CHAPTER 3

ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT

3.1 ORIENTATION

Self-concept is one of the oldest human sciences research topics and is elaborately discussed in an 1890 psychology textbook of William James (Marsh, Byrne & Shavelson, 1992: 45). Despite all the research, however, there exist several disparate conceptual models of *self-concept* and there are many so-called synonyms, such as self-identity, self-esteem, self-regard and self-perception (Byrne, 1996: 1-2, 7). These problems have impeded self-concept research in at least three ways: they obstruct the replication of research, it is difficult to agree on the best methods for measuring self-concept, and it can be difficult to connect the research hypotheses and results to a specific self-concept theory or model (Byrne, 1996: 7; L'Ecuyer, 1992: 101). Brinthaupt and Lipka (1992: 1) recommended that researchers simultaneously study the theoretical, developmental and methodological aspects of the self-concept considering that the three aspects are related to one another and each co-determines the other (also see Hattie, 1992: 3). In this study, the theoretical, developmental and methodological aspects of self-concept are incorporated (refer to 3.3, 3.6 and Chapter 4 respectively). The different self-concept models are discussed next, followed by the theoretical framework of the notion *self-concept* as used in this study, and an understanding of the academic self-concept.

3.2 SELF-CONCEPT MODELS

A model is a structural representation of a theory enunciating the mutual interrelationships among the concepts and hypotheses (Kaplan, 1997: 116). Byrne (1996: 8) divided the theoretical models of self-concept into two groups: Models supporting the self-concept as a unidimensional construct, and models supporting the self-concept as a multidimensional construct.

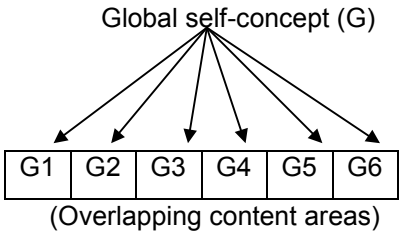
3.2.1 Unidimensional model

The unidimensional model, also called the nomothetic (referring to the self-concept as a universal and generalised construct) model, is the oldest and most traditional way of viewing the self-concept (Strein, 1993: 274). In this model, the self-concept is seen as a

unidimensional and overarching construct that can be either positive or negative, and can influence behaviour in any situation (Burden, 1998: 292; Byrne, 1996: 9; Strein, 1993: 274, 276). For example, success on the sports field can lead to a better global self-concept, which in turn can lead to better academic achievements.

According to the unidimensional model, the self-concept does not consist of different dimensions, such as academic or social self-concept, but consists of overlapping content areas, such as academic achievement or appearance, and equal importance is given to each of the content areas, as represented in Figure 3.1. When using a measuring instrument based on the unidimensional model, the scores of each item are summed to get a global self-concept score. Recent research, however, has shown that the self-concept is not unidimensional, but multidimensional. Different people each attach unique measures of impotance to each of the content areas; therefore, the simple sum of the scores may not be the appropriate way to reflect the self-concept accurately (Byrne, 1996: 13-14; Strein, 1993: 274, 276).

Figure 3.1 The unidimensional self-concept model (adapted from Byrne, 1996: 10)



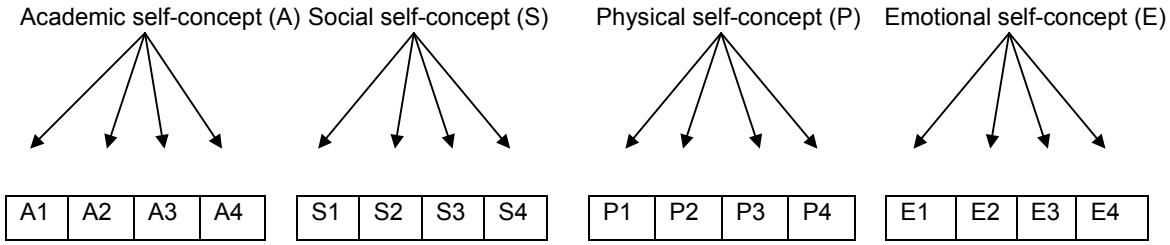
3.2.2 Multidimensional models

There are at least five permutations of the multidimensional model.

(1) Independent factor model

According to the independent factor model, the self-concept consists of different facets or dimensions which function independently from one another, as shown in Figure 3.2. The dimensions develop independently through experiences, abilities and interaction with significant other people and are not hierarchical, and subsequently there is no global self-concept. Little, if any, justification for the independent factor model exists in literature on the self-concept. Research has shown that there are correlations amongst the dimensions (Byrne, 1996: 15-16).

Figure 3.2 The independent factor model (Byrne, 1996:11)

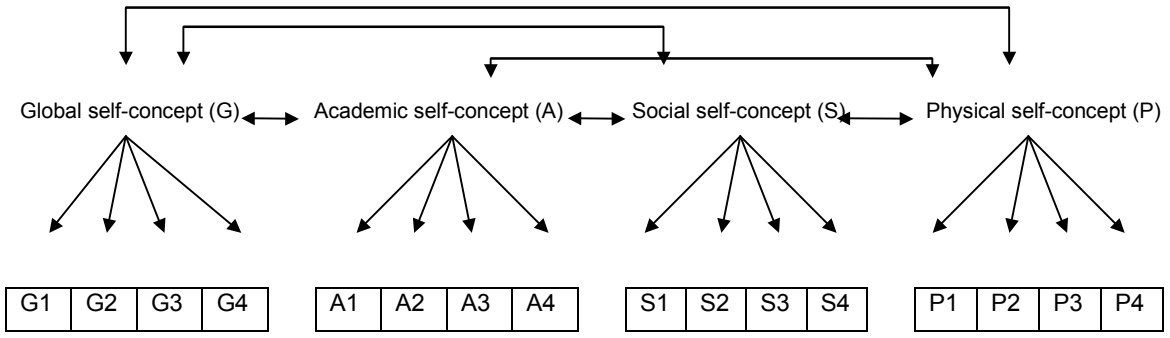


(1-4 represent the different items on each of the respective scales)

(2) Correlated factor model

According to the correlated factor model, the self-concept consists of different dimensions, such as academic and social self-concept, which shows positive correlations with one another. The global self-concept does not exist as an overarching global self-concept, but as one of the dimensions (Byrne, 1996: 16-17), as represented in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 The correlated factor model (adapted from Byrne, 1996:10-11)



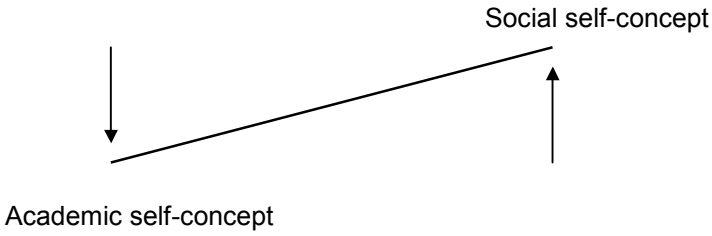
(1-4 represent the different items on each of the respective scales)

(3) Compensatory model

The compensatory model was originally developed to explain the self-concepts of learners with special educational needs, in this study termed learners who experience BLP (see 2.4.2). The model acknowledges the existence of a global self-concept and different subordinate self-concept dimensions. The dynamics, however, amongst the dimensions are unique in the sense that a low self-concept in one dimension is compensated for by a higher or exaggerated high self-concept in another dimension, as represented in Figure 3.4. The self-concept dimensions are thus inversely related to one another. For example, research found that a low academic self-concept of learners with special educational needs (BLP) was associated with a high social and physical self-concept. The inverse was also found, namely

that a high academic self-concept of learners with academic giftedness was associated with a low social and physical self-concept. The underlying principle is that the compensation is an unconscious attempt by the learner to still have an average feeling of well-being when low self-concept dimensions are experienced. Not many changes occur in the global self-concept, since changes in the self-concept dimensions are balanced in a compensatory way amongst the self-concept dimensions. The internal/external frame of reference model of Marsh (1986b, refer to 3.8.1) relates to the compensatory model. It is unrealistic, however, to accept that all learners with special educational needs (BLP) will have high social and physical self-concepts (Burden, 1998: 292; Byrne, 1996: 17-18; Hattie, 1992: 69; Strein, 1993: 278-279).

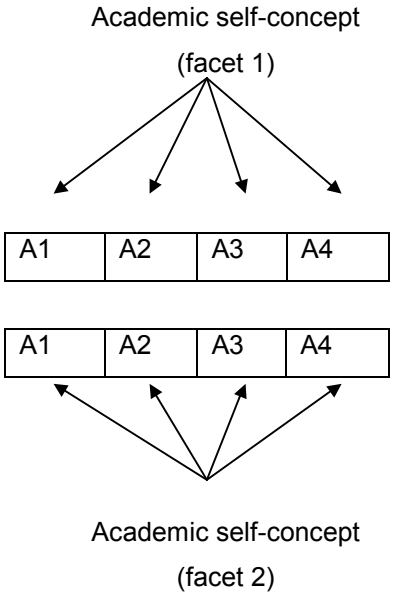
Figure 3.4 The compensatory model (adapted from Strein, 1993: 275)



(4) Taxonomic model

Most of the self-concept models consist of a facet (global self-concept) with several levels (dimensions), such as academic, social and emotional self-concept. The taxonomic model has a factorial design, in other words there are at least two self-concept facets, each with at least two levels (dimensions) (Byrne, 1996: 20), as represented in Figure 3.5. The different self-concept facets form a cluster of self-perceptions about an aspect, such as academic self-concept. According to the taxonomic model, the clusters function fairly independently of one another. Criticism against the model is that the different groupings apparently do bear relation to one another (Strein, 1993: 278).

Figure 3.5 The taxonomic model (only academic self-concept is shown) (adapted from Byrne, 1996:12)



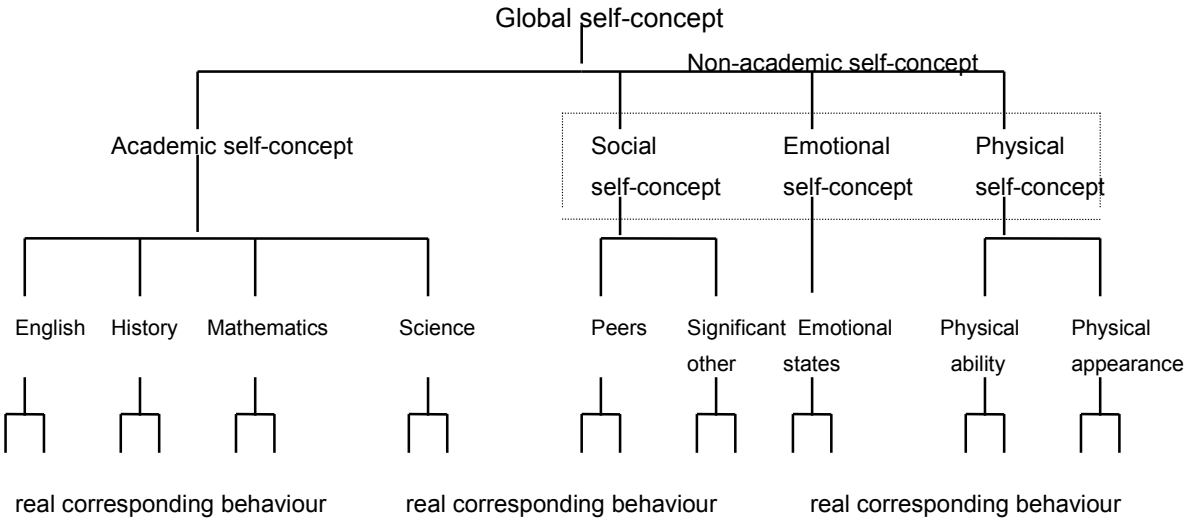
(1-4 represent the different items on each of the respective scales)

(5) Hierarchical model

Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) were the first researchers to create an empirically testable hierarchical self-concept model (Byrne, 1996: 22). The model has been expanded and changed, although the basic structure has stayed similar. The hierarchical model, as represented in Figure 3.6, can be described as a pyramid with a global self-concept at the apex. Intermediate level self-concepts, such as academic self-concept and social self-concept, follow beneath the apex. Beneath each of the intermediate level self-concepts, further specific self-concepts are found, such as subject-specific academic self-concepts like mathematics and first language self-concepts. Although the components of hierarchical models can differ, the pyramidal description applies for all hierarchical models. The self-concepts are found increasingly differentiated from the top to the bottom in the model. The foundation of the pyramid is made up of the behaviour that concurs with each dimension directly above (Byrne, 1996: 22; Hattie, 1992: 86; Strein, 1993: 276).

The self-concept dimensions are related to one another, but can be seen and studied as separate constructs, in other words, although there are correlations amongst the dimensions, each dimension operates as a separate construct to be interpreted and studied on its own (Byrne, 1996: 23-24). The hierarchical structure implies that the strength of the correlations amongst the self-concept dimensions varies in a fixed pattern. This can be explained by

Figure 3.6 The hierarchical model (Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton, 1976: 413)



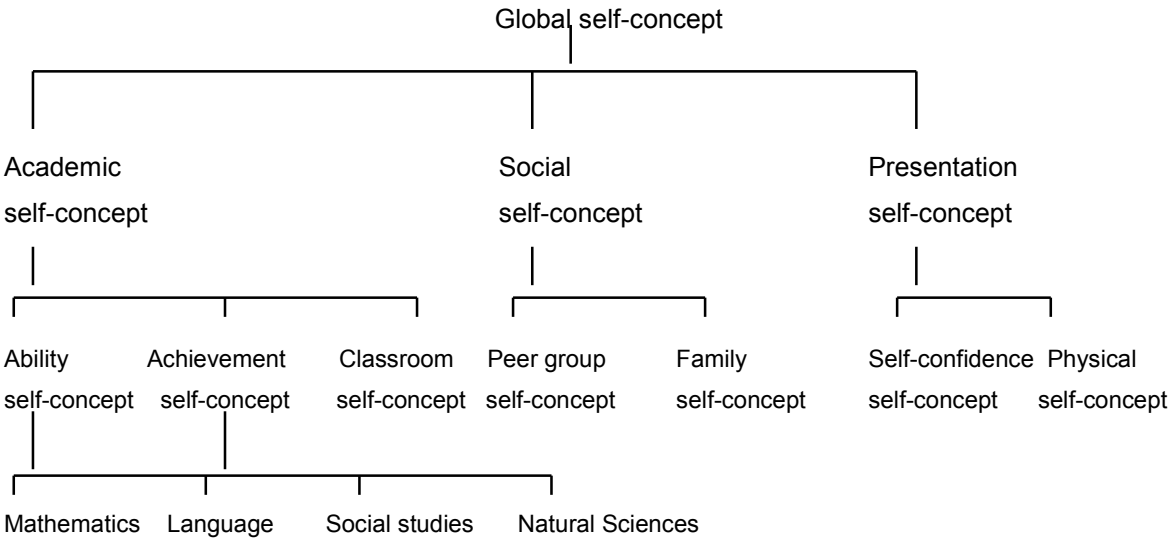
using the academic self-concept part of the model. Global self-concept correlates the strongest with academic self-concept, the second strongest with subject-specific self-concept, and the weakest with academic achievement, such as mathematics and English, which is the corresponding behaviour of the subject-specific academic self-concept. Academic self-concept correlates more strongly with subject-specific academic self-concept than with achievement. Subject-specific academic self-concepts, for example mathematics self-concept, correlate stronger with the corresponding academic achievement, for example mathematics achievement, than with non-corresponding academic achievement, for example history achievement (Byrne, 1996: 23-24; Lyons, 1989: 76, 80; Marsh, 1992: 40; Marsh, Byrne & Shavelson, 1992: 51, 70; Strein, 1993: 277).

The hierarchical model was subjected to multiple studies. Factor analyses were done, relations were investigated between self-concept and other variables such as achievement, degree and aspirations, and wider application of the hierarchical model to different genders and cultures (Strein, 1993: 276).

The Song and Hattie Scale, as represented by Figure 3.7, is also based on the Shavelson *et al.* (1976) model, but Song and Hattie (Byrne, 1996:31; Hattie, 1992: 83-84) made two changes. Firstly, the academic self-concept was divided into achievement, ability and classroom self-concept. *Achievement self-concept* refers to perceptions of actual achievement, for example '*I am proud of my report*' and '*I am satisfied with my school work*'. *Ability self-concept* refers to the extent that the learner believes that the learner is able to

achieve, for example '*I think that I have the ability to achieve good marks*'. *Classroom self-concept* refers to self-confidence in classroom activities, for example '*Most of my teachers do not understand me*' and '*I am worth nothing in the class*'. Subject-specific self-concepts are found under achievement and ability self-concepts. The second change was that they divided non-academic self-concept into social self-concept and presentation self-concept.

Figure 3.7 Song and Hattie's self-concept model (Byrne, 1996:31)

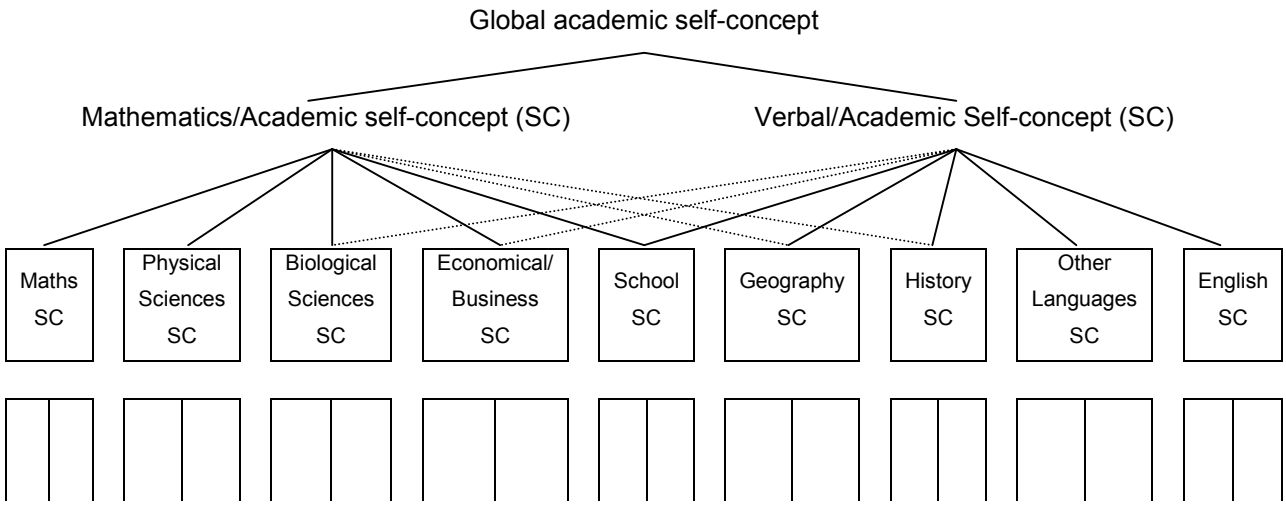


3.3 DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE TERM SELF-CONCEPT AS USED IN THIS STUDY

The importance of a theoretical underpinning when developing instruments, is aptly stated by Byrne (1996: 43): " *... a researcher either validates a theory by ensuring sound instrumentation or validates a measuring instrument by ensuring the soundness of the theory within which it was developed*." Kaplan (1997: 117) described theory as a number of hypotheses that are connected in a significant way and stated that each hypothesis must be understood against the background of the rest of the theory. Still, theory is just theory: "*A theory ... is a policy, not a creed*." (Kaplan, 1997: 116). Knowledge of a theory can be developed by building out the theory, through its wider application, or by building it in, through intensifying and specialisation of the existing theory (Kaplan, 1997: 116-117). Therefore, theory should not be static, and should be both the starting and ending point of research. A model, as mentioned before, is a visual, structural representation of the theory wherein the mutual relationships amongst the concepts and hypotheses are made clear, and has as its aim the simplification of the theory (Byrne, 1996: 80; Hattie, 1992: 5; Kaplan, 1997: 116).

The theoretical underpinning of the notion self-concept as used in this study is based on the hierarchical model of Shavelson *et al.* (1976), in particular the adaptations by Marsh, Byrne and Shavelson (1988: 378), and the dynamic self-concept model of Jacobs (1981: 161; 1999). The Shavelson *et al*. model has been among the most tested and defended models (Byrne, 1996:83). Results of studies in other cultures support the hierarchical, multifaceted nature of the self-concept model (Hattie, 1992: 113; Marsh & Hattie, 1996; Mboya, 1993), although research has yet to be undertaken in any systematic way within various South African cultures. Figure 3.8 presents the academic self-concept part of the model.

Figure 3.8 The self-concept model of Marsh, Byrne and Shavelson (1988: 378)[1], [2], [3]



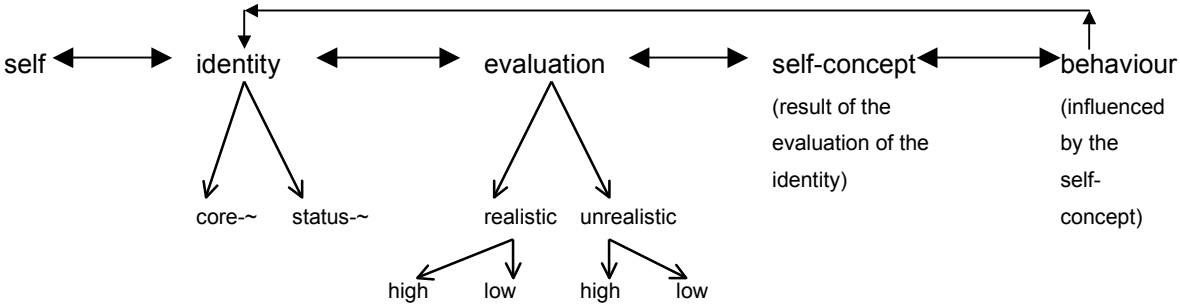
Jacobs regards the self-concept as the result of several processes as schematically represented in Figure 3.9:

[1] Core school subjects are selected to form part of the revised model. The subjects are ordered from a reasonably pure mathematics/academic component to a reasonably pure language/academic component (Marsh, Byrne & Shavelson, 1988: 377).

[2] Criticism on the model has it that the decision of the core school subjects was arbitrary, and that no provision was made for a subject such as music (Marsh, 1990: 635).

[3] The lines descending from the core subjects could represent components of those subjects. For example, the lines descending from mathematics could represent algebra, geometry and trigonometry, and the lines from English could represent prose, essays and grammar.

Figure 3.9 The self-concept model of Jacobs (1981: 161; adapted as in a personal interview with Jacobs, June 1999)



In Figure 3.9, *self* refers to all the person's characteristics (Plug *et al*., 1989: 317), including the self-concept. A person's identity is the answer to a question such as *Who am I?* (Jacobs, 1999). Possible answers are: I am a girl. I am a learner. For each person there is a unique combination of answers to the question *Who am I?*. The answers are not static, and a person's identity can change in the course of time. The identity is thus unique, multifaceted and changeable. In different situations different parts of the identity can come to the fore (Byrne, 1996: 251; Jacobs, 1999) during which other parts of the identity are less prominent. Often a person attaches value of a greater or lesser extent to a certain part of the identity. The core identity (-ies) is the identity (-ies) to which the person attaches much value, and the status identity (-ies) is the identity (-ies) found on the periphery of importance and is therefore less significant for the person (Jacobs, 1999; also see Martin & Debus, 1998: 531).

For each identity, a person can develop a specific self-concept. Evaluation of the identity takes place in the light of the characteristics of the individual system and events that have happened in the systems surrounding the individual system: deflected meanings in the unconscious, influence of significant others such as parents, educators and peers, and praise and punishment received. The evaluation of the identity (McKay & Fanning, 1992:1) can be realistically high or low, or unrealistically high or low (Jacobs, 1999). The self-concept, which is the result of the evaluation of the identity, can, therefore, also be realistically high or low, or unrealistically high or low (Jacobs, 1999). When a mathematics learner with good intellectual potential and good marks evaluates his or her mathematics identity, the evaluation and resulting mathematics self-concept can be *realistically high*. A *realistically low* evaluation of mathematics identity and resulting low mathematics self-concept could originate from a mathematics learner with limited intellectual potential who achieves low marks in mathematics. Unrealistic evaluations are obviously also possible. What must be kept in mind, though, is that if the mathematics identity is a core identity, the evaluation thereof will influence the learner more than when a status identity is evaluated.

The self-concept of a learner influences his or her behaviour (Jacobs, 1999). There are ways of behaviour which are characteristic of learners with high and low self-concepts (see Botes, 1987: 42, 115-120, 122; Meintjies, 1998: 12; Nthoba, 1999: 63, 68; Scott, Murray, Mertens & Dustin, 1996: 289; Wiest, Wong & Kreil, 1998: 603). Behaviour originating from the evaluated identity, that is the self-concept, also feeds back into the identity and the evaluation thereof (Jacobs, 1999). The behaviour can confirm or contradict the core or status identity. The behaviour confirms the core or status identity when the learner still attaches the same worth and meaning to the core or status identity. When the learner decides or realises that what he or she has considered to be the core or status identity, does not have the same worth or meaning any more, that identity changes. Behaviour often confirms the evaluations which were made and can be regarded as a form of self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, learners can evaluate themselves unrealistically low, and then behave accordingly and therefore evaluate themselves unrealistically low (Jacobs, 1999). Learners, however, are not necessarily bound to these dynamics, but can change the meanings attached to identities, and change their evaluation and, therefore, their self-concept.

3.4 SELF-CONCEPT AND SELF-ESTEEM

Two self-terms often found in the literature that can cause confusion and ambiguity are *self-concept* and *self-esteem*[4]. Hattie (1992: viii) investigated the different manifestations of *self-concept* and *self-esteem* in the literature and maintained that the following words are used as synonyms for *self-concept* and *self-esteem*:

self-concept	**self-esteem**
self	self-regard
self-estimation	self-reverence
self-image	self-accepting
self-perception	self-respect
self-awareness	self-worth
self-imaginary	self-feeling
self-consciousness	self-evaluation

[4] Confusion and ambiguity regarding the terms and their ascribed synonyms obviously also hold for academic self-concept, academic self-esteem *et cetera*.

Hattie offered striking criticism on the multitude of self-terms: "*We do not want to impose meanings on our language tools for our own convenience, nor do we want to invent new tools merely to serve a particular usage that could be idiosyncratic*." (Hattie, 1992: 5).

One group of proponents of the concept *self-esteem* regard the *self-concept* and *self-esteem* as mutually exclusive concepts. According to them, *self-concept* or self-knowledge contains cognitive, descriptive components and answers the question '*Who am I*?'. *Self-esteem* or self-evaluation contains affective, evaluative components and answers the question '*How do I feel about who I am*? (Brinthaupt & Lipka, 1992: 3; Campbell & Lavallee, 1993: 4). Self-esteem, therefore, could be understood as a concept referring to self-respect, own worth or self-regard (Plug *et al*., 1989: 317).

Another perspective holds that *self-concept* refers to a broad definition of the construct and includes cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects. *Self-esteem* is then regarded as a more limited, evaluative component of the self-concept. Brinthaupt and Erwin (1992:155-156) mentioned that some authors associate *self-concept* with self-description and *self-esteem* with self-evaluation of the self-description (for example, '*I do not like myself*'). According to them, self-description can contain evaluative (for example, '*I like reading*') or non-evaluative (for example, '*I am an athlete*') undertones. The self-evaluation refers to the measure in which a person likes his or her described self, or is satisfied with the described self, or refers to the discrepancy that exists between the ideal and real self. The question that arises now is how to separate the descriptive and evaluative components of the self, since a person can describe and evaluate him- or herself in one sentence. The inseparability of the descriptive and evaluative components shows that separation of the components can become a methodological problem.

Hattie (1992: 54, 171), among others, held a third perspective on the self-concept/self-esteem distinction. To him, the difference between *self-concept* and *self-esteem* lies in the degree in which the characteristic concerned is regarded as important. The self-esteem will only be affected when certain dimensions of the self-concept are regarded as important. For example, a boy may declare that he is not a good sportsman, which is evidence of a low physical self-concept. If the boy, however, does not regard sport as important, his self-esteem would not be strongly affected (refer also to core and status self-concepts in 3.3).

Byrne (1996: 6), however, pointed out that despite conceptual assertions that support the distinction between *self-concept* and *self-esteem*, research on construct validity has as of yet not been able to demonstrate conclusively a distinction between the two constructs.

Brinthaupt and Erwin (1992: 137-171) argued that the failure to differentiate the two terms is because most self-concept research use self-report instruments with items that elicit descriptive and evaluative responses, making it virtually impossible to separate the two constructs. It appears that a theoretical distinction exists between *self-concept* and *self-esteem*, but that it is difficult to distinguish between the constructs in practice (Hattie, 1992: 171, 247; McCreary-Juhasz, 1992: 227).

3.5 A FUNCTIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF SELF-CONCEPT

Definitions have as object the clarification and explanation of the meaning of concepts as they have been used in practice. Definitions are formed through a combination of concepts of which the meanings are already clear. Brinthaupt and Lipka (1992: 3) observed that self-concept definitions contain structural characteristics, processes, or both. They stated that researchers have described the self-concept as a schema, a multi-dimensional construct, a series of narratives, a linguistic description of subjective experiences or an extensive theory.

Hattie (1992: 5-6) argued against definitions and regarded the use of open concepts as a more desirable strategy to define/describe a concept. Psychologists who use open concepts, develop a system of convergent reduction sentences which are related to one another. A reduction sentence does not give a complete definition for the concept which it represents. It only determines the meaning of the concept partially or conditionally, without trying to be all encompassing, because the possibility exists that there may be applications outside the current investigated field. Concepts are therefore left 'open' for application in new contexts.

Since the self-concept model of Shavelson *et al.* (1976) forms an integral part of the theoretical underpinning of the study, it has relevance to take note of their understanding of self-concept:

> "S*elf-concept, broadly defined, is a person's perception of him- or herself. These perceptions are formed through one's experience with and interpretations of one's environment and are influenced especially by reinforcements, evaluations by significant others, and one's attributions for one's own behavior*." (Shavelson & Bolus, 1982: 3).

Although the Shavelson *et al*. model of self-concept focuses on the structure of self-concept, their understanding of self-concept focuses on the personal processes that constitute the self-concept. They place the self-concept within the individual system, and the factors which

may form and influence the self-concept in the individual and adjoining systems. It is important to note that the self-concept of a person is a perception, and as such cannot be argued with the person. Although the perpetuating nature of the relation between self-concept and behaviour is mentioned, the possibility for change is not explicitly contained in their understanding of self-concept. "*These self-perceptions influence the way one acts which in turn influences one's self-perceptions*." (Marsh & Yeung, 1997b: 692).

In the study, the understanding of self-concept of Shavelson *et al*. (1976) is accepted as a broad description of self-concept. In the light of recent research, perceptions of academic, social, emotional and physical dimensions can be read into the description.

Shavelson *et al*. (1976: 411-415), Marsh *et al*. (1992: 48-50) and Hattie (1992: 98-113, 242) identified a number of characteristics which further clarify the self-concept.

Self-concept is organised. People base their perceptions of themselves on a wide variety of personal experiences. To reduce the complexity of all the experiences, the individual organises the experiences into categories, thereby giving an organised or structured content to the self-concept.

Self-concept is multifaceted or multidimensional. The different categories formed by the person reflect the multifacetedness or multidimensionality of his or her self-concept. It appears as if the categories are not unique to each individual, but are shared by groups of people; therefore, a self-concept model can be constructed which contains, for example, academic, social, emotional and physical facets or dimensions. By explicitly naming a few dimensions, the possibility of idiosyncratic dimensions is not denied. Le Roux (1999: 223), for example, referred to physical, academic, social, value, family and psychic selves. Although researchers generally recognise the multidimensionality of the self-concept, there are differences concerning the specific dimensions and how the dimensions are structured (Hattie, 1992: 242; Marsh *et al*., 1992: 53). Additionally, the dimensions of the self-concept can themselves be multidimensional (Byrne, 1996: xv) and can be divided into smaller and more descriptive subconstructs. Until the preadolescent stage, more self-concept dimensions develop with increasing age (Byrne, Shavelson & Marsh, 1992: 175, 191). Although the constituents of the self may be divided into many dimensions, it is most important to understand how each individual (re)assembles the dimensions into a conception of self. The dimensions of the self are interpreted by the individual in a manner that can allow for various dimensions to become more salient in the interpretations, understandings and decision-making, depending on the interpretation, judgement or decision to be made.

The unity is thus more related to the processing strategies used than to the constituent parts, an idea well explained by Wittgenstein (1958: section 67) as that the strength in the rope "*lies not in one fibre running throughout its length, but in the overlapping of many fibres*".

Self-concept is hierarchical. The dimensions of the self-concept form a hierarchy with individual experiences of particular situations at the basis of the hierarchy, building up towards a global self-concept at the apex of the hierarchy. The conception of a hierarchy may give the impression that lower dimensions in the hierarchy can be added up to form the higher dimensions of the hierarchy. There is little evidence, however, to support this line of thinking (Marsh & Hattie, 1996).

The global self-concept is stable. Lower down in the hierarchy the self-concept becomes increasingly dependent on particular situations and therefore becomes less stable. At the basis of the hierarchy the self-concept varies as the situations vary. Changes in the lower levels of the hierarchy are probably attenuated by conceptualisations in the higher levels, which may make the self-concept show resistance against change. Hattie (1992: 115-116, 246-247) agreed with the view on stability of the self-concept: "... *we do not wake each morning as strangers to our self*." (Hattie, 1992: 246). He mentioned that memory, habit and goals contribute to the stability of the self-concept in the higher levels of the hierarchy. On the other hand, the self-concept also has dynamic qualities and can change, and can also bring about change in behaviour.

Self-concept is a developmental phenomenon. Babies do not differentiate themselves from the environment. The self-concepts of young children are global, undifferentiated and situation-specific. As children develop and learn from experiences, they increasingly differentiate themselves from the environment. Also, as language concepts develop, concepts develop wherein to categorise the experiences. With increasing age the self-concept becomes more differentiated and multifaceted.

Self-concept is both descriptive and evaluative. A person develops a description of him- or herself in different situations, but also forms an evaluation of him- or herself in the situations. Evaluations can be made in the light of absolute standards, such as ideals, or relative standards, such as those of the peer group or significant others. The evaluations vary in importance from individual to individual, and from situation to situation.

Self-concept is unique, since each person ascribes meaning in a unique way, also to him- or herself. Unique factors can also influence each person in a unique way to ascribe meaning.

Self-concept also can provide direction for behaviour. Self-concept is not behaviour, does not control behaviour and does not explain all behaviour, but can be concluded from behaviour and can influence behaviour. Self-concept will probably have a greater influence on behaviour in situations where a person is not part of a group.

Self-concept can be culturally bound. There are two approaches regarding the relation between self-concept and culture: Self-concept varies little across cultures, or self-concept varies radically from one culture to another in accordance with the system of symbols used by the specific cultures (Hart & Edelstein, 1992: 299). Cultural differences relate to the worth or importance attributed to the self-concept, or certain aspects of the self-concept (Hattie, 1992: 189) (refer to 3.7).

3.6 DEVELOPMENT OF AND CHANGE IN SELF-CONCEPT

As the self-concept develops, it changes and as the self-concept changes, it can develop. The difference is therefore only functional in the sense that *development* refers to the formation of the self-concept with the course of time, and that *change* refers to the change in evaluation, that is, to combinations of high or low, and realistic or unrealistic.

When the description of self-concept, as stated by Shavelson *et al.* (1976: 411), is taken as a point of departure, it is clear that perceptions of the self, environmental influences, reinforcements, significant others and behaviour contribute to the development of the self-concept. From the dynamic self-concept model of Jacobs (1981, 1999) in Figure 3.9, it follows that the first requirement for self-concept development is the awareness of the self, followed by the formation of identities to be evaluated, resulting in perceptions of the self, hence a self-concept.

The development and formation of the self and self-concept commence at a very early age in life (Botes, 1987:25). Through the baby's interaction with other people, the baby gradually becomes aware of him- or herself in the environment. An identity develops, namely '*I as a child*'. The identity is evaluated, in other words a perception of the '*I*' is formed, and a self-concept originates; and this often very much depends on how the baby perceives the reaction of others towards him or her. Environmental influences, contingencies (reward and punishment) and significant others contribute to the way in which a child evaluates him- or herself. This implies that the primary education situation has a fundamental share in the formation of the self-concept. The experiences, pleasant or unpleasant, which children have during the early life phases, can have a lasting influence on the their perceptions of

themselves during later years. The development of a high self-concept is predisposed by warm and democratic education styles. Children exposed to authoritarian education styles tend to form low self-concepts (Botes, 1987: 27, 33, 35; Hattie, 1992: 118; McKay & Fanning, 1992: 2; Nthoba, 1999: 18; Pretorius, 1992: 41, 46). As the child grows older, the range of experiences deepens and increases, cognition develops and vocabulary expands, more identities are formed which can be evaluated more variedly and a multidimensional self-concept originates.

The role of significant others in the development of the self and evaluation of the identities cannot be underestimated. Hattie (1992: 53) suggested that people become significant to a person when they exert a significant influence on the person, and not because they fulfil certain roles or fill a position of power. The child observes the behaviour of significant others towards him or her, and draws conclusions regarding their thoughts of him or her. In turn, the conclusions play an important role in the child's perceptions of him- or herself. This process links with the '*looking-glass self*' of Cooley – I see myself in the behaviour of others towards me (Ashmore & Ogilvie, 1992: 239; Botes, 1987: 26; Hattie, 1992: 17; Pajares & Schunk, 2002: 6; Wigfield & Karpathian, 1991: 235). The feedback can be regarded as important for the self-concept if the feedback is relevant to a self-concept dimension considered to be important by the person. If a learner has higher regards for his or her mathematics self-concept than his or her English self-concept, feedback with regard to the mathematics self-concept will be significant. Also, the significant other person(s) must be truly significant to the specific self-concept dimension, for example feedback on mathematics performance by the mathematics educator may have more influence on the mathematics self-concept of the learner than feedback on mathematics performance by the sport educator.

Ashmore and Ogilvie (1992: 237) expanded the role of the significant other by postulating that patterns of thought, feeling and behaviour, as embodied in relationships with significant others, are internalised consciously or unconsciously during the course of time. The internalised patterns form a basis according to which the identities relevant to the specific group of significant others are evaluated. The perception of the opinions of significant others, however, is not the only way in which the self-concept can be influenced. Some people have few or no significant other people in their lives, and must base their self-perceptions on less personal, ethnic or group role models (McCreary-Juhasz, 1992: 227), such as when a person compares him- or herself to an ideal self (McCreary-Juhasz, 1992: 205-206). The reference group to which the child belongs, for example the cultural, ethnic, gender and/or religious group, can influence the formation of the self-concept. The reference

groups denote the self in different ways and have specific expectations, norms and standards to which each group adheres. Any member of the group will be measured accordingly (Botes, 1987: 32). When the child regards him- or herself as part of a reference group, the child will evaluate the self according to the group's expectations, norms and standards, and will behave according to the group identity (McCreary-Juhasz, 1992: 207). The self can also be compared to external factors such as the mass media, film stars, historical events and other interest groups (McCreary-Juhasz, 1992: 206).

When children start school, the school environment makes a further contribution to the development of the self-concept, especially in areas such as the academic self-concept which does not figure prominently during the preschool years (Grobler, Myburgh & Kok, 1998: 49). The personality, principles, verbal and non-verbal communication patterns, and the global and subject-specific self-concepts of the educator can influence the development of the academic and subject-specific academic self-concepts of a learner (Botes, 1987: 34-35). Additionally to evaluations by the educator, evaluations by the class peers and the learners themselves can influence the development of their academic and subject-specific academic self-concepts (Botes, 1987: 10-11).

Marsh, Craven and Debus (1991: 389-391) found that children as young as five to eight years have multidimensional, hierarchically structured self-concepts, including academic self-concept and global self-concept. Therefore, it appears as if self-concept and academic self-concept develop before the age of eight years. It is not clear, however, whether these various self-concepts are integrated.

Byrne (1996: 155) and Hattie (1992: 62, 242) reported that some researchers are of the opinion that the young child describes him- or herself more in terms of objective, concrete characteristics, and the adolescent more in terms of subjective, abstract characteristics. It also appears as if there are individual differences in the way information is integrated, although younger children tend to integrate information about dimensions of themselves in a less sophisticated way than adolescents (Hattie, 1992: 243). The different levels of integration correspond with Piaget's stadia of cognitive development. The primary school child is mostly in the concrete operational phase. During the concrete operational phase the child develops and uses a coherent cognitive system which is mainly concrete. In the formal operational phase which follows, the adolescent develops abstract and logical thought and is able to draw conclusions (Meyer & Van Ede, 1990: 81).

During the middle childhood years (8-12 years), the self-concept structure of the child undergoes several important changes (Byrne, 1996: 52-53, 56, 85). First, the multidimensionality of the self-concept increases because of the development of cognitive abilities. The child is able to discern among academic, non-academic and other self-concept dimensions (Byrne, 1996: 85). Second, the child is able to make significant and trustworthy judgments regarding his or her global self-concept (Byrne, 1996: 53-54). Third, the child's descriptions of him- or herself change from concrete descriptions to descriptions denoting characteristics. During early pre-adolescence the characteristics indicate character or ability (for example honesty, cleverness); during later pre-adolescence the characteristics indicate interpersonal characteristics (for example friendliness, shyness) (Byrne, 1996: 53). Fourth, when a child judges him- or herself, the child makes use of social comparison (Byrne, 1996: 53-54, 85). The child compares him- or herself with children similar as well as different to him or her.

The adolescent uses increasingly abstract terms to refer to him- or herself and is able to integrate characteristics. For example, to create the characteristic 'sensitivity', characteristics such as friendliness, helpfulness, caring and good listening skills must be integrated (Byrne, 1996: 125). The adolescent is able to have perceptions of him- or herself in a specific role or situation. The situation will determine which self-concept dimension comes to the fore (Byrne, 1996: 125, 251). The situation specificity also implies that adolescents can have different perceptions of themselves in interaction with, for example, their peer group and parents. The finer dimensions of the self-concept are delimited clearer than with pre-adolescents (Byrne, 1996: 125).

Marsh *et al.* (1992: 81) reported that the global self-concept lowers in mean during pre-adolescence, but elevates gradually during late adolescence and early adulthood. The change in self-concept relates to the phases of development as described by Erikson. The primary school learner, or pre-adolescent, must acquire competence, but often inferiority (low self-concept) is the result. The secondary school learner, or adolescent, has the task to establish a trustworthy identity (Meyer & Van Ede, 1990: 64). As a trustworthy identity is established, the self-concept will elevate with increasing age.

Despite the dynamic process during which self-concept is formed, self-concept itself is rather stable and changes do not occur easily. A realistically or unrealistically high self-concept will not be changed easily by situations inconsistent with the self-concept (for example, a low mark in a test or unfair criticism by an educator) as the person will not attribute unfavourable meaning to the situations. The opposite is also true, as a low self-concept influences the

process of giving meaning (Grobler *et al*., 1998: 50; Hattie, 1992: 237). Shavelson *et al.* (1976: 414) argued that many situation-specific experiences, inconsistent with the particular self-concept, must occur to effect change in the particular self-concept. It must be kept in mind, however, that the quantity of inconsistent experiences will not effect changes in the self-concept, but the way in which the identities are evaluated. In terms of Piaget's theory, assimilation and accommodation of new and existing perceptions must take place (Meyer & Van Ede, 1990: 78).

The accuracy of judgements of a person's own abilities and appropriate expectations can be of great value for the successful functioning of a person (Hattie, 1992: 250). If a person's expectations of achievement in a specific dimension are high, but the eventual results are much lower than expected, the specific self-concept may decrease. If low expectations are entertained, low achievements will have little or no effect on the self-concept. Expectations can thus contribute to changing the self-concept (Hattie, 1992: 43). Learners who have higher expectations of their abilities than they can achieve, will have lower self-concepts, but learners who have expectations in accordance with their abilities, will have higher self-concepts. It follows that learners with limited abilities can have high self-concepts, and learners with good abilities can have low self-concepts (Hattie, 1992: 219).

Feelings of inadequacy and failure can contribute to the formation of a low self-concept and successful achievements can contribute to the formation of a high self-concept (Botes, 1987:9). A difference, however, must be made between success and experiencing success. The way in which a situation is experienced, determines whether it will contribute favourably or unfavourably to bring about change in the self-concept (Botes, 1987: 9). If a person does not experience success, the self-concept cannot be influenced favourably. Experiencing success is reciprocally connected to expecting success. Expectations of children are often influenced by the feedback they receive. Children's expectations are related to those with whom they interact and the reference group to which the child belongs (Hattie, 1992: 45). Realised high or low expectations of others can also confirm, elevate or decrease the self-concept of the child.

Feedback, or the constant absence thereof, is one of the most powerful factors to change self-concept (Hattie, 1992: 251; McCreary-Juhasz, 1992: 212), provided that the feedback is internalised(Craven, Marsh & Debus, 1991:18). Feedback is especially important to indicate to a person which adjustments can be made in his or her perceptions so that the resulting self-concept can closely resemble reality (Hattie, 1992: 48, 250). Confirmation or disconfirmation of perceptions of the self, or the lack thereof, is often verbal, but can also be

non-verbal, for example facial expressions (a smile or a frown) or tactile (a hand shake or a spanking) (Hattie, 1992: 49). Self-concept can be confirmed in one situation but not in another (Hattie, 1992: 49), for example, an educator can make favourable comments on a report card, but parents may be dissatisfied with the report. The difference in feedback on the same issue may confuse a learner.

3.7 COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS IN AFRICA

So much has been published regarding the collective consciousness in the African culture (Kotzé, 1993: 1-20; Markus & Kitayama, 1991: 224-230; Mwamwenda, 1995: 424; Stevens & Lockhat, 1997: 254; Triandis, 1989: 509-510; Venter, 1999: 26-28, 31) that it is only fair to question whether an African person can have an individual self-concept? Perhaps self-concept is a Western concept. One might consider whether the collective consciousness extends evenly across all black ethnic groups or whether each group has an own collective consciousness. Given that experiences influence a person's self-concept, the question might be raised whether a collective history of experiences will also influence a collective self-concept, in addition to the effect on the individual self-concept.

According to Kotzé (1993: xiii) a collective consciousness does indeed exist in Africa. Specific experiences that generate a collective consciousness are deprivation in all areas, such as income, employment opportunities, stability, food, health, education and security, and living with others who also experience deprivation. In order to survive, groups must be formed and assistance must be given to group members (Kotzé, 1993: 3-5). The difference in consciousness between black and white people therefore lies in the disparate experiences of the two groups, and not in the difference in colour (Kotzé. 1993: xiii).

Communalism is founded in a concern for communal welfare. The basis of communalism is to lend priority and protection to the community and to respect the person in the community. To exist outside the community, is to be an outsider. Communalism also has to do with sharing with and helping one another (Mkabela & Luthuli, 1997: 18; Triandis, 1989: 509; Venter, 1999: 26, 31). Therefore, it appears as if communalism is the essence of collectivism, hence collective consciousness. For Mkabela and Luthuli (1997: 17, 18) communalism will help Africans to function once again in relation to one another, after the Western culture introduced an individualistic way of life to the Africans (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997: 253), where the value of the individual is emphasised above that of the group (Venter, 1999: 29). According to Mkabela and Luthuli (1997: 6), the inferior way in which Africans see themselves must be changed. Africans must appreciate and understand their identity,

humanness and history. "*Africans have retained very little of their original culture. They lack deep understanding of this culture because of the inroads the Western world has made into their daily lives*." (Mkabela & Luthuli, 1997: 17). The authors regarded language as the core of the self-concept. By internalising a Western language in preference to an African language, Africans may come to see themselves in a Western image and then the foreign Western image becomes discernible in their doings. Language is a symbol of identity and group membership. When someone's language is regarded as inferior, the person who uses that language is also regarded as inferior (Mkabela & Luthuli, 1997: 51).

From the above discourse it appears as if the collective consciousness of the African is being substituted by an individualistic self-concept. Therefore, one can indeed speak of the self-concept as well as the collective consciousness of the African. Stevens and Lockhat (1997: 254) were of the opinion that the socio-historic context rejects collectivism for black learners and encourages individualism.

All cultures seem to have a collective consciousness as well as an individualistic consciousness. Collective and individualistic consciousness, however, operate in different ratios in different cultures. It seems that, particularly earlier in the African culture (and by that the ethnic diversity is not denied), the collective consciousness was dominant and a personal or individual self-concept did not feature prominently. In individualistic cultures a collective consciousness can be detected, but the collective consciousness is subordinate to the personal or individual self-concept. The individual can decide which parts and how much of the collective consciousness he or she wants to make part of his or her self-concept (Kotzé, 1993: 6). Communities can in the course of time change the ratio of the two consciousnesses and move from a collective to an individualistic community or *vice versa*.

Triandis (1989: 507) observed three dimensions of the self to be common across all cultures: a private, public and collective form of the self. Depending on the complexity, level of individualism or collectivism and degree of looseness of the culture, the different dimensions of the self are found. Education practices in collectivistic cultures emphasise obedience, trustworthiness and the correct behaviour, in contrast to self-reliance, independence and creativity in individualistic cultures (Triandis, 1989: 510). Education practices have important implications for the development of the self-concept in different cultures.

According to Nthoba (1999: 3), learners from traditionally black residential areas often feel that everyone in the community with whom they compare themselves, are better than they, with the result that they have lower self-concepts. The African self-concept is traditionally

influenced by a Eurocentric approach (Nthoba, 1999: 26). A telling example of the European influence occurred during a research project in a traditionally black residential area (Du Plessis, 1999: 41-42). A foundation phase educator gave her learners the task to bring pictures of babies to school. Without exception the learners brought only pictures of white babies to school. The incident led the educator to the conclusion that black children regard themselves as inferior to white children (Nxumalo, 1999). When the development of the self-concept is kept in mind, one could reason that the cause for the perceived inferiority could be attributed to the black adults, since the black children evaluated themselves as they saw themselves in the eyes of the adults. It can also be speculated that those black children regarded not their parents, but white people, as significant others. Before delving too deep for complex explanations, one might consider that the learners, who were very poor, only had access to magazines discarded by white people. Still, the implications of bringing pictures of only white babies to a black school are profound for identity and self-concept formation and development.

Meintjies (1998: 12) claimed that a group of people who are subjected to serious oppression over a long period of time, will develop signs of a low self-esteem. In an investigation, it was found that black learners, especially Grade One learners, regard themselves significantly lower than white and Indian learners (Meintjies, 1998: 13). The black Grade One learners did not identify clearly with one of the possible ethnic groups (Meintjies, 1998: 13). On a preference scale and a scale that determines social satisfaction, black figures were placed last. Thus it appears as if Grade One learners are already aware of social stratification in South Africa (Meintjies, 1998: 13). Relating to the dynamics of the self-concept theory that posits that self-concept is the result of a person's evaluation of his or her identities in the light of the feedback received from the parents and the peer group, Meintjies said that a macro-social component must also be present during evaluation, which could explain why black learners prefer white learners above themselves (Meintjies, 1998: 14). By using social identity theory, Meintjies tentatively explained that persons with a low self-concept will identify with socially strong or successful persons in an attempt to improve their self-concept, hence the lack of identification of the young black learners with themselves (Meintjies, 1998: 14). According to Meintjies (1998: 15), the results of the investigation lent support to the idea that, as the collective or social self-concept of a group improves, the self-concept of the members of the group will also improve.

As postulated by Meintjies (1998: 12), it was supposed that discrimination will lead to black minority[5] group children evaluating their own group negatively and the white outsider group positively, resulting in low self-esteem for the black children. Research, however, proves the opposite, maybe as a result of social change and the black awareness movement (Kelly & Duckitt, 1995: 217). Kelly & Duckitt (1995: 217) found that self-esteem, own-group racial pride and total ethnocentricity were significantly higher for older (10-12 years) black children than for younger (6-8 years) black children. Their results further suggest that own-group and outside group attitudes of minority group children do not necessarily influence their self-attitudes (Kelly & Duckitt, 1995: 217, 221). A possible explanation for the results can be found in the way self-esteem and self-concept is formed, namely through interaction with parents, siblings and peers *et cetera* of mainly the own-group. Therefore, the outside group does not play an important role in the formation of personal self-esteem or self-concept (Kelly & Duckitt, 1995: 222).

3.8 ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT (ASC)

3.8.1 Academic self-concept

Global self-concept cannot reflect the diversity of the various self-concept dimensions (Marsh *et al.*, 1992: 67). As can be seen from the discussion of the hierarchical self-concept model in Figure 3.6, the academic self-concept (ASC) forms part of the global self-concept. Based on the understanding of self-concept of Shavelson *et al.* (1976), ASC can be regarded as a person's perceptions of him- or herself as learner in an academic or school environment. Research findings (*inter alia*, compare the Internal/External model as discussed below, on the next page) have shown that also the global ASC cannot reflect the diversity of the various ASC self-concept dimensions; therefore, subject-specific ASC dimensions were built into the hierarchy (Marsh *et al.*, 1992: 67, 78). Following the understanding of self-concept of Shavelson *et al.* (1976), *subject-specific ASC* can be described as a person's perceptions of him- or herself as learner in a specific subject or learning area. *Academic self-concept*, *ability self-concept* and *self-concept of ability* are used as synonyms in the literature (Byrne, 1996: 2).

Strein (1993: 273) claimed that research currently utilises understandings of ASC which firstly focus on self-perceptions that include both descriptive and evaluative components (for example '*I can write well*') and secondly emphasise self-perceptions of behaviour rather than

[5] Minority refers to minority rule, and not minority in numbers, as was previously the case in South Africa.

feelings (for example '*I do well in most of my school subjects*' rather than '*I feel bad about myself in the school*').

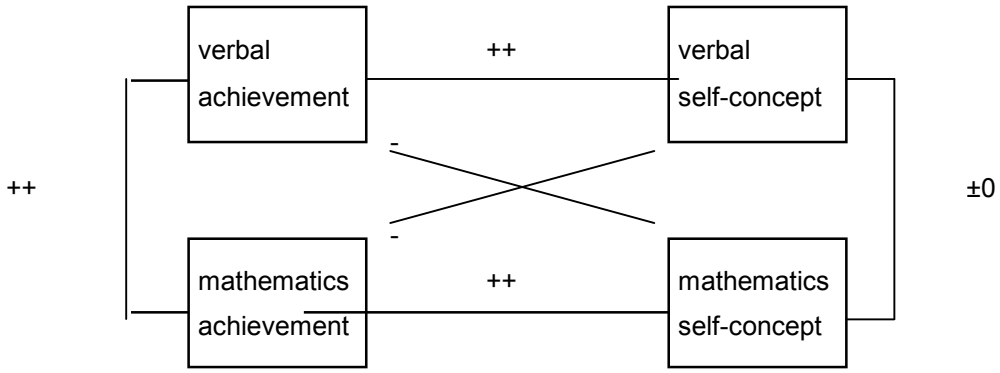
Verbal and mathematics achievements usually correlate with .5 to .8 (Marsh *et al*., 1992: 68-69), although the correlation between verbal and mathematics self-concepts is much lower. This led to the modification of the Shavelson *et al.* (1976) model and to the development of the Internal/External (I/E) model of Marsh (1986b: 132-133), as represented in Figure 3. 10. According to the I/E model, verbal and mathematics self-concepts are formed in relation to both internal (I) and external (E) comparisons, or frames of reference. External comparisons occur when learners compare their self-perceptions of their verbal and mathematics abilities with the observed abilities of other learners in their frame of reference, for example learners in the same class or grade. The relative external perception is then used as a basis for ASC in each of the two areas. Internal comparisons occur when learners compare their self-observed mathematics abilities with their self-observed verbal abilities. The relative internal impression is then used as a second basis for ASC in each of the two areas. The following example will clarify. Suppose a learner has realistic perceptions of him- or herself as below average in both verbal and mathematics abilities, but that he or she performs better in mathematics than in verbal and other academic learning areas. This learner's mathematics abilities are below average compared to other learners (external comparison), but relatively better compared to his or her abilities in other academic learning areas (internal comparison). Depending on the importance ascribed by the learner to mathematics and other learning areas, the learner could have an average or above average mathematics self-concept, regardless of his or her below average mathematics abilities (Marsh, 1986b: 133).

The external comparison predicts a positive correlation between verbal and mathematics self-concepts. The internal comparison should lead to a negative correlation between verbal and mathematics self-concepts, since the verbal and mathematics abilities are compared with each other and the difference in abilities can contribute to a higher self-concept in a learning area. The collective influence of both sets of comparisons, depending on the relative strength of each, leads to the poor correlation (almost none) between verbal and mathematics self-concepts (Marsh, 1986b: 133-134).

The I/E model also predicts a negative direct effect of mathematics achievement on verbal self-concept, and of verbal achievement on mathematics self-concept. For example, a high mathematics self-concept is more probable when mathematics abilities are good (external) and when mathematics abilities are better than the verbal abilities (internal). It is therefore the difference between mathematics and verbal abilities which is predictive of mathematics

self-concept. High verbal abilities can essentially do damage to a high mathematics self-concept (Marsh, 1986b: 134), since the difference between the abilities would then be smaller. The lack of correlation between verbal and mathematics self-concepts is found across all ages (after Grade Three), both genders and academic and non-academic environments (Marsh *et al*., 1992: 75).

Figure 3.10 The I/E model of Marsh (1986b: 134)



(++ correlations high positive; - correlations low negative; 0 correlations about zero)

Strein (1993: 280) maintained that ASC is actually self-assessment of relative academic abilities. He referred to the '*Big-fish-little-pond Effect'* (BFLPE) of Marsh and Parker (1984) and Marsh (1987). Marsh and Parker (1984: 213, 229) found that, although the socio-economic level of a school and academic ability correlate positively, the socio-economic level and academic ability have an adverse effect on ASC. The BFLPE was formulated to explain the phenomenon. According to the BFLPE, learners form their academic self-concepts by comparing their academic achievements with those of other learners in their class or school, but not with those in a broad frame of reference such as the community or the rest of the country (Marsh & Parker, 1984: 228; Strein, 1993: 280). ASC thus relates with the group that the learner uses as a standard to compare him- or herself to (Hattie, 1992:99). The BFLPE predicts that, for two learners with the same abilities, the learner in the academically better school will have a lower ASC than the other learner (Strein, 1993: 280), since the learners of the academically better school, with whom he or she compares his or her academic abilities to, do work of the same or higher quality than he or she does. The BFLPE relates to academic achievement as portrayed by class marks and not by achievements on standardised tests (Marsh, 1987: 291). It appears as if the BFLPE is greater on younger learners (Marsh, 1987: 291). The BFLPE is not contradictory to the fact that high achievers have high academic self-concepts. It simply posits that the inclusion of a learner in a school where the average ability is higher than in another school, could lead to a lower ASC which, in turn, could result in a slight decrease in marks and educational and career aspirations

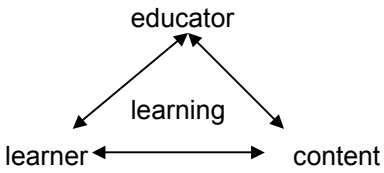
(Marsh, 1991: 470). An assumption based on the BFLPE is that transfer of a learner with HI from a special school to a regular school, would lead to a lower ASC.

Criticism of the BFLPE includes that there are no causal explanation models as to why this effect is occurring. The assumption of the BFLPE, that learners form their academic self-concepts only by comparing their academic achievements with those of other learners in their class or school, is too simplistic. Although the academic achievements of a class group contribute to the ASC of learners, feedback from educators, parents and peers, previous experiences, and expectations of the learners, parents and educators also contribute to the formation of the ASC.

3.8.2 Academic self-concept within the school system

Every school has its own culture and practices and gives meaning to policies in a unique way. Three mutually dependent and circularly reciprocal main components can be identified in the school system regarding school-based BLP, namely the parts played by the educator, the learner and the learning content, as represented in Figure 3.11. Each of the components contributes to the school context and can influence the academic self-concept of the learner to a greater or lesser extent.

Figure 3.11 A schematic representation of the school system components contributing to BLP



The situation, skills, knowledge and attitudes of the educator, the specific meanings that the educator attributes to the task of educating, and the school context in which the educator operates can influence the interaction of the educator with the learner and the content. Likewise, the situation, learning possibilities, experiences, language ability *et cetera* of the learner can influence the interaction of the learner with the educator and the content. Also, the nature and appeal or challenge of the content in terms of its cognitive, affective and normative demands can influence the way in which the learner and the educator interact with the content.

General factors that can influence the development and change of the ASC were discussed in 3.6. The focus now falls on the parts that the educator, the learner and the content play in the development and change of the ASC.

Learners' self-perceptions of ability and input relate to the feedback of the educators. Each educator has a pattern of interaction through which he or she gives an indication, verbally or non-verbally, of what his or her opinions of the learner are. The ability of learners to observe and interpret the non-verbal behaviour of educators is influenced by developmental and cultural factors. Younger children focus especially on the words and tone of voice of the educator. Learners find it easier to interpret the behaviour of educators of the same cultural background or language society (McCreary-Juhasz, 1992: 217). The type of feedback, the interaction amongst classroom context variables, differential treatment of learners by the educator, individual classroom experiences and a learner's interpretation of all these factors can influence the learner's evaluation of him- or herself (McCreary-Juhasz, 1992: 218). Given the role that the expectation and experience of success has on the formation of the ASC, educators can do much to let learners feel successful (Botes, 1987: 14).

The role that class peers play in learners' self-perceptions, has already been explained by the I/E model of Marsh (1986b) and the role of the significant other in 3.6. The learners' own influence on their ASC lies in the way that they evaluate themselves, and in what is used to make the evaluations, such as significant other, class peers and feedback. The support that learners experience at home can also contribute to self-perceptions as learners.

Also, the learning content can influence learners' ASC. If learners experience gaps in their knowledge of a learning area, it may happen that the following content is too difficult to understand, resulting in lower achievements, and consequentially affecting the subject-specific ASC. Culturally strange content will also be more difficult to understand. The way a learner gives meaning to the content may change the nature of the content. The interests of the learner can also predispose the learner to like certain learning areas more than others, and therefore pay more attention and perform better. The use of English as a language of teaching and learning may make learning unnecessarily complex for learners who have another first language (MacDonald & Burroughs, 1991: 27-31). Such learners do not understand the content very well, since they do not understand English very well. Often the educators themselves are not fluent in English. The result is that the learners' problems are not addressed (MacDonald & Burroughs, 1991: 19; Mkabela & Luthuli, 1997: 54).

3.8.3 Academic self-concept within the collective consciousness

In a collective culture, a group member will share the group's viewpoint of success and failure, because of harmony with the group. If group members regard the group as significant, each will use the group's viewpoint of success and failure as criteria when evaluating him- or herself (Botes, 1987: 32). One could consider what would be the criteria for academic success and failure in the collective consciousness?

The criterion applied by the collective consciousness for any success and failure is whether the welfare of the group is promoted. Academic achievement as such involves only the individual: it is the individual that achieves or does not. According to Kotzé (1993: 153), anything that threatens the survival of the group will compel the collectivistic group to take action to maintain the *status quo*. An achiever can disturb the *status quo,* because he or she becomes different from the rest of the group.

It could be deduced that high academic self-concept/achievement would only be acceptable in a collective community if the community regards academic achievement as a means to promote the welfare of the group. Currently there is increasing pressure on learners to perform well at school, since school has become a means to social mobility for the individual. The question now arises whether learners in a collectivistic culture regard academic achievement in terms of the personal social advantages achievement can affect or in terms of the broken cohesion if someone does achieve. Apparently there are still members of the collectivistic community who oppose an individual who rises above the others and who try to impair the achiever if he or she makes academic progress (Anonymous, June 1999). ASC can only become a reality in the collective consciousness when academic achievement is accepted by the collective consciousness. Mkabela and Luthuli (1997:22) stated that learners belonging to the African culture can improve their academic under-achievement by learning of their culture, thereby promoting understanding and consistency between the school and the home.

Research investigations regarding the self-concept of black learners belonging to the traditional collectivistic culture in South Africa indicated that the construct ASC, hierarchical and multidimensional, does indeed exist. Mboya (1994a: 167, 169; 1994b: 318, 320) developed the '*Self-Description Inventory'* (*SDI*) for high school learners (Mboya, 1993: 189-191), based on the Shavelson *et al*. (1976) model. Mboya's research findings indicated the multidimensionality of the self-concept of African adolescents, as well as age and gender difference in some of the self-concept measurements. The gender differences in self-

concept measurements were according to gender stereotypes. Mboya (1994a: 167, 169) also found different self-concept measurements for black and white learners on some of the self-concept dimensions, indicating that black and white adolescents might attribute different measures of importance to some of the dimensions of the self. Mwamwenda and Mwamwenda (1987: 71, 73-74) found that learners in Botswana (African learners; average age 13.9 years) with high self-concepts perform better than learners with low self-concepts regarding total performance, mathematics, English, science and social sciences performance.

3.9 (ACADEMIC) SELF-CONCEPT OF LEARNERS WITH HI

The ASC of learners with HI seems to be fairly undocumented and/or unresearched. In the field of impairment, the ASC of learners with learning and intellectual impairments has been researched more often (Al-Yagon, 2004; Dev, Smith, Lesczynski & Ladrigan, 2002; Humphrey, 2002; Spicer, 2004; Stone & May, 2002; Tracey & Marsh, 2002). Much of what can be said here of the ASC of learners with HI, is conjecture, based on available information. Most sources include general remarks regarding the self-concept of learners with HI such as '*their self-esteem/self-concept can be affected/poor self-concept* ' (English, 1995: 171; Johnson, 2003a; Kapp, 1991b: 347; Powers, 1999: 30). No reference to HI and ASC could be found.

Social isolation appears to be one of the biggest challenges in the lives of learners with HI (Powers, 1999: 30; Smith, 1998b: 214). Learners who are socially isolated in class, are not only deprived of learning opportunities, but also of feedback. The power of feedback in the development and change of ASC was addressed in 3.6. Not only are learners with HI deprived of verbal feedback, but also their reliance on non-verbal cues may lead to faulty interpretations of the feedback, resulting in faulty self-perceptions of academic ability and progress.

If it is true that "*language aids individuals in making sense of their inner processes and coming to define their sense of what they are*" (Pajares & Schunk, 2002: 8), then learners with HI who often struggle to master language, will also struggle to make sense of what they are – their self-concepts. Also, in 3.6 it was stated that "*as language concepts develop, concepts develop wherein to categorise the experiences. With increasing age the self-concept becomes more differentiated and multifaceted*." It might be that the self-concept of learners with HI is less differentiated and less multifaceted than that of their peers, because of the slower development of language concepts.

3.10 SUMMARY

Chapter 3 has provided a theoretical background to understand the nature, characteristics, and development and change of self-concept and academic self-concept. The self-concept is located in the individual system, but the multiple factors contributing to the self-concept reside in the individual and surrounding systems. Where the ASC is concerned, the school system plays an important role in the development and change of the self-concept. By investigating the ASC of learners with HI in different school contexts, it might be possible to conclude which school context is more conducive to developing a healthy ASC and therefore which school context reflects an effective learning environment for learners with HI. Chapter 4 presents the research design employed to investigate the relationship between ASC and HI in two South African public school contexts, namely special and full-service schools.