (educators) reported the manifestations of learning support in extra classes and extra work from educators, as well as in assistance with schoolwork from family members and some educators and friends. Table 3.18 displays excerpts from the interview transcripts.

TABLE 3.18:   EXTRACTS ON EXTRA CLASSES, EXTRA WORK AND ASSISTANCE WITH SCHOOLWORK

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1348 / 64 / Co-participant I (Educator)	'Personally, I've started Saturday school where I'm giving extra lessons. Although it is not only learners from my school alone. I'm using also learners from other schools to give them more lessons…'

Unit / page/ speaker	Quotes
1586 / 88 / Co-participant VII	'…Maybe giving extra lessons, maybe giving more classworks and lot of assignments, to keep them busy and give them maybe extra work in reading and visiting the school library…'
1328 / 62 / Co-participant I (Educator)	'…I support them by giving more work if they've got problems the very same area whereby they struggle a bit and after doing some corrections I give them more work…'
1490 / 80 / Co-participant IV	'…Sometimes you have to supplement by giving them work or assignments…'
1537 / 84 / Co-participant V	'Personally I give them practical work to go and work, maybe do a model of a plant cell, do a model of an animal cell, go out look for types of roots, types of leaves and when they come to class and they paste them on the board…'
1548 / 85 / Co-participant VI	'…Then wherever there are still educational problems one attends them by giving the learner more work'.
1637 / 91 / Co-participant VII	'…photocopy some lessons for them, extra lessons, giving them assignments, lots of assignments, researches…'
1509 / 82 / Co-participant V	'…usually I take them out to appreciate nature, show them the living things that we use and the non-living things that are also helpful to us. So from outside we go in the class. We use what we had from outside we bring it into the class and from there we go on with our lessons'.
1505 / 81 / Co-participant V	'…From the GDE we also get some competitions where these kids are to take part and by so doing they are going to impart what they have learnt from the school'.
1319 / 61 / Co-participant I (Educator)	'There is support from the Education Department. Most of the time it comes in the form of work programs or work sheets whereby the child is given extra work…'
241 / 8 / Participant B	'He gives me the homeworks'. *(Educator)*
374 / 12 / Participant C	'…He was calling that some of the children who don't understand like me will come after school and get study'. *(Educator)*
1361 / 66 / Co-participant II	'…I'm going to take them to Pretoria Show… I'm going to take them now to be exposed to these things'.
1383 / 70 / Co-participant II	'…I'm just taking them saying what I've been teaching you…like if I'm teaching them how to design a house, how to construct a house, I'm taking them and giving them examples…'
1406 / 72 / Co-participant III	'From the GDE (Gauteng Department of Education) we have got teachers development here and we work in clusters (groups), where we are trying to maybe…to work together to see that there is a progress, what is it that we can give to our learners…'
38 / 2 / Participant A	'…when I'm not understanding my mother can help me to do it…'
199 / 7 / Participant B	'To practice with me, to do with me my homeworks'. *(Friends)*

Unit / page/ speaker	Quotes
326 / 10 / Participant C	'Like when they give us a homework I don't understand I give her and say "you must help me, I'm not understanding" and she helps'. *(Sister)*
342 / 11 / Participant C	'Where I'm not understanding I tell them here I don't understand and they try to help me'. *(Educators)*
513 / 18 / Participant E	'…she help me in the homeworks, what what, when they give me assignment, she interview me…' *(Grandmother)*
430 / 14 / Participant D	'My brother he helps me a lot. He takes me down and reads for me and then he told me I can't write for you. Take a pen and then I will tell you what to do'.
408 / 13 / Participant D	'…He helps me how to read Setswana and write an essay and so forth'. *(Educator)*
656 / 25 / Participant G	'…he do (sic) show me how must I work on the subject like Mathematics. Like sometimes, additions he tries to help me with many works of it'. *(Brother)*
716 / 28 / Participant H	'…I told her that I don't understand what and what and she help me. My uncle if they give us homework in school I just go home and tell my uncle he must help me here and here, then he help me…' *(Sister / uncle)*
786 / 30 / Participant H	'…My sister and my uncle when I come back from school they ask me "didn't they give you homework? Come let us help you?" Then I take all my books and I go back they help me'.
909 / 37 / Co-participant A	'…Like the homeworks she ask me then I can help her if I understand, if I don't understand I just say you can go somewhere to others…' *(Mum)*
911 / 37 / Co-participant A	'To the neighbour'.
933 / 38 / Co-participant A	'Sometimes I like to ask her questions about the school, what she has done at the school and the rest'. *(Mum)*
982 / 40 / Co-participant A	'…If she don't (sic) understand and I understand I will help her. I can send her to the neighbour if I know that that person can help in the subject she don't understand…' *(Mum)*
1071 / 44 / Co-participant C	'I help him like when his teacher give him homework like in Mathematics I do sometimes help him…' *(Sister)*
1093 / 45 / Co-participant C	'First I ask him do you understand this homework already because he do sometimes in class generally…' *(Sister)*
1194 / 52 / Co-participant F	'When she's writing, neh, and then she doesn't understand her works then "mum, I want this answer. I don't understand the answer". Then I help, Ok, the answer is like this like this'. *(Mum)*
404 / 13 / Participant D	'…And then my friends at my class, we do group us after school and then we do the work... That helps me to learn more and more'.
594 / 22 / Participant F	'…They always talk about school and we have to do schoolwork everyday…' *(Friends)*

Unit / page/ speaker	Quotes
636 / 24 / Participant G	'…I try to practice them in class with my friends'.
668 / 26 / Participant G	'…When I have problem on Mathematics they do try to help me so that I must understand…' *(Friends)*

Participants in the study tend to receive a lot of assistance with their schoolwork. Although most of them turn to friends for support, they nevertheless obtain help with their schoolwork from educators, and some of the participants acquire assistance also from siblings, mothers and other relatives. In all, the researcher perceived that Grade Nine learners are not without assistance. However, the form it takes and the consistency of it seems highly variable.

3.9.2.4   Creation of support by mobilizing resources

Some of the Co-participants (educators) reported having to 'create' some of the support rendered to Grade Nine learners, especially where support is limited. Excerpts are displayed in Table 3.19.

TABLE 3.19:   EXTRACTS ON CREATION OF SUPPORT BY MOBILIZING RESOURCES

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1357 / 65 & 66 Co-participant II	'…but some of them we have to create… I don't expect The Department to give me all the things, materials on learning support… some we are creating, some we are just asking from other schools and colleges'.
1359 / 66 / Co-participant II	'…so we have to create the environment that is sort of inclusive, that is going to include all the learners…'
1503 / 81 / Co-participant V	'The support that we get is we usually made as educators during cluster meetings…'
1644 / 92 / Principal	'Besides having teachers teaching, we are having for them extra lessons that are being given by an outsider, we are having for them Saturday schools with an outreach body that is attached to the school and assisting the school... Then we are having class teachers who are working as guardians. And we are having an extra period for them two periods a week that we call life as a school and there is a teacher who goes there to further give them life skills in various ways and encourage them…'

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1648 / 92 / Principal	'…the Principal communicates problems and they go and assist and whenever there are courses, there are extra tuition for learners then they invite us. There is also besides what I've said the UNISA that is involved through outreach to try to get the level of the learners, their ability to read…'
1344 / 64 / Co-participant I (Educator)	'…maybe if we need some charts and they are not able to afford to buy charts or to buy some polish for the class, what we do I encourage them to sort of give them some tasks and then I…I don't want to say I'm paying them; I just give them something to go and buy whatever they need…'
1348 / 64 / Co-participant I (Educator)	'…I've started Saturday school where I'm giving extra lessons… Then if I feel that I can't reach them, or there is a big gap between myself and them I go an extra mile by going to other educators from other schools to get more work… or I invite them to come and help out because we are moving in the direction of forming an association of Maths teachers in grade nine to help one another in our township'.
1359 / 66 / Co-participant II (educator)	'…sometimes I'm just making peer support groups in class because of sometimes it is not that a learner cannot be able to learn…'
1666 / 95 / Principal	'We are using the local child protection unit; local community and policing forums… Otherwise we use our social welfare. There are other NGO's where we refer our learners. Most importantly at school we are having a peer support groups…'
1668 / 95 & 96 / Principal	'They are learners attached to Pretoria University under one of the life skills educator. They assist learners with minor problems- learner's go to them and tell them their problems or they are being encouraged to join the peer support group… And then we are having the SBST, School Based Support Team at the school… Then we are having our District, where if we fail as a school we refer them to our District… Another support is we are having what we call grade counsel where we are having grade teachers, class teachers of a particular grade who get down there with grade principal and taking care of learners. Then as a school we are having in addition a welfare committee to support those learners especially those whose parents are unemployed and have nothing at home…'
1652 / 92 / Principal	'All these strategies we are using, especially teacher development and the learner development…'
1507 / 82 / Co-participant V	'Sometimes we get like magazines, and sometimes we get the newspapers that have learning areas, like Sunday Times and Soweto and sometimes, we get materials from the Botanical Gardens, and sometimes we get materials from the television, the learning station…'
1557 / 85 / Co-participant VI	'…One get information from newspapers and I use what they use in their daily lives, then I try to compile some kind of notes and thereafter I run some questions…'

Unit / page / speaker	Quotes
1395 / 71 / Co-participant II	'…They are technology companies like Telkom, Anglo-American and others. They are sending them materials and sometimes the companies are taking them to their workshops…'

The session with the principal of the sample school revealed the type of support already available, as well as the efforts being made by the school to provide support for Grade Nine learners who are experiencing barriers to learning, by mobilizing potential resources. According to her report, these strategies have been quite effective in improving learning for learners experiencing barriers to learning.

3.10   FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

Follow-up interview sessions were conducted at the end of data analysis. The aim of this was to enable participants and co-participants to verify whether the findings were satisfactorily representative of the evidence they gave. Not all were available for the sessions but an adequate representation was established. In all, seven of the nine participants were available; six co-participants (educators) and the principal were also available for follow-up. Only three family members were accessible, as some of them have relocated.

The sessions with the participants and educators, as well as the principal, were conducted in the school premises. These were carried out on 27 March 2006, between the hours of 11h00 and 13h50 and 30 March 2006, between the hours of 8h20 and 10h45. The duration of each session was ten to fifteen minutes, except for the three tape-recorded sessions, the duration of which was about twenty to thirty-five minutes. Two sessions with family members were conducted on 30 March 2006, from 11h00 to 11h10 and from 11h30 to 11h40 respectively. The third was conducted on 4 April 2006, between the hours of 08h48 and 09h00.

Everyone involved indicated that the themes, sub-themes and categories that emerged were a satisfactory representation of the information divulged at the interview sessions. Educator III agreed with the outcome of the interviews, but nevertheless asked a few questions for the sake of clarity. Educators V and VI reported additional development since our last meetings.

In the researcher's thinking, the new additions were, however, quite enlightening, as Educator V reported that the problems leading to barriers to learning are escalating, with learners' inability to read and write identified as the topmost barriers to learning. Interestingly, Educator VI, in supporting this view, linked it to the Outcomes-based Education system, which he identified as the greatest barrier to learning. In addition to what was presented at the original sessions regarding the OBE as a barrier to learning, he reckoned that the problem could be traced to the foundation level (Grade One), when 'teaching' is replaced with eighty per cent of the work to be carried out by the learner. The repercussion is that from this lower grade, the child does not perform adequately but gets pushed up nonetheless.

Extract from the follow-up interview transcriptions:

Unit 56 / page 8 / Educator VI: *Now I will like to comment on the inability to read and to write, which is a very serious problem now more especially with the introduction of the new system OBE... which encourages 80% of work to be done by the learners, right. Then teachers resort to giving more of the work than teaching. The actual teaching is not taking place that much... Now the problem is that from the lower grades they are not performing well. They are being pushed. They keep on pushing them, you see…*

From the comments of Educator VI on the OBE system, the researcher perceived a link between this new system and educator absenteeism identified by some participants previously.

Excerpt:

Unit 56 / page 9 / educator VI: *…Then it is more of paper work. That is why you find that the teacher sometimes becomes reluctant in a way to get to class because they still have to sort out the papers, because the officials when they come to school they want to see a lot of work that has been done by learners…*

Educator VI also indicated that the difficulty with the implementation of the new system lies in the expectation that an educator who took three years to obtain a diploma can implement the OBE after a two-week training course.

Excerpt:

Unit 60 / page 10 / Educator VI: *…it took a teacher 3 years to complete to become a real teacher, to acquire a diploma or even a degree so that he can be ready to teach, but now to*

attend a course for one day or even two weeks and then you are expected to implement all these…

In her comment, Educator V stated that in her view, drug taking, sex, smoking and crime should rank second, as these are also on the increase. She maintained that too much sex is shown on television, and was particularly displeased with the advertisement on HIV & AIDS, i.e. *HIV wants you*.

Note the following extract:

Unit 29 / page 4 / educator V: *…Maybe it is the effect of some of the drugs that they are using. And the sex, there is too much sex on the television, and they watch television. There is this advert on 'HIV wants you'. They show there a boy sleeping with a girl and they want to experiment... And smoking and crime, huh...*

Unit 35 / page 4 / Educator V: *... maybe the crime has been committed maybe at home and he carries that to the schoolyard in his head...*

On the method of instruction as a barrier to learning, Educator V added that the language of instruction is English, which some of the learners do not understand, hence the difficulty in reading and writing.

Excerpt:

Unit 41 / page 5 / Educator V: *... the method of instruction truly and rightfully is English. Some of them don't understand English. So sometimes we use vernacular words to describe it but when it comes to writing down the test they have a problem in writing and they have a problem in reading…*

On the manifestations of learning support, Educator VI's comment on the knowledge of learning support is that parents do not prioritise and do not see the need to get their children to understand the seriousness and importance of acquiring an education.

Extract:

Unit 66 / page 11 / Educator VI: *... It's a question of prioritizing. Our parents have not yet realized how important it is to help learners in taking education serious…*

Finally, two participants (A and H) were found to be repeating Grade Nine for the second time. Both reported being ill and absent from school for a while, thereby missing out on examinations. For participant A, the same illness that resulted in her repeating the grade the previous year reoccurred. Educator I was reported to have left teaching for a job in Golfing. Educator IV informed the researcher during the session with him that he had gone back to school on a part-time basis, in order to acquire the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE).

3.11   CONCLUSION

A detailed discussion of the interview report has been presented in this chapter. A total of nine learners (participants), nine family members (co-participants), seven educators (also co-participants) and the principal were interviewed. The two themes that emerged from the data, along with the sub-themes and categories were all discussed with supporting quotes from the interview transcripts. Also presented in this chapter were details of the follow-up interviews.

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CHAPTER 4
FRAMING THE FINDINGS IN TERMS OF EXISTING LITERATURE

4.1   INTRODUCTION

This research used multiple case studies of nine Grade Nine learners who are experiencing barriers to learning, and are thus repeating the grade. The purpose of the study was to determine, explore and explain the manifestations of learning support in the lives of these learners. This chapter is intended to present the findings of the study as they relate to existing literature.

4.2   SUMMATION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study are based on two main themes, namely barriers to learning and the manifestations of learning support. These are connected to the research questions, which will be revisited in the next chapter. Nevertheless, the main research question guiding the study was:

> *How does learning support manifest itself in the lives of high school learners?*

The ensuing sub-questions were:

1)   What is the nature of barriers to learning for high school learners?
2)   What is learning support?
3)   What learning support is available for high school learners experiencing barriers to learning?

The findings of the study present an array of opinions and ideas emerging from the data regarding barriers to learning and the manifestations of learning support in the lives of Grade Nine learners.

4.3   FINDINGS AS THEY RELATE TO LITERATURE

4.3.1   THEME ONE: BARRIERS TO LEARNING

The findings of this study as regards barriers to learning complement the views of Speece *et al.* (2003:38) and the *Education White Paper 6* (DoE, 2001:7) to the effect that a range of factors lead to barriers to learning. Adelman and Taylor (1993:14) also share the view along with Donald *et al.* (2002:31 & 55) who maintain that the factors that result in barriers to learning involve not only the learner but also the whole social system. Some of the divulged barriers that emerged in this study will now be linked to the literature.

Barriers to learning were identified as resulting from various factors. As has been stated in the previous chapter, these factors are grouped into four sub-themes in this study, as barriers to learning relating to learners, educators, family and the education system/society.

SUB-THEME ONE: LEARNER-RELATED BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Five categories emerged in the learner-related barriers to learning as follows:
1.   Play and leisure activities
2.   Peer influence/adolescence
3.   Low motivation for learning
4.   Inability to read and write
5.   Drug abuse, sex, smoking and crime.

1.   Play and leisure activities

This was a strong theme amongst the barriers to learning acknowledged for high school learners. Both participants and co-participants (educators and family members), found play and leisure activities to be worrisome in terms of their impact on learning. Although play and leisure activities were, in this study, very much pinpointed as negatively influencing learning, the researcher's opinion is that play can actually serve a positive role in the teaching and learning process. According to Jones (2005/81:292), play is a necessity for *all* children of the world, and *one way for children to have a better life is for play opportunities to be given to them in their homes, at school, at after-school programs, and in their communities.* McCune (1998/69:601) describes play as that facet of children's actions which is first linked to the inner being and then to the player's capabilities and views. Play and learning are thus

interconnected as they are in 'an interactive balance of assimilation to the self and accommodation to reality' (McCune 1998/69:601), for reality often infringes on play.

According to Byers (1998/69:600) and Pellegrini and Smith (1998/69:610), 'physical activity play' serves as a likely means of exercise that keeps the body fit and in shape. Although participants in the study indulge in a lot of play activities, albeit in a way that impacts negatively on learning, the study revealed a lack of facilities that might make organized and supervised play activities possible both in the school and the community, the aim being to boost learning.

The factor that could probably have resulted in the negative influence of play and leisure activities in this study might be the lack of organized and supervised play activities in the appropriate facilities. As a result, learners are left to indulge in play activities on their own. Hence the findings of the study in terms of play and leisure activities contradict the views of authors such as Jones (2005/81:292) and McCune (1998/69:601) on the positive influence of play on learning, in that play and leisure activities emerged in this study as a barrier instead of a facilitator of learning.

2.   Peer influence/adolescence

The developmental phase of adolescence is often associated with stress, as the adolescent goes through emotional confusion (Louw, 1997:505). In the researcher's opinion, the most challenging aspect of the developmental phase seems to be social development, during which the adolescent has to come to grips with the various changes he is experiencing. One of the key developmental tasks of the adolescent is character formation (Shaffer, 1996:483) and the need to achieve equilibrium between who he is, people's perception of him and how he relates to the norms and ideals of the society (Donald *et al*., 2002:78). He thus begins to search for answers to who he is, to what group he belongs and what he wants to achieve in life (Shaffer, 1996:483).

The adolescent's greatest challenges as he develops are fraternization, identifying where he fits into the society, securing interpersonal expertise, fostering acceptance of others and their beliefs and developing self-assurance (Gouws *et al*., 2002:67). The desire to achieve these draws him closer to peers, as being socially accepted by them matters above all else. Peer influence thus becomes a powerful force that often confronts the adolescent learner, and can either manifest itself positively or negatively, depending on the values upheld by the group

with whom the learner associates. In this study, peer influence and adolescence were acknowledged by participants and co-participants as constituting barriers to learning for high school learners, thus which is in accordance with the views of such writers as Donald *et al.* (2002), Shaffer (1996), Louw (1997), and others.

The researcher's opinion on this issue in the study is that some adolescent learners tended to turn to peers for what could not be obtained from the family or school, which is in agreement with Donald *et al*'s (2002:244) view that 'inadequacies' of the family and school would determine the amount of influence wielded by peers, who might provide for him what is lacking at family and school levels. Although peer influence and adolescence were recognized as a major barrier to learning for the high school learners in this study, some participants acknowledged that they received *learning support* from peers (whom they generally referred to as 'friends'). The researcher's conclusion therefore is that while there were negative influences from peers on participants and Grade Nine learners, one cannot overlook the positive influence that was provided by peers in the form of personal learning support. In other words, the outcome of peer influence and adolescence manifested both negatively and positively in the study.

3.   Low motivation for learning

As this category started to emerge, the internal question that the researcher asked was 'why will a learner fortunate enough to be in school exhibit low motivation for learning?' The answer to this could possibly be found in the classroom culture, the school culture or the reflection of the whole social system. Various forces, visible or invisible, according to Donald *et al.* (2002:168), can affect the activities in the classroom, consequently resulting in low motivation for learning on the learner's part. A learning environment should be such as to meet the needs of all learners as well as possible in order to facilitate motivation to learn.

At this point, the researcher would like to link a lack of three interrelating features of a learning environment, namely physical, social and instructional conditions, to a possible unwillingness or lack of motivation to learn. This is in agreement with Adelman and Taylor (1993:160) who inferred that a poor learning environment might have a deleterious effect. The physical features that might impact negatively include inaccessibility of building facilities, noisy classrooms, poor illumination, poor aeration, irregular temperature, inadequate seating conveniences and over-population. The social features, which include the relationship between the learner and the educator, and between the learner and other learners,

could impact either negatively or positively (Donald *et al*., 2002:169-171). Finally, the instructional aspect, which is connected to the teaching and learning procedure, was recognized as a barrier to learning in this study and so will be discussed in more detail.

A few co-participating educators identified learners' low motivation for learning as troubling. They reported that learners involved are 'lazy', will not attend to their portfolios and avoid difficulties in subject areas. In the researcher's view, several things are important here:

▪ Adelman & Taylor's (1993:163) point that 'motivation is a prerequisite to learning, and its absence may be a cause of learning problems, a factor maintaining such problems, or both', and Muthukrishna's (2002:139) stipulation that learners are willing to take risks, to be drawn in and exhibit commitment to learning if they are motivated.

▪ The view of the *Education White Paper 6* (DoE, 2001:19) that the barriers to learning experienced by learners in both special and ordinary schools are the result of facets of the curriculum such as learning area content, language used in teaching and technique of instruction, and implying that these might not be consistent with the learner's intellectual requirements.

▪ Donald *et al*'s (2002:31) contextual disadvantage, which might probably originate from 'disadvantage in particular social and educational contexts'. The researcher's intuition on this is that a learner confronted with the above may manifest low motivation for learning, as well as a refusal to participate in class activities like the writing of homework, classwork and projects, or a refusal to listen in class.

4.   Inability to read and write

Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) suggest that 'reading is essential to success in our society', as this skill is to a great extent significant for *social* and *economic* development. Even though only two co-participants, one of whom is the principal of the school, identified this category as a barrier to learning, the researcher sees it as a possible foundation for many high school learners' challenges in experiencing barriers to learning. This thought was confirmed at the follow-up interview sessions when two of the co-participating educators ranked it at the top of all the categories. The researcher believes that all academic activities largely depend on a learner's ability to read and write. Lyon (1999) shares this belief by stating that a learner who

cannot read at an acceptable level is likely to encounter significant barriers to learning in different educational capacities.

When inquiring about the possible causes of some of the participants' inability to read and write, Educator VI was of the opinion at the follow-up interview session that the Outcomes-based Education system is to blame, as the new system tends to relegate the old system of actual teaching to 'twenty per cent', with 'eighty per cent' of the tasks to be carried out by learners, even at the foundation level (lower grades) where the art of reading and writing should be taught. According to him, the implication is that very little time is allocated to actual teaching, thus eliminating most of what could have been acquired (such as reading and writing). However, the researcher believes that the causal factors of illiteracy (as manifested in the inability to read and write) probably stretch beyond the Outcomes-based Education system as well. They include teacher education, poverty factors, parental education factors, language barriers, school system factors and so forth. Snow *et al.* (1998), for instance, mention that most reading difficulties encountered by adolescent learners could probably have been *avoided* or even *resolved* at the foundation stage of schooling. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this study does not establish causal factors for the participants' inability to read and write; in this section, it merely mentions possible hypotheses.

According to the researcher's analysis, reading deals principally with appreciating written words; and failure to lay a firm reading and writing foundation at an early stage of the child's education could result in the inability to read and write at a later stage (high school). Lerner's (2003:397) outlook is that challenging school environments could be linked to a shortfall in reading. Van Kraayenoord and Elkins (1998:140) suggest that the inability to read might result from various factors such as brain damage, visual and or auditory impairment, as well as environmental influences that are due to differences in culture or language and poor instructional strategy. Poor phonological skills could also result in an inability to read. A learner experiencing reading difficulty may probably exhibit writing problems as well since reading and writing are connected. Dednam (2005:122) believes that although learners are decisively taught to read, reading and writing skills develop concomitantly, and Lerner (2003:397) also suggests that learning to read is a wide procedure that requires cautious instruction and determination. Lyon (1999) also recognizes that acquiring the knowledge of reading is an extensive process which should be instituted long before the child is enrolled in formal school. Also acknowledged as being at risk of failing to learn to read properly are those who begin their schooling with inadequate contact with English as a general means or

language of communication, and then having to cope with English being the language of instruction at school. Children from disadvantaged environments or homes may also experience reading problems due to poverty factors. However, the researcher's impression is that learners from advantaged homes or environments may equally experience limited exposure to the language of instruction where this differs from that spoken at home, and so can also encounter this barrier to learning. In summary, the inability to read affects a learner's ability to write, as he may not appreciate the representation of the alphabets in sounds and may not recognize the words to be written, thus creating a barrier to learning.

5.   Drug abuse, sex, smoking and crime

Hallahan and Kauffman (1991:129) and Corbett (1998:8) maintain that evidence shows that learners from challenging socio-economic environments tend to encounter barriers to learning, as they have to contend with environmental factors such as poverty, drug abuse, violence, HIV & AIDS and other societal challenges. Donald *et al.* (2002:31) describe these barriers to learning as arising from the social context of learners, and although external influences are at play, these tend to be linked to internal influences. For Adelman and Taylor (1993:14), this is the Type I learning problem, where the learner's environment has given rise to barriers to learning. Reasons abound why *any* learner would fall prey to drug abuse and consequently to sex, smoking and crime. These reasons include 'withdrawal or escape from painful reactions to life', peer influence, insubordination and an attempt to break away from boredom rather than indulge in challenging activities (Mwamwenda, 2004:382).

In this study, many of the participants and co-participants revealed that drugs such as dagga and pills, cigarette smoking, sex and crime impact negatively on learning for high school learners. As the data from the study did not establish the factors that could have given rise to the indulgence in the above (except for peer influence), the researcher assumes that it might issue from factors such as poverty in the family or society, relief and escape from family or personal problems, the urge to experiment and so forth.

SUB-THEME TWO: EDUCATOR-RELATED BARRIERS TO LEARNING

To be a teacher means to make a lifelong commitment to keeping the learner central to the teaching-learning process (Johnston, 1996:4). According to Landsberg (2005:69), part of the task of an educator is that of a *facilitator*, which goes beyond simply imparting knowledge to learners. That is why they also have the responsibility to facilitate events and activities in a

learning environment. Sibaya and Kruger (2005:125) believe that 'all learners can learn' if the educator provides the necessary aid required for them to achieve their distinctive and optimal potential. However, it follows that in the same way in which educators can support learning, they can also serve as a barrier to learning due to their integral role in the learning process.

Some participants and co-participants identified three categories of educator-related barriers to learning in the study. These include:

1.	Method of instruction
2.	Educator absenteeism
3.	Perceived uncaring attitude of educators.

## 1.	Method of instruction

A principal aspect of the teaching process is the instruction strategy that an educator employs. A positive outcome of teaching depends greatly on the method of instruction, as this can either enhance or discourage effective learning. The *Education White Paper 6* (DoE, 2001:19) recognizes the method of instruction as a barrier to learning for many learners. Donald *et al*. (2002:31) refer to this as 'poor teaching' while Prinsloo (2005b:458 & 459) suggests that the flow of the lesson and the avoidance of barriers occurring will depend on the ability and competence of the educator to make it inspirational and engaging for learners. Therefore, the method of communication and instruction the educator employs is an important skill in facilitating learning in the classroom.

In this study, it emerged that the method of instruction could have resulted in participants reporting a lack of understanding of educators in class and perhaps, a lack of listening. However, these were perceptions expressed by the participants in the study. The researcher herself did not assess the method of instruction specifically, but rather focused on the data generated by the participants and co-participants on the manifestations of learning support.

## 2.	Educator absenteeism

The researcher sees teaching and thus an educator's presence in class as the primary assignment for an educator. In this study, numerous reports on educator absenteeism were mentioned. Although this category emerged in the study, the data collected did not ascertain the reasons for educator absenteeism, except where Educator VI blamed the Outcomes-based Education system for educators being absent from class due to an overload of paper work. The researcher, however, is of the view that other factors could probably have brought this

about, such as ill health, unavoidable family crises, a need to attend staff development seminars or training courses, lack of specialization in the subject areas, thus a feeling of inadequacy, and so forth. The high assessment load on educators may be a further contributing factor.

3.   Perceived uncaring attitude of educators

A participant described this as causing disillusionment for learners in Grade Nine. Exhibiting a positive attitude towards learners is often an effective means of achieving productive teaching and learning. This thought complements Mwamwenda (2004:389) who sums it up by stating, *it is important for teachers to be positive and enthusiastic about their work, as well as about the learners they are teaching. They should have high expectations of learners' achievements and do whatever is needed to encourage them to meet such expectations. As part of this process teachers should show warmth and empathy and a caring attitude towards their learners.*

A co-participating educator reported self-presentation as important, as some educators come to school unprepared and improperly dressed in his opinion, thus attracting disrespect from learners. This co-participant reported that some educators show disregard for learners by ridiculing, disparaging and degrading those who exhibit learning difficulties. The researcher needs to point out, however, that this was the opinion of one co-participant.

Some co-participating educators and the principal reported a lack of self-development by educators. The importance of self-development lies in the educator improving his capabilities, outlook and performance. Pandor (2006) addressed the issue of educator development in her education budget speech, where she reiterated that the structure for this development has almost been completed. The Minister also stated that the target of this development will be reading and writing, which constitute crucial areas that require attention at all educational levels. As has already been reported, this study identified the inability of learners to read and write as a barrier to learning that could possibly have begun at the foundation level of their education. Thus, the reading programme already in place will also assist in addressing this barrier to learning. Pandor (2006) further announced in the budget speech that steps have been taken to improve remuneration for educators. This package consists of improvement in the conditions of service for educators, and improvement of salaries. In the researcher's view, these steps may indirectly address the issue of the perceived uncaring attitude of educators

(identified in this study as a barrier to learning), through increasing the performance of educators, and promoting excellence in teaching and the performance of learners in general.

SUB-THEME THREE: FAMILY-RELATED BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Swart and Phasha (2005:220) suggest that each family is unique in respect of *skills, knowledge, resources and time available to promote the learning and development of their children.* However, as was stated in the previous chapter, the disintegration of family life is inclined to harmfully affect the educational adaptation of learners in high school. Most families of today are under strain due to several factors such as poverty, HIV & AIDS, death in families, and so forth. This may impact on learners emotionally and scholastically. Prinsloo (2005a:33) states that the susceptibility of the family has resulted in learners' insecurity emotionally and otherwise, as many of them are in single-parent homes, suffer from violence (such as sexual or physical abuse), or are orphaned and underprivileged due to poverty factors. Mwamwenda (2004:275) believes that a child who lacks parental love and care may also lack the culture of respect for parents and educators alike. Concentrating on school activities becomes a task for this learner who may be worried about the various tribulations at home, ranging from conflicts to poverty. As mentioned earlier, Donald *et al.* (2002:56) complement Mwamwenda's belief in maintaining that learning may be affected at the family level by various factors such as the family's values regarding education, the family's economic status and the language used at home if different from that of instruction at school.

The study revealed three categories of family-related barriers to learning experienced by participants and Grade Nine learners. These include:

1.   Poverty (associated with limited financial resources)

2.   Family problems

3.   Lack of sibling support and non-involvement of parents in the academic lives of their children.

1.   Poverty (associated with limited financial resources)

Poverty could affect a high school learner negatively in achieving academic competence. In this study, poverty was identified as constituting barriers to learning for some participants. Donald *et al.* (2002:56) referred to the family's resources and Mwamwenda (2004:275) referred to the economic deficiencies of the family as factors that may result in unproductive learning for those affected. Prinsloo (2005a:29) maintains that poverty and unemployment

impact on the payment of school fees and the purchase of books required in school. Donald *et al.* (2002:209) point out that parents in poor communities may sometimes not cope with the finances associated with schooling and so may require that learners take up responsibilities that will bring home money. The zero school-fee policy announced by the Minister of Education (Pandor, 2006) may start to address this, as one of the priority areas in her budget speech focused on the 'introduction of no-fee school', especially since the budget aims to *consolidate, strengthen and improve the education system.* As poverty tends to plague disadvantaged communities, thereby probably limiting their education resources, the Minister's introduction of an approach by means of which schools in disadvantaged communities will be supplied with educational support such as 'libraries, laboratories and teaching materials', increases the chances of successful education for learners in these areas.

Some participants and co-participants, in identifying poverty as a family-related barrier to learning, revealed that some learners in Grade Nine often walk long distances to school because they cannot afford the transport fares, and some report to school without books or materials required for the day's activities in class. One of the consequences of poverty identified in this study is hunger, for many learners were reported to be going to school without food or the money to purchase any at break, thus facing the barrier to learning due to hunger. The consequence is tiredness from the long walk to school, and/or demoralization due to hunger or due to lack of materials to carry out tasks. However, the school in this study operates a feeding scheme with the assistance of some non-governmental organizations that sometimes supply food items to the school.

The Minister of Education, Pandor (2006) addressed the issue of hunger as she highlighted the moves to improve the situation. She spoke about the National School Nutrition Programme in her education budget speech and stated that it is aimed at providing meals at schools for learners in order *to enhance active learning capacities*, as well as to improve learners' attendance at targeted schools. This programme is supposed to reach five and a half million learners at seventeen thousand schools. However, the National School Nutrition Programme was not identified by any of the co-participants in this study as being implemented in the sample school.

2.   Family problems

Family problems are diversified and seem to represent a major problem for the Grade Nine learners in this study. Mwamwenda (2004:373) states, 'The family is governed by explicit and

implicit rules, regulations and conventions that guide its behaviour and interactions individually, personally, interpersonally and jointly'. Family problems include illness of one or both parents, the effects of the HIV & AIDS pandemic, marital conflicts and violence. Prinsloo (2005a:31) points out that some of these learners are heads of their families at a very early age and have the responsibility of providing for siblings and sick parents without any income. Hence some of them turn to prostitution or crime, and may become traumatized and unfocused in school activities.

The following family problems resulting in barriers to learning for participants were identified in this study: parental illness and learners acting as home nurses and heads of households, lack of income, inadequate housing, family disunity, physical and sexual abuse, marital conflicts and learners witnessing violence.

3.   Lack of sibling support and non-involvement of parents

Some participants reported not receiving any form of support from siblings and/or parents. Swart and Phasha (2005:220) have pointed out that several factors could lead to a lack of parental involvement. These are 'family structure, employment, parental socio-economic status, level of education, parental attitudes towards education, sense of self-efficacy with regard to involvement, linguistic and cultural differences and parents' expectations of their child's performance'. Also to be considered as possible factors that could result in a lack of sibling support and non-involvement of parents are the fact that these siblings may be struggling with academics or other facets of life themselves; parents or caregivers may be working long hours; may not be educated enough to handle the academic work at their children's level; or may be too ill to appreciate the educational problems of these learners. These factors may also shed light on why fathers were not mentioned as providing any form of learning support for participants in the study.

In South Africa and elsewhere, the socio-economic status and the educational level of parents are very important, as these will probably determine whether there would be any involvement from the parents' side in the child's learning. Millions of parents were left illiterate during the period of *Apartheid*, with the order, framework and promise provided by education being alien to them. Without educational experiences and role models to look up to, these parents may possibly harbour a feeling of incompetence and may feel like unwelcome visitors to their children's schools. There might be parents who could have been put off involvement in their

children's school lives due to unfavourable encounters that might have resulted in mistrust, while lack of confidence may put some off completely (Swart & Phasha, 2005:221 & 222).

The above may be reason enough for lack of parental involvement in their children's learning, but the researcher believes that the welfare of the learner should be paramount, as academic achievement or the lack of it usually impacts on the family, especially on parents. This 'category' however, probably calls for further study due to the historical and other complexities involved.

SUB-THEME FOUR: EDUCATION SYSTEM AND SOCIETY RELATED BARRIERS TO LEARNING

The barriers to learning encountered by learners generally relate to their environment or circumstances in which they find themselves as they go through growth and learning. In the opinion of Donald *et al.* (2002:205), 'poor educational and social conditions' are usually linked together and this can in most cases result in barriers to learning. Authors such as Adelman and Taylor (1993:14), Donald *et al.* (2002:31 & 207), DoE (2001:18 & 19), Mastropieri and Scruggs (2004:149), and Prinsloo (2005a,b:28 & 451) have identified diverse factors that relate to the education system and the society, as resulting in barriers to learning. To Adelman and Taylor (1993:14), barriers to learning can issue from the 'deficiencies in the environment' where learning occurs, and this they referred to as the Type I learning problem. They also identified a Type II learning problem, where the learner's characteristics and the unaccommodating environment with regard to teaching and learning are equally to blame for the manifestation of learning difficulties. The implication of this is that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds may have *capacities* and *attitudes* that do not correspond to the expectations in school, thus revealing the unpreparedness of the education environment to adapt to such situations (Adelman & Taylor, 1993:25).

The *Education White Paper 6* (DoE, 2001:18 & 19) recognizes some factors in the education system that can lead to barriers to learning. One of these factors is the inflexibility of the curriculum. This pertains in the areas of the work content, management and organization of the teaching and learning environment, the language used in instruction, instruction strategies, materials employed in the teaching and learning process, the accessible time for the completion of the curriculum, and finally, the teaching tempo. Other systemic barriers that might impact negatively on learning for high school learners include over-population of

learners in a possibly under-resourced classroom, as well as poverty manifesting itself in various ways in the lives of many high school learners.

Donald *et al.* (2002:31) view poverty as a social system factor. Poverty, being characterized by unemployment, insufficient facilities and reserves and inappropriate policies, obviously leads to barriers to learning. Donald *et al.* (2002:31) in agreeing with the *Education White Paper 6*, maintain that barriers to learning described above are *barriers of context that relate to the socio-economic and political structure of our society and the resources and responses of particular communities, schools and families within this structure*.

The study revealed three categories of education system and society related barriers to learning as:

1.   Inappropriate curriculum and the Outcomes-based Education system
2.   Classroom sizes
3.   Poverty.

1.   Inappropriate curriculum and the Outcomes-based Education system

Further to what was said in relation to learning area content, Prinsloo (2005b:451) points out that in order for meaningful learning to occur, the learning area content needs to be related to the learner's culture, environment and level of readiness. Learning area content that does not make sense to the learner could be regarded as irrelevant and so the learner might shy away from such learning tasks and other class activities. Prinsloo (2005b:452) advises that the learning area content should be learner-oriented and should relate to the learner's environment.

It was disclosed in the study that the learning area content is often perceived to be 'non-practicable' by the learners and is at a higher level than some learners can comprehend. Also revealed is the fact that some topics are so unrelated to learners and their environments that these are rendered meaningless and pointless, as learners do not appreciate what the educator is talking about.

The number of learning areas taught to Grade Nine learners was reported to cause frustrations, for it becomes problematic when most educators issue tasks simultaneously without consulting each other on the possible impact of task-overload on the learners. The researcher

agrees with Prinsloo (2005b:451) and thinks that topics and learning contents need to be made as practicable and relevant as possible and should be at the readiness level of learners.

Donald *et al.* (2002:24) explain that the Outcomes-based Education (OBE) system arose from the competency-based movement in education, which stresses the learner's ability. According to Naicker (2004:21), this system has shifted from the traditional system that was associated with *time, calendars, grades, passing and failing*; thus the idea of the Outcomes-based Education is that each learner performs at his own pace, with the school setting conditions for accomplishment. The main aim of the system is 'for all learners to succeed', with its inspiration being 'the production of self-directed learners with the ability to solve problems' (Lomofsky, Roberts & Mvambi, 2004:75). Also, Fraser (2002:199) describes the new system as promoting the amplification of a learner's chances of learning, as well as relating his accomplishment to achieving the conceptualised results without necessarily paying attention to the amount of time needed to carry out the work.

Despite the reported advantages of the system, such as structuring knowledge in the minds of learners, the learner's ability to connect previous experiences to any learning situation and the ability for recollection instilled in the learner (Le Grange & Reddy, 1998:6 & 7), co-participants in this study found the difficulty in successfully implementing it troubling. They recognize the problem that many educators are not conversant with the new system, as they are used to the old system. Some co-participants complained that the training period to master the implementation process was insufficient. However, as the new system is a decade old, it is possible that these views are changing.

2.   Classroom sizes

Over-population in the classroom is a major barrier to learning in schools, as it is difficult to fulfil the needs of all learners. Donald *et al.* (2002:206) recognize that over-crowded and under-resourced classrooms cannot meet the demands of all learners. Ayers (2006:17) suggests that reduced class size will be beneficial for learners experiencing barriers to learning, as well as learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the researcher's view, this may ensure that the educator provides individual attention wherever it is required. In this study, co-participants (educators) identified over-population as a barrier to learning for high school learners, as this makes providing individual assistance complicated, since attending to a learner exhibiting difficulties often means leaving the rest of the class unattended, whereupon they become noisy and disruptive.

3.   Poverty

This theme is so pre-eminent in this study that it has already been mentioned under family-related barriers as well. Some co-participating educators also named the community of this study as 'disadvantaged'. According to Prinsloo (2005a,b:28 & 451), poverty is fast rising in South Africa, with overwhelming effects. This is exhibited in various forms, some of which include poor health, malnutrition, unaccommodating living conditions which manifest in unsanctioned settlements, limited technology, crime, educational backlogs and children catering for the household as heads of the family. Donald *et al.* (2002:207) relates poverty to 'inadequate facilities and resources', which includes 'overcrowded housing'. Mastropieri and Scruggs (2004:149) suggest that complications arise in achieving success in life due to poverty and this could culminate in learners being at risk of failure. Connected to poverty also is 'low educational achievement of parents', unemployment and the fact that affected families find it difficult to make available the necessary learning materials or experiences that can enhance and support their children's learning (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004:149). Poverty, according to Donald *et al.* (2002:209), sometimes results in learners dropping out of school because parents may not be able to afford the cost of having them in school.

The study identified poverty as a major barrier to learning for participants in this study. Interestingly, the findings of the study on poverty agree with the views of Prinsloo (2005a,b:28 & 451), Donald *et al.* (2002:207) and Mastropieri and Scruggs (2004:149), as these were pointed out as manifesting themselves in the lives of participants in the study and high school learners in most cases.

Some co-participants recognized a lack of materials required for learning as a barrier to learning. Lack of development and learning area specialization of educators were also identified. This links up with Donald *et al*'s (2002:31) view that 'inadequate resources' or 'educationally inappropriate policies' can result in barriers to learning. Inadequately trained educators or an educator who does not engage in self-development may also be linked to a lack of overall development and learning area specialization. The researcher's opinion is that these factors may all be related to poverty.

Conclusion

In concluding, the researcher will refer to Figure 1.3 where Donald *et al.* (2002:55) sum things up by suggesting that the barriers to learning experienced by learners involve the whole social system, as all levels are interrelated. Adelman and Taylor (1993:14) are aligned with

the suggestions of Donald *et al.* (2002:55). The researcher recognizes that the barriers to learning encountered by Grade Nine learners in this study are diverse in nature and actually draw in all levels, as a number of factors were identified as negatively influencing learning at the levels of the learner, family, educator, education system and the society.

4.3.2   THEME TWO: MANIFESTATIONS OF LEARNING SUPPORT

Although many authors have given different perspectives on how to provide learning support in order to achieve effective learning, the researcher will base this discussion on the views of Donald *et al.* (2002:237) and Adelman and Taylor (1993:43), since their views formed the conceptual basis of this study. Donald *et al.* (2002:236) maintain that barriers to learning go beyond the learner to the whole social system, which includes peers, the family, educators, the education system and the society at large. An interactive relationship exists between all the levels of the society so that a problem at one level affects all the others. This opinion was evident in the findings of the study.

In addressing the problems, Donald *et al.* (2002:237) therefore suggest that all levels of the social system should be involved, as the interdependence of all the levels implies that a change at a level will have a *ripple effect* on the other levels. Complementing this are Adelman and Taylor (1993:43) as can be seen from Figure 1.5 where it is pointed out that intervention should be broadened to include all the types of learning problems (especially Types I and II in the case of this study). Donald *et al.* (2002:238) recommend 'multiple intervention between systems, within systems and engaging the learner' in order to eliminate a re-occurrence of the problem at a different level from where it is being solved.

Barriers to learning identified in the study run through all the levels of the social system. Addressing the issues therefore also involved all the signified levels. The second theme, manifestations of learning support, has four sub-themes:
1.   Knowledge and availability of learning support
2.   Guidance, advice, motivation, encouragement and one-on-one support
3.   Extra classes, extra work and assistance with schoolwork
4.   Creation of support by mobilizing resources.

The first sub-theme on the knowledge and availability of learning support will be addressed in the next chapter where the research questions are revisited. Therefore the researcher goes straight on to sub-theme two as follows:

2.   Guidance, advice, motivation, encouragement and one-on-one support

The manifestation of learning support in guidance, advice, motivation and encouragement was reported by almost all the participants. They reported this to have been a positive influence on their learning. Participants said they had received guidance and advice from friends, siblings, mothers, grandmothers and educators. The researcher noted, as will be reported in the next category, that although participants receive guidance and advice from family relations, not much assistance is received from them as regards the learners' schoolwork, which may explain the emergence of 'non-involvement of siblings and parents' in the first theme identified in this study. A co-participating educator is also assigned guidance periods during which he guides learners on their skills. Mwamwenda (2004:361 & 362) points out that personal guidance and counselling is required for learners who experience personal problems such as feeling inadequate, inferior to others, rejected or doubting their scholarly skills. Also important is educational guidance in attending to learning difficulties, amongst others, as it may be necessary to provide assistance for these learners and perhaps give encouragement to those not motivated enough in their learning.

Encouragement was received from some mothers of participants and also from some educators. The researcher views encouragement as being connected to motivation. It tends to work together in that a learner who is encouraged to exert himself is also simultaneously motivated to learn. In substantiation of this, Ayers (2006:57) points out that encouragement rather than disparagement will assist in escalating a learner's motivation to learn.

Only one co-participating educator reported applying motivational tactics as learning support through taking models of work constructed or produced by him to class in order to encourage learners to persevere, and to give them hope and the realization that they can also produce such models. The researcher regards motivation as a very important support strategy for a learner encountering barriers to learning. In the researcher's view, it should actually be the first step in assisting a learner because a lack of motivation will not allow for the successful implementation of any learning support. According to Adelman and Taylor (1993:163), 'motivation is a prerequisite to learning, and its absence may be a cause of learning problems…' and if the curriculum is such that it is sufficiently captivating to hold the

attention of the learner, then he will probably be motivated enough for learning to be effective and to blot out other prohibiting factors. This implies the necessity to instil in learners the drive to learn, for Johnston (1996:27) states that 'the will to learn is the very heart of the learning process', as this is closely connected to the motivation to learn. Adelman and Taylor (1993:187) also suggest that matching the syllabus to the learners' 'levels of motivation and development' is important, while Mastropieri and Scruggs (2004:247) maintain that successful learning requires three vital components: the learner's skills, his desire to succeed (motivation) and his emotional state at the time of learning. Donald *et al*'s (2002:122) view that teaching and learning will not be productive 'unless attention is paid to every student's *motivation* or will to take on challenges of learning', and Lerner's (2003:211) advice to employ activities that will arouse a learner's interests and desire to learn, further support this view.

Three co-participating educators reported providing one-on-one support. The researcher thinks this could be a very effective support strategy for learners experiencing barriers to learning and who may be too shy or ashamed to open up or engage in class activities. According to Newman (2002/41:133), learners who might be poor achievers and, thus often exhibit *poor self-perceptions of ability and low self-esteem*, might not readily try to find academic assistance in the classroom. Lerner (2003:162) maintains that one-on-one support is a productive method of teaching that could result in significant improvement in learners' academic work. Friend and Bursuck (1999:125) referred to this strategy as 'one-to-one instruction', and in agreeing with Lerner (2003:162), infer that this enables the learner to embark upon tasks at his own level and pace.

Several authors, as stated below, supported the application of one-on-one support strategy, which they referred to as 'individualization'. Sands *et al.* (2000:60) describe this method of learning support as that which caters for the educational requirement of a specific learner who is experiencing barriers to learning. Sibaya & Kruger (2002:136) explain individualization as an instructional strategy that matches the particular learning demands of each learner, including the variation of learning time, provision of extra time, as well as the variation and adaptation of learning resources. In the opinion of Mastropieri and Scruggs (2004:501) this support strategy could assist in the provision of appropriate activities to meet a specific learner's educational needs; and according to Adelman and Taylor (1993:147), activities are such that they match the learner's 'current developmental status and performance capabilities'. This strategy enables the educator to adapt the instructional method to the learner's distinctive

way of learning, as well as his learning abilities (Smith, 1998:318). MacIntyre and Deponio (2003:89) also state that the educator is required to appreciate the learner's favoured way of learning. Heron and Harris (1993:129), and Hammill and Bartel (1995:452) are also promoters of individualization. In this study, the application of a one-on-one support strategy by some educators made it feasible for learners in need of it to receive individualised teaching.

3.   Extra classes, extra work and assistance with schoolwork

For participants in this study, learning support also took the form of extra classes, extra work and assistance with schoolwork. Most of the co-participating educators revealed that in an effort to assist learners experiencing barriers to learning, they organize extra classes after school hours and/or on Saturdays, or give extra work to make learners practise, or sometimes both. The principal also pointed out that an outreach body gives Saturday classes to learners in need of them.

Participants receive assistance with their schoolwork from numerous persons around them. Nevertheless, it was significant that very few of them got assistance from family members such as siblings, mothers, grandmothers and/or uncle and aunts, even though they were part of the learners' lives. The limited assistance with schoolwork received from relatives could have been the result of factors such as their educational levels, work hours, illnesses and some other family problems. Most of the assistance with schoolwork was received from friends, as many learners tend to turn to friends rather than their families or educators. Newman (2006/41:134) points out that friendship represents assistance and support that comprise *reliability, affection, intimacy, and lack of conflict and rivalry*. Hence, it seems that learners who share friendships are often able to interact and direct their attention towards learning and solving problems. Friends often seek assistance from one another in a way that could result in building knowledge, thereby reinforcing productive learning.

Eloff (2006a:38) identified the peer group as an important connection to the asset-based approach to learning support for learners' peers, which could manifest in their provision of expressive, practical and motivational support, as well as in influences brought to bear in the learning process, in sharing the problems, in showing compassion and trust, and in coping with peers experiencing barriers to learning. This was the reason for the manifestation of these attributes in the reports on the supportive assistance that those participants in this study received from friends in dealing with difficult schoolwork.

Some educators were, however, also reported to assist in different ways. A positive interaction between the educator and learners might culminate in the educator understanding the learner and providing appropriate guidance for learning. Therefore, the educator exhibits his concern through listening to learners, ensuring that learners comprehend difficult work materials, thereby also making available, in 'a non-threatening way', assistance to a learner who needs it (Newman, 2006/41:133). Notably missing from the data as regards providing any form of learning support, were fathers, for no participant reported receiving help from them. The reasons for this may be complicated and can be hypothesized to be related to the absence of fathers, poverty factors and migration. It seems to call for further study, as the explanation of this phenomenon (along with limited support by family members) falls beyond the scope of this study.

4.   Creation of support by mobilizing resources

The needs of a learner experiencing barriers to learning could be addressed through mobilizing available assets for support, especially where conventional support is not adequately provided. It is the researcher's view that an adequately trained educator will not be rendered helpless by the unavailability of learning support for learners in his care. The researcher therefore applauds the fact that even though much is not available as support in terms of resources some educators manage to create support through the mobilization of accessible resources. One educator reports making models which he takes to class as a motivational strategy, and he also takes learners to fairs to experience things first hand; another uses newspapers, magazines and the learning channels on the television while some are involved in the feeding scheme where learners who have nothing to eat at home are provided with food to eliminate the barriers to learning caused by hunger. The principal also organizes for outside assistance from non-governmental organizations, an outreach body, students of some universities, as well as the school's social welfare committee.

Eloff (2006a:16) refers to the above means of providing support for learners experiencing barriers to learning as an asset-based approach to learning support, where the practitioner *identifies, accesses and mobilizes* the assets for learning support. In other words, this approach 'uses assets, resources, capacities and strengths to deal with challenges and to provide support' (Eloff, 2006a:20) for learners who need it, the advantage thus being that a mobilization effected on an individual affects the rest of the social system due to the interconnection between levels of the social system. According to Eloff (2006a:36), assets can be identified at all the levels of the social system such as the individual learner, the school, the

classroom, the family, peer group, and so forth. Thus, the mobilization of assets at one level will affect the rest of the levels as a result of the connecting relationship that exists between the components of the whole social system. This study identified the inadvertent application of this approach by some co-participating educators and the principal, as has been pointed out.

4.4   CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the findings of the study as they relate to existing literature. The chapter also showed that the findings as they concern the first theme of barriers to learning are augmented when the views of Donald *et al.* (2002:55) are used as a conceptual framework. It shows that all levels of the social context are interrelated, with the result that problems often produce ripple effects. This implies that an interaction at any one level affects all the others. Adelman and Taylor (1993:14) also shared this view in their continuum of learning problems. The findings of the study veered toward these views, as the barriers to learning experienced by participants were revealed as emanating from all levels of the social context, namely, the learners, families, educators, the education system and society. Presented in the second theme are the ways in which learning support manifested itself at different levels of the society (such as families, educators and friends) in the learners experiencing barriers to learning. This supports Donald *et al*. (2002:238) and Adelman and Taylor's (1993:43) suggestion that intervention should take place at all the levels on which the problems arose, in order to avoid a re-occurrence of the barriers to learning.

The researcher believes that the reactions of some of the participants during observation in class could have been due to different factors. The researcher therefore concurs with Newman (2002/41:132) who suggests that learners may not apply themselves when they are faced with taxing academic exercises. They then hastily quit, are inactive in class or simply carry on unsuccessfully by themselves. Other factors that could give rise to a learner not exerting himself in class, according to Newman (2002/41:132), include the learner's socialization over the years and the environment in which learning is taking place.

It seems that several of the barriers to learning and manifestations of learning support that emerged in this study are currently receiving attention. The Minister of Education, Pandor (2006) indicated in the education budget speech that there would be an improvement in 'the provision of resources for learning to schools'. She also reiterated that books have been supplied to 710 high schools in terms of the recently launched reading programme. There is

the intention to make parents partners in education and active participants at all levels of their children's school lives. She mentioned the intention to fortify the appraisal and framework of the support system nationwide in order to have an idea of how schools perform, the educational demands of schools, and how districts and provinces will add to the attainment of national norms and principles. The Minister went on to say: 'Teachers in all schools will be encouraged to develop learning strategies for each learner so as to focus on success. Schools will be required to devise learning improvement strategies and to focus on supporting learners to succeed'. Plans are afoot to provide educational support in the form of *libraries, laboratories and teaching materials* to schools in disadvantaged communities (Pandor, 2006). Even the plans to improve remuneration for educators are likely to boost morale as well as serve as an incentive that might improve their performances. The researcher regards all the issues attended to above as a step in the direction of addressing barriers to learning and increasing sources of learning support for high school learners at a national level.

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CHAPTER 5
FINAL SYNOPSIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes the study on the manifestations of learning support in the lives of high school learners who are experiencing barriers to learning. The research questions are revisited in this chapter and the link between the research questions and the findings of the study is showcased. Recommendations, suggestions for further studies, limitations, as well as the strengths and contributions of the study are incorporated in this chapter too.

As has been noted, the purpose of this study is to determine, explain and explore the manifestations of learning support in the lives of high school learners. The study thus looked into the nature of barriers to learning experienced by these learners, the support available to assist them in their learning and its manifestations in their lives. Two main assumptions informed the study, the first being that it is plausible that learners in high school could experience barriers to learning and that these could be intrinsic or extrinsic. The second assumption was that support might be available in various ways and formats, but that a fair amount of variability can be expected. These assumptions were confirmed by the findings of the study in the sense that several categories of barriers to learning encountered by high school learners were identified, along with diverse forms and manifestations of learning support for the participants in the study.

The barriers to learning identified in the study transcended the learners and applied to the whole social system. Also, the learning support received by participants and other high school learners issued from all around them, for instance from family members, educators and friends. Donald *et al*'s (2002:55 & 237) view that barriers to learning and the intervention process extend from the individual learner to the whole social framework, as well as Adelman and Taylor's (1993:14 & 43) continuum of learning problems and their focal point of intervention informed the theoretical viewpoint of the study. The findings of this study, in terms of barriers to learning and the manifestations of learning support in the participants, concurred with the views of Donald *et al.* and Adelman and Taylor stated above. Furthermore, the scholastic documents and records (see Appendix C) of most of the participants were

indicative of them encountering barriers to learning. Also, the observations in the classrooms revealed that some learners might be experiencing difficulties in their learning.

5.2   REVISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that guided this study, starting with the sub-questions, are as follows:

SUB-QUESTION ONE:

What is the nature of barriers to learning for high school learners?

SUB-QUESTION TWO:

What is learning support?

SUB-QUESTION THREE:

What learning support is available for high school learners experiencing barriers to learning?

THE RESEARCH QUESTION:

How does learning support manifest itself in the lives of high school learners?

5.2.1   SUB-QUESTION ONE: WHAT IS THE NATURE OF BARRIERS TO LEARNING FOR HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS?

Authors such as Donald *et al.* (2002:31 & 207), Adelman and Taylor (1993:14), Prinsloo (2005a,b:28 & 451), Mastropieri and Scruggs (2004:149) and the Department of Education (DoE, 2001:18 & 19) maintain that several factors could be responsible for the barriers to learning that high school learners experience. Donald *et al.* (2002:55), in agreement with Adelman and Taylor (1993:14), suggest that the problem does not lie with the learner alone, but involves the whole social system.

The nature of barriers to learning experienced by participants in the study was the result of diverse factors that pertained to the first main theme of the study: *barriers to learning*. Four sub-themes emerged from the whole social system as constituting the nature of barriers to learning that learners in high school encounter. Hence the barriers to learning are learner-oriented, educator-oriented, family-oriented and education system and society-oriented. Further categorizing these, the following emerged:

The nature of **learner-oriented barriers to learning** experienced by high school learners is associated with play and leisure activities, as was signified by participants and co-participants; peer influence and adolescence were also identified by all concerned; low motivation for learning and the inability of learners to read and write were reported by co-participating educators to be troubling; and drug abuse, sex, smoking and crime were identified by some participants and co-participants. All of these impacted negatively on learning for participants in the study.

Educator-related barriers to learning resulted from the method of instruction. Some participants reported a lack of listening and understanding in class. Others remarked on educator absenteeism whilst a perceived uncaring attitude on the part of educators was cited by some participants. Each of these factors had an unfavourable impact on learning for participants in the study.

Family-related barriers to learning: Some of these arise from poverty, for instance the incidence of learners not being able to acquire materials necessary for tasks at school and learners having to walk long distances to school on empty stomachs. Other family problems include illness of one or both parents, marital conflicts and violence, lack of sibling support and non-involvement of parents in their children's schooling. All of these factors result in unproductive learning for participants.

Education system and society related barriers to learning were identified as resulting from an inappropriate curriculum, where the subject contents are non-practicable and unrelated to learners and their environments. The number of learning areas was also reported to be bothersome when tasks are simultaneously issued. Moreover, some co-participating educators identified the difficulties that educators encounter in implementing the Outcomes-based Education system. Classroom sizes in terms of over-population surfaced as a barrier that renders giving individual attention impossible. Inability to provide suitable resources as a result of poverty was another of these factors, all ultimately resulting in unproductive learning for high school learners.

The nature of barriers to learning for high school learners that were identified in the study is in accordance with the views of Donald *et al.* (2002:55) and Adelman and Taylor (1993:14) whose work informed the conceptual framework of this study.

5.2.2   SUB-QUESTION TWO: WHAT IS LEARNING SUPPORT?

This sub-question informed the first part of the sub-theme, 'knowledge and availability of learning support' that emerged in the second main theme of the study: *manifestations of learning support*. In order to ascertain what type of support is provided to assist learners in their learning, the researcher needed to find out what learning support means to co-participants. A variety of interpretations emerged as family members and co-participating educators attempted to give their perceptions of the term.

Family members: A couple of family members gave an adequate description of the term, thus implying knowledge of learning support. Although some of them could not give what would pass for a 'dictionary definition', they were able to imply in their explanations of the term an understanding of what learning support is. Those who seemed to have been sidetracked by the question on what learning support means, nevertheless gave an outline of the support they provide, the implication being that even when they were unable to explain the term, they nevertheless understood and expressed it as best they could. One family member was more anxious to express the wish for the learner to obtain an education and so did not give an explanation of the term. However, this family member's response does not rule out knowledge of learning support, for she nevertheless provided support in the form of guidance, encouragement and assistance with schoolwork.

Co-participating educators: The descriptions that co-participating educators gave of the term spanned from *adequate* to *passable* and then to *puzzling*. A few co-participating educators expressed adequate knowledge of learning support in their description of the term, while some provided what the researcher regarded as passable descriptions; passable because the inadequacy of the descriptions also revealed some knowledge of the term but difficulty in expressing it. Some others gave explanations that puzzled the researcher, although they shed further light on the meaning of learning support. There is a tendency to regard learning support in terms of the assistance provided when required but not in terms of the accountability of educators and adults associated with the learners. A co-participating educator described learning support in that way.

The researcher's view of co-participants' knowledge of learning support is that the inability to explain the term (or the inadequacy of the explanations provided) might possibly suggest that the question asked on the knowledge of learning support was either not understood by or not

clear to the co-participants, who could not explain the phrase. It is possible too that they did not understand, or misinterpreted the context of the question, for they nevertheless provided learning support in various forms to learners who needed it (as was revealed).

5.2.3   SUB-QUESTION THREE: WHAT LEARNING SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE FOR HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS EXPERIENCING BARRIERS TO LEARNING?

This addresses the second part of the first sub-theme of the second main theme of the study. Some co-participating educators revealed that not much is available to them as learning support, thus giving them no choice but to cast about for whatever might be helpful. A few of the educators, however, reported the availability of some support in their learning areas (such as work sheets from the Gauteng Department of Education in one learning area, and the Schools Management Team supplying materials from the Department in another learning area, as well as a few supplies by the school in a learning area).

Other co-participating educators revealed indulging in collegial support, where they form a team in the learning area and hold meetings. Some educators share ideas at cluster meetings. Others use newspapers and magazines that have learning areas and also materials from the botanical gardens and from learning channels on the television. The principal also outlined some support available through an outreach programme that involves the University of South Africa (UNISA), Saturday school by an outreach body attached to the school for assistance (St Mary's Dominican School for Girls), two periods weekly of 'Life as a school' with an educator who gives learners lessons on life skills, and then other support identified by participants and co-participants such as extra lessons. The researcher's discernment of the situation is that the official availability or non-availability of learning support from the authorities has not ruled out the manifestations of learning support in diverse forms from the different levels associated with the participants in the study.

Relatives who co-participated in this study revealed that they gave learning support to learners in diverse ways. This support manifested itself in guidance, advice, encouragement and sometimes in assistance with schoolwork. Peers (friends) also gave support in the above ways. Two support strategies that the researcher found particularly resourceful and worth recommending are the mobilization of resources and one-on-one support. One-on-one support involves individualization, thus assisting learners to learn through employing the learner's unique learning style. The mobilization of resources, which involves the asset-based approach

to learning support, was reported to have been employed (though inadvertently) by some co-participating educators. One opinion was that the Department of Education should not be expected to supply all the materials for learning support, as some educators are inclined to focus on the deficit approach to learning support.

5.2.4   THE RESEARCH QUESTION: *HOW DOES LEARNING SUPPORT MANIFEST ITSELF IN THE LIVES OF HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS?*

As has been pointed out, barriers to learning can arise from the levels of the learner, family, educator, education system and the society. Indeed, many authors (Sibaya & Kruger, 2002:125-129; Moletsane, 2002:215; Donald *et al.*, 2002:238, 301 & 302; Adelman & Taylor, 1993:43; Jones & Jones, 2001:186; Bjorklund & Brown, 1998/69:604) have highlighted diverse ways of providing learning support for learners in high school who are experiencing barriers to learning. Having noted in previous chapters that barriers to learning extend beyond the learner to the whole social system, countering these barriers should also go beyond the learner to the levels of the society involved. Thus Donald *et al.* (2002:238) propose multiple interventions to incorporate all involved so that a reoccurrence of the problem at a different level will be eliminated. Adelman and Taylor (1993:43) agree with this prescription in their focal point of intervention (Figure 1.5).

For the high school learners in this study experiencing barriers to learning, learning support manifested itself in various ways that involved everyone around them as all participants revealed that they received assistance at different points and from different sources, including friends, siblings, mothers, some other relatives and educators. The learning support received by high school learners manifested itself in the following sub-themes of the second main theme of the study:

1.   Guidance, advice, motivation, encouragement and one-on-one support
Guidance, advice, motivation and encouragement were reported to have issued from relatives, educators and friends, and to have impacted positively on learning for the high school learners in this study. Some co-participating educators employed the use of the one-on-one support strategy, which the researcher thinks is a significant strategy due to its individualistic character.

2.   Extra classes and extra work

Extra classes and extra work which were given by educators to participants in the study and other learners that needed the assistance. An outreach body also provided Saturday classes. Participants reported receiving **assistance with schoolwork** from some relatives and educators. However, most of the assistance with schoolwork came from friends (peers), as participants tended to turn to friends when they sought help rather than to educators and family members.

3.   Creation of support by mobilizing resources

This is another term for the asset-based approach to learning support, which the researcher views as being favourable especially where conventional support is not readily available. Some educators reported the mobilization of whatever assets or resources were available in assisting learners that needed support in their learning. Non-governmental organizations, an outreach body, and some students of universities also provided support through this means.

In summary, the ways in which learning support manifested itself in the participants in this study are in accordance with the views of Donald *et al.* (2002:238) and Adelman and Taylor (1993:43) whose work, as has been indicated, informs the conceptual framework of this study, i.e. that the manifestation of learning support should encompass all involved in the school lives of high school learners.

5.3   TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

The criteria used as a yardstick of quality in this study include credibility, transferability and dependability, outlined as follows:

5.3.1   CREDIBILITY

The achievement of credibility in the study was derived from the use of multiple sources employed in the collection of data. The use of interviews, observations and analysis of documents/records served as a corroborative means of ensuring the same outcome in the findings of the study. The verification of the findings through follow-up interviews further enhanced the authenticity and credibility of the study.

5.3.2   TRANSFERABILITY

Although the findings of this study cannot be generalized due to the use of a small sample, the researcher believes that the findings are nevertheless transferable to other situations in that they can resonate elsewhere. The inference is that given the rich and detailed descriptions of the experiences of learners in terms of barriers to learning and the ways in which learning support manifests in their lives, a comparable study may provide a sense of similarity in a different community, with the same contextual factors.

5.3.3   DEPENDABILITY

The dependability of the study lies in the corroborativeness of the different sources of evidence employed. The themes, sub-themes and categories identified were based on multiple occurrences within the study's data sources. However, where necessary, exceptions were also highlighted by including them in the discussions. Contributing to dependability is the fact that participants and co-participants reported their actual experiences, as shown in the quotations from the interview sessions and learners' documents/records presented. As with credibility, the follow-up interviews conducted at the end of data analysis also confirmed the dependability of the findings of this study, as the study depended solely on the evidence gathered from participants and co-participants, and the observations of the researcher.

5.4   RECOMMENDATIONS

5.4.1   SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

In the light of the findings of this study, the researcher would like to suggest further studies that can be carried out in disadvantaged environments in the field of learning support for high school learners. Studies could be conducted to compare the nature of barriers to learning experienced by learners in former Model C and Independent Schools and those experienced by learners in schools situated in disadvantaged environments. Also open for comparison would be the learning support available to learners in former Model C schools, Independent Schools and those in disadvantaged schools. These studies may assist in determining what can be borrowed from an area to support and improve learning in other areas, as the ultimate goal is effective learning for ALL learners. The following topics for further study are therefore suggested:

- Exploring the nature of barriers to learning experienced by high school learners in schools located in high socio-economic environments.

- A comparative study of the nature of barriers to learning encountered by high school learners in schools in disadvantaged environments and former Model C schools.

- The support available to high school learners in former Model C and Independent Schools, and the general manifestations of learning support in their lives: A comparative study.

- Exploring the effectiveness of employing the support available to former Model C and Independent Schools to improve learning in disadvantaged schools.

5.4.2   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING

The Minister of Education (Pandor, 2006) stated in her education budget speech that plans for *well-designed and relevant teacher-development programmes* are in the final stages. The researcher suggests that the professional development package for educators should consist of motivating incentives, as this will ensure skills development, and improvement in the disposition and accomplishment of educators in their learning areas. Also to be incorporated into the professional development of educators might be further training on creation of resources through the mobilization of any available assets in order to limit dependency on the Department of Education.

Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:7) point out that those who employ an asset-based approach to learning support are conversant with the *assets, resources and capacities* available in whichever surrounding is in question. It is therefore demanded of the user of this approach to assess the significance of explicit assets in relation to the anticipated objective. Also, according to Eloff (2006a:36), assets can be found in the whole social system. The researcher therefore suggests a professional training for educators encompassing awareness of assets instead of focusing on the deficit approach as many are inclined to do; how to recognize what assets are available; how to appraise the value of an asset as regards an expected objective; and how to mobilize these resources from all around, in addressing different demands associated with barriers to learning.

To be incorporated too in the developmental training will be practical ways that educators can encourage and motivate parental involvement (to the best of their abilities) in the educational activities of their children, as well as instilling in them the awareness of assets in the

environment that can be employed to support learners' learning at home. This could be achieved through organizing seminars for parents on the mobilization of assets as learning support.

Although the Outcomes-based Education system was not the focus of this study, it did emerge that some viewed it as a barrier to learning. Therefore, on the grounds of the findings of this study based on the reports of educators in that regard, the researcher suggests that a longer period of training prior to the implementation of the system be considered, if such is not already in place.

5.4.3   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

That each learner has a unique learning style cannot be over-emphasized. It is therefore the duty of every educator to identify the most suitable learning style that will benefit all learners in their care. For this reason, the researcher suggests the following for the enhancement of professional practice:

- The adoption of a one-on-one support strategy by more educators, as the use of such a strategy encourages individualization or individual attention, thus accommodating the learner's distinctive learning style in combating his barriers to learning. However, this recommendation is made tentatively in view of the large classroom sizes educators deal with every day.

- The use of visual displays, such as animation in multimedia learning, to be considered as a possible resource for learning support. The researcher thinks that this could be explored as a method of teaching for effective learning.

- The researcher is of the opinion that the asset-based approach to learning support is a significant and holistic support strategy that can be utilized effectively for learning support. Since this is a system whereby an educator can mobilize whatever resources are available, not only from the school but from the whole social system, the researcher suggests that this be explored in countering barriers to learning experienced by high school learners. This will also limit dependency on the Department of Education in the supply of support materials, as well as reduce the

deficit approach, where educators have a propensity to frequently complain of the unavailability of learning support from the Department.

5.5   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Every study has its own set of limitations. This research work is no exception, for it also recorded some limitations. These are as follows:

▪   **Small sample size**

The study was centred on a small sample size consisting of nine Grade Nine learners experiencing barriers to learning and thus repeating the grade. Information was also collected from nine family members, seven educators and the principal of the school. The sample size was not adequately representative of the entire body of Grade Nine learners in South Africa, because it consisted only of a small number of learners from one school. Therefore the findings of the study cannot be generalized.

▪   **Observer effect**

Reactions to certain questions during the interview sessions could possibly have resulted from some interviewees not quite understanding the questions put to them. Consequently, they might possibly have provided answers or reactions that could cause some bias in the study. Also, there was the possibility of participants exhibiting unusual behaviour, which they presumed the researcher expected during direct observation, consequently resulting in a bias in what was actually observed.

▪   **Possible sources of bias**

Other sources that could give rise to limitations in the study include the 'outsider' status of the researcher which might have placed restrictions on the openness of *all* participants in giving accurate answers to interview questions; the possibility of language barriers; context effects, where participants and co-participants might have misunderstood the context of the interview questions or the researcher may have misinterpreted the answers given; and the probable misunderstanding of some terminologies used during the interview sessions, such as learning/learner support, barriers to learning, learning difficulties, and so on.

▪   **Reduction of bias**

To reduce the bias due to observer effect and other possible sources of bias, the researcher established a high level of rapport with all who participated in the study. Several visits were made to the school involved in the study prior to the commencement of the data collection process. The aim of the visits was to get acquainted with participants, to explain the study, to get them relaxed, and to build a trusting relationship with them, especially considering that the researcher's status as an 'examiner' could be intimidating. Being aware of this status, the researcher took a genuine interest in the participants, while making a conscious effort not to influence the outcome of sessions through displaying expressions that might lead them on or indicate disapproval of their responses.

The move from the noisy and intimidating staff room where a few of the interview sessions were conducted to a quieter room also reduced the bias of uncertainty on who was listening in, since the quiet room where the sessions were carried out behind a closed door instilled the confidence of having anonymity in participants. Those who were hesitant in responding were made to feel comfortable through being given time to think and to compose themselves before responding.

5.6   STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

The strength of this study was derived from several sources as follows:

▪   **Multiple interviews with a variety of participants**

These interviews were conducted with an assemblage of participants consisting of learners repeating Grade Nine, therefore indicating possible encounters with learning difficulties, and co-participants consisting of family relations and educators in charge of the learning areas where participants in the study seemed to be experiencing difficulties. The principal of the sample school was also a co-participant.

▪   The use of a **qualitative research design**

This embraced multiple sources of evidence such as interviews, observations and documents/records. Nine Grade Nine learners repeating the grade were interviewed, seven of them were observed in class and their scholastic records analyzed. Also interviewed were nine family members, seven educators and the principal of the school in the study.

- **Follow-up interviews**

The follow-up interviews conducted for agreement on the final outcome after the analysis of the data collected. This increased the credibility of the study, since participants and co-participants established that the findings were a satisfactory representation of what was divulged at the sessions and of their experiences.

- **The linking of the barriers to learning**

The linking of the barriers to learning identified to the **learning support** that was reported to manifest in the lives of participants in this study. This inherent link was then followed by another link where the findings from the study were linked to broader literature.

5.7   CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite the limitations of the study, there have been notable contributions:

- The study has contributed to the practical knowledge of **policy makers** and **educators** on the actual nature of barriers to learning that high school learners in disadvantaged environments might be experiencing. This knowledge could facilitate policy strategy on the provision of effective support materials that would successfully address the barriers to learning experienced in schools in disadvantaged areas.

- This study revealed the fact that even though conventional support might be limited and perhaps not readily accessible, learning support is indeed available to learners experiencing barriers to learning in high schools. Learners are therefore not left totally stranded, as learning support manifests itself in numerous ways and from different sources in their lives. The types of support that became apparent in this study could be explored and enhanced by **policy makers** and the methods of implementation upgraded to benefit *all* learners, including those with **special needs**.

- The study contributed to the body of knowledge for **all stakeholders**, especially **educators**, showing that learning support can be derived from the society at large by means of the asset-based approach. This can diminish dependency on the Department of Education for the supply of support materials.

- The study contributed to **families** becoming aware that learners might be experiencing barriers to learning and so might require assistance from them.

- The study has contributed by enriching the body of existing literature on the nature of barriers to learning that high school learners experience in schools located in disadvantaged areas, as well as on the ways in which learning support manifests in their lives.

5.8   CLOSING REFLECTIONS

The art of instructing is complex and involves the concomitant management of many more variables than are involved in other fields of work, in that the educator often has to deal with more than a learner, and the educator's success depends on the tactics engaged in the accomplishment of an effective learning atmosphere (Cangelosi, 2004:4). The researcher feels that an educator must always be prepared for whatever unfolds in a classroom situation. Lefrancois (1997:29) puts it thus:

> *But good teachers cannot afford to be shocked too often by the behaviors of the young. If they are to teach them effectively, it's important that they know what to expect of them... nor should they be taken aback by the sometimes startling but often impractical logic of the adolescent.*

Being a learner can sometimes be a demanding task that becomes complicated when the learner also experiences barriers to learning. It is therefore important that educators be aware of the possibility of learners being overwhelmed by different factors related to academic tasks and other influences. Educators therefore need to provide assistance readily should this become necessary.

This study determined, explored and explained the nature of barriers to learning that high school learners experience, as well as the learning support that manifests in their lives. The findings of the study thus indicated that high school learners experience a range of barriers to learning that result from factors relating to the learners themselves, families, peers, educators, the education system and the society. Moreover, even though limited learning support is available through official channels, learners receive diverse forms of learning support from everyone around them, such as family members, educators and friends. Hence the conclusion

that learners who experience barriers to learning are not left stranded in respect of learning support, which is apparent in a variety of ways and formats in the lives of high school learners. The researcher's belief is that with the proper amount of encouragement and motivation, every child can learn successfully. By mobilizing the right assets or resources from surrounding sources, learning can be made as interesting for the learners as teaching can be for the educators.

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