Adaptation to a denominational school environment: a case study of Grade Nine learners in a Catholic school

By

MEMORY MUGANIWA

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Education

in the

Faculty of Education
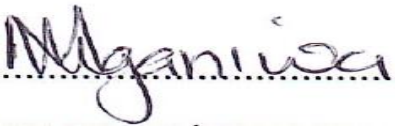
at the

University of Pretoria

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DOCTOR S. DE JAGER

19 January 2021

Declaration of Originality

I, Memory Muganiwa, student number 12263509, declare that this dissertation, "Adaptation to a denominational school environment: A case study for Grade 9 learners in a Catholic school", is my own work and demonstrates my own abilities. It is submitted to the University of Pretoria in fulfilment of the degree, Master of Education, and has not previously been submitted by me at this or any other tertiary institution.

Date: _____15 December 2020_____

Supervisors' Approval for Submission

PROF J. BEYERS

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Ethical Clearance Certificate

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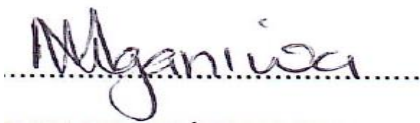Ms Bronwynne Swarts
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- Data storage requirements.

Dedication

I dedicate this research to my late mother, Nellia Chindungu, who, when I was young, inspired me to be a hard worker in everything I did. To my father, Pedzisai Chindungu, thank you for always mentioning the importance of education in life. To my husband, Dr Kuziva Muganiwa, thank you for ever loving me and supporting me in my academic journey despite life obstacles and difficulties, you stood by me. And to my beautiful children, Munashe, Ruvarashe, Fadzaishe Muganiwa, the sky is the limit when it comes to education.

Signature:

Date: _____15 December 2020_____

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Abstract

Denominational schools possess varied environmental elements such as the school identity and culture, religious aspects, school policies and other variables in the school system. In light of these variables, learners who enrol at Loreto Convent Catholic School may experience the school's academic and general school life. The study sought an in-depth understanding of how Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation at Loreto Convent Catholic School from the time they enrolled at Grade 8 level. An inquiry was undertaken by utilising a qualitative single case study approach. An interpretive paradigm underpinned the study with ontological and epistemological perspectives being examined with reference to the topic. Alongside, complex adaptive system theory was used as a lens to understand the non-linear complexities that exist in the Catholic school environment. Literature relating to the research purpose, research questions and understanding of denominational school environments were discussed in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, data was collected by means of individual in-depth interviews from both Grade 9 learners and Grade 9 class teachers. Only girls were interviewed as the school is non-co-educational from Grades 8 to 12. Ten learners in Grade 9 and two Grade 9 class teachers were interviewed and shared their experiences on adaptation in the school. Their views were audio recorded, thereafter transcribed and interpreted to determine what their experiences were in adapting at Loreto Convent School. In the process, Tesch's eight steps of the coding process were applied and three main themes were generated. Indications from the analysis were that Grade 9 learners experienced more challenges than opportunities in adapting to the school. Key findings of this study were that as learners attempted to adjust factors such as religious variations, culture shock, school discipline, peer influence, teacher to student relationships and other aspects, these had a direct bearing on experiences of adaptation. Recommendations were put forward to further explore the scope of issues of adaptation as experienced by the Grade 9 learners.

 Key words: denominational school, adaptation, Grade 9 learners, school environment

Language Editor's Declaration

I, Brenda Gouws, declare that I have copyedited the following master's dissertation prior to submission for examination:

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My involvement was restricted to language usage; spelling and punctuation; flow and style; completeness and consistency; referencing style of the in-text citations and reference list; formatting of headings; table and figure captions; automated page numbering and automated table of contents. I did no structural editing or re-writing of the content.

I made all amendments using the track changes feature in Microsoft Word and used the comments feature for suggestions and clarification, but the implementation thereof was left to the author. I endeavoured to ensure that the author's meaning was left unchanged during the editing process. I make no claim as to the accuracy of the research content. I am not accountable for any changes made to this document by the author or any other party subsequent to my edit.

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List of Abbreviations

CAS   Complex Adaptive System (Theory)

CBD   Central Business District

CIE   Catholic Institute of Education

RE   Religious Education

SASA   South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996)

SMT   School Management Team

UDHR   Universal Declaration of Human Rights

US   United States of America

VTP   Volunteer to Participate

WENR   (World Education News + Reviews (WENR)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Social environments such as schools influence learners' experiences to adapt as they join a new school set-up. Institutionalised environments such as Catholic schools have been identified as social environments that influence learners' experiences to adjust to secondary school life (Lester & Cross, 2015:2-3; Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee & Sonia, 2003:206). As a secondary school teacher for the past 10 years at Loreto Convent Catholic School, I have observed that learners gain academic as well as real-life experiences from the school environment. Lester and Cross (2015:10) clarified that moving into a secondary school set-up can be a dramatic life-changing event for different learners, as they are exposed to both positive and negative experiences. Past research has shown that the transition to secondary school presents various unexpected experiences for learners. For example, Booth and Gerard (2014:737) reported that teachers could become less friendly and unsupportive to learners in the new school environment. In addition, Eman (2013:72) suggested that the excitement that learners have on entering a new school is infused with distress due to pressures arising from attempting to fit into the new environment. The transition can be regarded as a crossroad, both academically and socially, as the school setting may be different from their previous school experiences (Hanewald, 2013:64).

The Catholic school is widely considered to be one of the institutions that offers learners an inclusive environment (Fusco, 2005:87), as it opens its doors to all children irrespective of their religious affiliation, race, ethnic group, culture and background. During my years of experience at Loreto Convent Catholic School, I also deduced that the Catholic school system is comprised of elements such as school rules, authority, religious education, the Church administration and learners of a diverse cultural background, among others. In this regard, Fusco (2005:88) spells out that Catholic school environments are unique with respect to shared values, academic achievements, religious restrictions and promotion of collective identity. As mentioned above by empirical views, Catholic schools are social environments that possess

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various aspects such as their uniqueness, different elements and the inclusion of different learners. The combination of empirical views and my 'glass darkly' observations provided me with sufficient motivation to undertake this study as I sought to establish a deeper understanding of how learners adjust to adaptation in a denominational school environment. There are many reasons why learners may struggle to adapt to school. A number of studies have revealed that the focus on the Catholic school environment and its meaningful bond with learners should be further explored (see Quinn (2018:69) and Zoeller and Malewitz (2019:67) about Catholic schools).

In this regard, the study focused on how Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation in a Catholic school environment from the time that they enrolled in Grade 8 level up to the time of this study in Grade 9. An in-depth inquiry was undertaken in order to understand the learners' experiences to adaptation using a qualitative approach and a single case study as the research method. In the study, the interpretive paradigmatic approach was identified as the most suitable to explore this research and it is explained in more detail in Chapter 3 section 3.2. The main theory underpinning the study is the complex adaptive System (CAS), which is also discussed in more detail in the literature review section Chapter 2. Chapter 3 presents the research methodologies, by focusing on gathering the required data from selected learner participants. Ten participants were selected for the purpose of individual interviews which formed the raw data set for the study. I interviewed two Grade 9 class teachers in their individual capacities and recorded field notes. In Chapter 4, the learners' responses are interpreted, from which certain key themes emerge. The themes are then discussed in more detail as the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the conclusions, recommendations and areas for further research. The background and context of the study are now discussed in the next section.

1.2 Background and context of the study

A brief history of Catholic schools provides insight into the origins, aims and developments of Catholic schools to date in the South African context. Frankema (2012:336) reports that before colonial times, African communities

were in control of the transfer of knowledge through informal domains, extended family, tribal groups and village associations. During and after colonial times, formal Western education was introduced by settlers into Africa. This education was well-received and gained popularity, while at the same time Western culture and religious values were being absorbed (Frankema, 2012:336). The religious landscape of South Africa changed over time, from the 1840s to the present post-apartheid period. Originally Catholic schools intended to preserve their Catholicism[1] by engaging a Catholic bishop (Collins & Gillespie, 1994:24), with first Catholic school in South Africa having been run by Catholic nuns[2] (see Baker, 2016:54). The Catholic administration was effectively in charge of the Catholic schools during this period.

In South African Catholic school history, before 1994 Catholic schools tended to accept and only have Catholic learners but today, in the post-apartheid era, non-Catholics are also accepted into Catholic schools (Walbank, 2012:171). Today, some Catholic schools are labelled 'government schools on private property', while others are called 'independent schools' (Baker, 2016:55). The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 identified two groups of schools, namely public and privately-owned (Du Toit, 2004:2). Furthermore, Du Toit (2004:2) adds that today independent schools are founded, owned, managed and financed privately, although at times the state may fund and assume considerable control. Chapter 2 section 2.2.3 provides a historical synopsis of the origins, developments, challenges and growth of Catholic schools in South Africa.

The school under study, Loreto Convent School, is an independent non-co-educational Catholic school, which has also been influenced by the earlier-mentioned history in this section and in Chapter 2, section 2.2.3. Loreto Convent School is part of the history of developments experienced by Catholic schools across South Africa. For instance, in the 1970s, the school defied

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[1] Catholicism refers to an adherence to the catholic religious faith, practices and systems followed by the Roman Catholic Church.
[2] Catholic Church nuns are individuals who devote themselves to church work and religious orders and belong to the religious community of women

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orders from the then Transvaal Department of Education by enrolling Black, Coloured and Indian learners, despite the school having being threatened and warned against doing so by the government authorities as reported in a local Makoni (2018:12). In this regard, the school has been open to enrolling learners of any race as part of unity in diversity. Subsequently, the school received a government subsidy in 1986 its first since the days of Paul Kruger[3] which meant that the school was partially financially assisted by then government Makoni (2018:12), despite Catholicism remaining a dominant feature of the Catholic school system.

It is worth noting that Catholicism in Catholic schools has not been without its own debatable issues. For instance, the expansion of Catholic churches and their schools have been viewed as importing Eurocentrism[4] with its Western perspective (Chryssides & Greaves, 2014:53). By contrast, today indigenous people of South Africa are still entrenched in the traditional African religion which existed for many years before the arrival of the Western Christian (Mokgobi 2014:2).

This research paid particular attention to Grade 9 learners in a Catholic school environment. It was of interest to understand how Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation to the Catholic school environment within this dual cultural context of Eurocentrism and African religions, as different learners might have different past religious experiences that include the African religion. For instance, some learners may be part of a non-Catholic form of Christianity or may not even have any religious affiliation.

Some empirical views have emerged highlighting the debateable issues associated with the perceived erosion of Catholicism in Catholic schools through the inclusion of non-Catholic learners, such as those of Walbank (2012:173). Chetty and Govindjee (2014:32) and Walbank (2012:173)

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[3] Paul Kruger president of South Africa in the Transvaal which is known as Gauteng post-apartheid period from 9 May 1883 to 31 May 1902.

[4] Eurocentrism can be defined as cultural practice that has its beliefs embedded in the historical background of non-Western societies within a European or Western context (See Chapter 2 section 2.2.3).

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suggested that parents have the right to take their children to a school of their choice and that all children irrespective of religious affiliation should be permitted in a Catholic school (see Chapter 2 section 2.5.3.2 focusing on some reasons for enrolling in Catholic schools). The successfully enrolled learners are then exposed to the experiences of adaptation to the new Catholic school setting and systems.

Qualitative research occurs in a natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:204; Baxter & Jack, 2008:545), in this case where the Grade 9 learners' experiences to adaptation in the Catholic school occurred. It was critical to discuss the school setting, as the case study approach points out that the unit of analysis referred to the participants was inseparable from the school set-up (Baxter & Jack, 2008:545). In demonstrating this importance, Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, and Sonia, (2003:209) note, 'As children interact with school setting, they construct meaning about themselves and others and the nature of the school.' This made this discussion regarding the school setting essential in order to understand the participants' experiences to adaptation in the school environment. In light of the above discussion, it is important to give a summary of the set-up at Loreto Convent School.

Loreto Convent School is located in the Central Business District (CBD) of Pretoria in South Africa. The school was established in 1878 located along Skinner street, (now Nana Sita Street) (Dibakwane, 2018). The majority of the schools' learners are Black. The school has three levels: below Grade 1, Grades 1 to 7, and Grades 8 to 12 (high school). Boys are enrolled only from Grade RR to Grade 3, while girls are enrolled in all levels (Grade RR to Grade 12); it is well known as Loreto girls' school (a non-co-educational school). A denominational school located in the CBD may enrol learners due to geographical reasons, that is, for living in close proximity to the school. Schools located in the CBD may provide a convenient catchment area for parents who use the route on a daily basis on their way to work, as parents may prefer to drop off their children at school in the morning and collect them after work. Proximity and accessibility to the school might be, among other reasons, the main reason for the choice of school. Similarly, other parents may prefer to drive several kilometres to the Catholic school, if they want their child

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to be educated in a Catholic school, or for other reasons such as the school's academic results and/ or religious values.

The school's academic record has been extensively reported on over the past number of years. For instance, in 2012 the school attained its 18th year anniversary of achieving a 100 per cent pass rate (Pretoria News, 2012:10). Moreover, in 2018 the school achieved 100 per cent pass rate for the 25th time (Dibakwane, (2018:10). It was also reported by Dibakwane (2018:10) that in 2013 the school was regarded as the best performing independent school in its district. Although the school has attained outstanding results in the past few years, its original, primary aim is to teach basic gospel values (Pretoria News 2012:10), as it is a denominational school.

The denominational school under study can be identified by its school environment, curriculum and connection with the Catholic church (Wallbank 2012:174). As observed by the researcher, the schools' identity can be distinctively recognised by the learners' uniform, the religious education taught as a subject, the wall displays such as the crucifix and other typical Catholic school features.[5] To illustrate the connection between the school and the Catholic church, the school is located within close proximity of both the chapel and the cathedral of Pretoria CBD. The local priest occasionally comes to the chapel and cathedral to deliver and share religious practices, rituals and activities with learners and the community, and during celebrations of mass. This is described in greater detail in the field notes in Appendix 5. It is compulsory for all learners to attend mass in full school uniform. This indicates a shared connection of values, ethos and identity with the Catholic Church. According to the Dibakwane (2018:10), the school tries to instil good moral values in learners by connecting them with a belief in Christ.

Hatch and Schultz (1997:357) point out that organisational members share values and embrace characteristics of the organisation which may include the organisation's logo, name, colours and symbols. The school is identified by its logo, learners' uniforms, school colours, house names, and the school

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[5] See Chapter 2 Section 2.3.2 focusing on Catholic school identity.

symbols and artefacts which form part of its environment. The school is uncompromising when it comes to learners' adherence to the school's full uniform as defined in the school code of conduct.[6] Thus, adherence to the school's full uniform policy is enforced by referring to the code of conduct.

The code of conduct that is followed, the academic records of the school, the unique Catholic school identity and the interaction of stakeholders, such as the priest and learners, are some of the aspects that may contribute to the school setting. These aspects are experienced by learners on a daily basis as they interact with them, whether knowingly or unknowingly, in the school environment.

Given these dynamics within the Loreto Convent School environment, I was motivated to understand how Grade 9 learners experience adaptation from the moment they start Grade 8 level at the school. This is also with the full realisation that they are adolescents naturally seeking their own identity as they develop into young adults in their environment (Kroger 2015:65). The onset of early adolescence coincides with the learners' transition into secondary school (Simmons, 2017:22).

Not all learners at the school are Catholic as few learners come forward to attend confession[7] with the Church priest when they are called. Catholics form the minority, accounting for less than 30 per cent of the learners in the school, with rest being non-Catholics (Naidoo 2015:117).[8] Pretoria News (2012:10) revealed that the school has a tradition of unity in diversification as it accepts learners of different cultures, origins and race. Their traditions are observed in activities with all learners participating in interhouse activities such as athletics, swimming, netball and Bible quiz (Pretoria News, 2012:10). Furthermore, events such as prize- giving day, parents' evening, and outreach activities for

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[6] Code of conduct is a set of rules clearly defining the rules, guidelines and practices that should be followed by an organisation as part of it norms. For Loreto Convent School, it was first accepted and formally signed in 2001 and parents and learners sign annually to agree and abide by it.

[7] Confession is a formal admission made by an individual in private of their sins and who is made to repent before a priest to seek for forgiveness from God.

[8] See Chapter 2 section 2.5.3.1 on enrolment numbers in Catholic schools.

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the needy in different centres such as old age homes, baby-care centres, and girl's homes all enable a relationship with the learner's families and community at large. Baker et al. (2003:215) emphasise that families are important environmental influencers of the development of attitudes towards the school.[9]

As is the case with other institutions, the Catholic school system is also influenced by its external environment. Consequently, Berns (2012:18) uses Bronfenbrenner's (1989) development ecological systems model to explain the interaction of the school internal system and external environments. The Catholic schools' integral parts include the community, the family, the Department of Education and the Catholic curriculum and education as prescribed by the Catholic Institute of Education. All these organs or systems have a role to play in the education and learning process of all learners in the Catholic school. Ballantine, Hammack & Stuber (2017:18) point out that education is part of the society and it works with other organs in society, for example, the family, so that the society can function. Although this research did not focus on family environments or background experiences, it was noted that learners moved into secondary school with past experiences from other social dynamics such as society, family and faith communities.[10]

The school as a social environment may either complicate the learners' adaptation or present opportunities as they move on from primary to high school (Langenkamp, 2010:12). Grade 9 learners may adapt positively or negatively to the Catholic school as they move from Grade 8 level, as the school presents a unique environment offering new experiences. As a result, a single case study was applied to this research as participants are in one environment that is considered unique (Baxter & Jack, 2008:549).

The background and context presented a framework of events and occurrences in the Catholic school environment. These events and

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[9] See Field notes in Appendix 5 on school activities.
[10] See Chapter 2, Section 2.5.3.3 focusing on possible conflicts in the Catholic school.

occurrences became part of my motivation for this study. In addition, detailed field notes in Appendix 5 provide a context of the Catholic school environment. Field notes contain information that frame the study in time, place, population, events and occurrences, thereby understanding participant's meaning to their experiences (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018:383). The rationale and motivation for the study is discussed next.

1.3 Rationale and motivation

Understanding the context of the environment of a denominational school guided me with the rationale for the study. I am a teacher by profession and a Catholic by religious and denominational affiliation. My experiences and observations in the past 10 years in a Catholic school have prompted the study, as I sought a deeper understanding of how Grade 9 learners experience adaptation in a Catholic school environment.

Learners may leave the school during Grade 8, at the end of Grade 9 or before entering Further Education and Training level (FET) Grade 10. Possible reasons why learners may leave the Catholic school environment may include failing to cope with the Catholic school environment, failing to adhere to Catholic ethos and values, failing Grade 8 or 9 academically, financial reasons or, at times, parents may be relocating to other towns or provinces. Having mentioned all these possible reasons, it was still my desire to undertake this study and try to understand how the learners experience adaptation in a Catholic school environment.

Rupsiene and Kucinskiene (2005:2) point out that adaptation may be complicated if the students' needs do not keep up with the school environment. Furthermore, they clarify that as adolescents move to new schools (p. 1), they encounter are adaptation challenges. In support, Itzhaki, Itzhaky and Yablon (2018:83) propose that while adolescents face adjustment problems, successful adjustment builds character. Catholic stakeholders, who include teachers, the school management team (SMT), learners and parents, need to understand that in trying to adapt to a denominational school, there are possible challenges or opportunities to be encountered (Hastings, 2012:337). However, some of the challenges may have contributed to the unsuccessful

completion of the education programme for some learners at the school. For these reasons, it was worth investigating and understanding how learners experienced adaptation in a denominational school environment.

The Catholic school environment consists of many systems and stakeholders interacting in a unique set-up. For example, the internal system of the school consists of the Catholic Church priest interacting with learners during mass services, the parents interacting with teachers on school consultation days and teachers interacting with learners in the classroom. The school external system consists of the external environment that interacts with the school. For instance, the DoE sends instructions to learners through the school principal. A complex non-linear interaction of the systems and actors is explained using the complex adaptive system (CAS) theory presented in Chapter 2. The CAS theory is the major theory used to underpin the study. Stewart and Patterson (2016:14) define school environments as being complex environments with various interactions and interconnectedness. As the learners move to the Catholic school environment in Grade 8, they interact with teachers, the SMT, other learners, the Church system and other stakeholders. By using the CAS theory which explains complex interactions in the school, I sought to understand how Grade 9 learners experience adaptation to the denominational school environment. The CAS theory's application to complex and unique environments such as Loreto Convent School may add to the body of knowledge on understanding the experience of adaptation to such a school.

Related empirical studies have been conducted on student's adaptation to the school environment. For instance, past research by Rupsiene and Kucinskien (2005:61) revealed contributory findings to this research. They found that there were three indicators of adolescents' difficulties in adaptation which included emotional state, attitude towards schooling, and school satisfaction in the new environment. Although this study focused on the influence of teacher's behaviour as students entered school, it revealed that teachers contributed to the positive or negative adaptation of learners. The same study also established that adaptation to a new school environment also depended on the type of school which these students attended before joining the new school.

A similar study done by Booth and Gerard (2014:736) examined the influence of the school environment on adolescents. The research encompassed the ecological system of a non-denominational school in the United States of America (US) and the perceptions of their environments and themselves. It would be a necessity to carry out this research with Grade 9 adolescents as participants in a denominational school environment in a South African context. Furthermore, recommendations were put forward that additional research on the school and developing adolescents is warranted and justifiable (Booth & Gerard, 2014:728).

As previously pointed out, various scholars reported on the adaptation of adolescents to the school environment. Some scholars used psychological perspectives to relate their studies. Other scholars used the sociological perspective to relate the adaptation of learners to the school environment. Other studies explained both perspectives on this matter. In this study, a sociological perspective is used within a South African context. The above studies dwelt on what contributes or affects adaptation in learners that encounter a social environment such as a denominational school. This study focuses on how Grade 9 learners experience adaptation in a Catholic school environment. Thus, professionally I would not only teach, but also be informed about situations that may present challenges or opportunities facing learners in the school environment that may influence their learning.

Considering my rationale, I hope to contribute to the academic body of knowledge on how learner's experience being in a new school, to improve my professional qualification, and to acquire a deeper understanding of learners' experiences as they settle into the Catholic school environment.

1.4 Focus and purpose

The purpose of this case study is to understand how Grade 9 learners experience adaptation within the Loreto Convent School environment from Grade 9 onwards. The study focuses on Grade 9 learners' experiences in adapting to Loreto Convent School. However, this study is not intended to understand the school setting and its administrative operations, but rather to

gain an in-depth understanding of learners' challenges and opportunities, as adapting may present negative and/or positive effects to learning.

1.5 Research questions and justification

1.5.1 Justification for research questions

The purpose of this research was underpinned by its research questions. Scientific literature prompted me to conduct a study to the adaptation of Grade 9 learners to the school environment. Itzhaki et al. (2017:82-83) point out that adjusting to secondary school requires an understanding of the Catholic school environment. I did not encounter any empirical studies reporting on Grade 9 learners' experiences of adaptation to a denominational school environment. The empirical studies on Catholic schools mainly have an international context. It is important to carry out this research and expand on the literature in the South African context, as the social context in South Africa may vary considerably from other nations. Baker (2003:206) highlights the fact that the context in which individuals exist contributes towards learners' adaptation. Vermeer (2010:207) argues that German national schools are not neutral in relationship to their environments. In another study done in Canada on Catholic school, Brennan (2012:23) interrogates the fact that both Catholics and non-Catholics in the school environment do not experience complete freedom of identity. The justification above and the rationale in Section 1.3 played a pivotal role in motivating this study.

1.5.2 The main research question

The main research question posed is:

How do Grade 9 learners experience adaptation in a denominational school environment?

The main research question leads to the following sub-questions:

- What has been the experience of Grade 9 learners in a denominational school environment?
- What are the experiences of Grade 9 class teachers to the adaptation of Grade 9 learners in a denominational school environment?

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- In what ways do environmental elements such as the identity and culture, religious aspects, and school policies influence learner's adaptation?

1.6. Definition of terms

A definition of the concepts related to this study follows:

1.6.1 Adaptation

In this study, adaptation refers to the adjusting or coping of learners when they move to new school environments. Rupsiene and Kucinskliene (2005:2) explain that adaption involves a process of adjusting to the school environment and that a learner tries to strike a balance between himself or herself and the school.

1.6.2 Denominational school

A denominational school refers to a teaching institution affiliated to a religious community and subscribing to a particular doctrinal belief. Denominational schools can be viewed as schools that are wholly or partially governed by religious institutions that include their religious and spiritual aspects based on the doctrines (Faas, Darmody & Sokolowska, 2016:84). Furthermore, the school system follows an ethos based on particular values of a religion.

1.6.3 Grade 9 learners

In the South African school system, Grade 9 is a phase which consists of learners who fall into the senior phase stages of Grades 7 to 9, that is, less than 16 years of age. Burger, Van der Berg and Fintel (2015:80) ascertain that the Department of Education Policy at the National level (1998) recommends that by Grade 9, a learner must be at least 15 years old (Department of Education age level and phase in school).

1.6.4 School environment

Usman and Putri (2019:13) defined the school environment as an institution of education for learners in which learning activities are systematically organised

under the guidance of educators to fulfil a required curriculum of learning from childhood to higher level.

1.7. Review of literature

In Chapter 2, the literature review is presented that relates to this study. In selecting relevant literature, most literature was sourced from empirical studies done internationally. This may be attributed to the fact that denominational schools originated from Western countries. The literature review is underpinned by the research purpose and research questions, making it selective and directed to the scope of the study as proposed by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018:161-162). The literature covers a brief history and the origins of Catholic schools, their expansion, challenges and contribution to the education sector from the 1870s to date. Further aspects of Catholic schools are discussed that include culture, identity, values, enrolment policy and challenges and conflicts arising in the Catholic school set up. The fact that the study's main area focuses on the experience of adaptation to the school environment by Grade 9 learners, makes it necessary to discuss the denominational school environment and its influence on how they adjust to the new school environment. Lastly, particular attention is also paid to the fact that the school environment is widely considered to be complex due to the connections, interrelationships and the extent of interactions between its various stakeholders. In this regard, CAS theory is applied as the main theory seeking to unpack these complexities within the Catholic school environment, thereby bringing a better understanding to the study.

1.8 Research paradigm and research methodology

1.8.1 Research paradigm

The purpose and focus of the study guides the philosophical stance that is deemed suitable to understand the Grade 9 learners' experiences of adaptation in a new Catholic school environment. The philosophical stance applied is the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm emphasises that reality is constructed in a social environment like a Catholic school and there is a need to understand the school environment (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25). If reality is

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socially constructed, then the participants' realities are truly their experiences on adaptation in the Catholic school. The participants experiences may be gathered, interpreted and analysed as pointed out by the epistemological propositions in the next section. It is important to note that, Chapter 3 discusses the interpretive paradigm critiques and justification for this study in more detail.

1.8.2 Epistemology

The epistemological propositions highlighted in this study underlined the gathering and interpretations of data from participants as proposed by Yazan (2015:137). Epistemological assumptions for this qualitative case study were that it allowed me to gather data, interpret it and report findings as presented in Chapter 4. The findings then gave evidence to the learners' constructed realities of their experiences to adaptation in the Catholic school environment. In Chapter 3 more detail on the epistemology and method of gathering data for the study is explored and utilised.

1.8.3 Ontology

The Catholic school as a social environment presents a natural setting that enabled the Grade 9 learners to adapt to their realities. An ontological philosophical positioning stipulates that learners in the Catholic school should have varied experiences as their realities in adapting to the school environment (Patel, 2015:n.p.). Hence, the findings of the participants' realities were subjective and may not be generalised.[11]

1.8.4 Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to address the research purpose and questions. The purpose of this qualitative approach is to understand the experiences of adaptation of Grade 9 learners in the Catholic school without me having an idea of what would be uncovered. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018:89). This study utilises the case study method and is guided by the

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[11] See Chapter 3 section 3.2.1 for a detailed discussion on the ontological proposition of the study.

qualitative approach. The interpretive paradigm paves the way for a deeper understanding of how Grade 9 learners experience adaptation in the school by incorporating a philosophical positioning to this case study.

The interpretive paradigm allowed for a rich, in-depth exploration by the researcher and, at the same time, the researcher become an instrument through which data was collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:62). The difference between qualitative and quantitative approaches, a justification on why qualitative approach was adopted and its pros and cons for this study is discussed in Chapter 3.

The study focuses on a descriptive type of case study which allows for thick descriptions of the learners experiences through their narratives (Gay, Mills, & Afrasian, 2014:404). It also allows for an in-depth study of complex relations Rule & John (2011:7), as those relations typically exist in environments such as the Catholic school as described by the CAS theory in Chapter 2 section 2.9.2. In addition, case studies relies on various sources of data collection methods, which results in data triangulation[12] (Yin, 2009:18). The multiple sources of evidence are presented in the next section Chapter 3 presents further discussions on the utilisation of the case study approach, including its pros and cons, justification and the 'unit of analysis' in the case.

1.9 Data sources in the case study

Also, in Chapter 3, the data sources for the study are discussed. The sources were made up of in-depth interviews for both the Grade 9 learners as the main participants and Grade 9 class teachers, field notes and researcher's observations. The interview question for the participants (learners) and the field notes are to be found in Appendices 7 and 10 respectively. The baseline questionnaire was used to understand the participants' profiles in the interview session and not utilised as a data tool. Learners' profiles and the interview process are discussed in Chapter 4 section 4.3 and summarised in Table 4.1.

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[12] Triangulation is the use of more than one type of data collection method (interviews, observations, and fieldnotes) to attain credibility and validity. If the same methods are used again in the same case study, the results will be similar.

The interview process involved 10 participants whose voices were recorded, and its purpose was to gain an understanding in the lived experiences of Grade 9 learners and make meaning out of it (Siedman 2013:9).[13]

1.10 Population

1.10.1 Population identification

In this study, the population consisted of all 84 Grade 9 learners who were in the early and middle adolescence developmental stage. Grade 9 learners were appropriate for the study as they still had fresh memories of what they experienced in Grade 8 level when they arrived in the new school. The Grade 8 learners were not considered as participants as they still had to undergo some experiences of adaptation in secondary school and they could only reflect in Grade 9. Grades 10, 11 and 12 were considered to have settled in the school and that they had lived many years in the school compared to Grade 9 learners hence their memories would not be as 'fresh'. A population consists of all individuals that the researcher is interested in studying Morgan & Sklar (2012:69). All 84 learners received the Volunteer to Participate form as the first step of indicating their willingness to voluntarily participate in the study. (the VTP form is in appendix 1 and its use is further discussed in Chapter 3 Section 3.7.2 and in detail in step 2 of that section).

1.10.2 Target population criteria

The VTP form results were that, from the 84 Grade 9 learners, 43 learners were willing to participate, and they comprised the sampling frame or target population (Creswell 2014:407). This reflected a value of almost half of the total, which was an acceptable target population to extract the required sample (Cohen et al*.,* 2018:225)

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[13] See Chapter 3 on data collection technique section 3.8.

1.11 Sampling technique

1.11.1 Sample size and criteria

A sample of 28 Grade 9 learners was drawn from a target population of 43 learners that were willing to participate in the in-depth individual interviews. Population screening was necessary to extract individuals of interest to this research through the exclusion criteria and willingness to participate. In qualitative research there are no hard rules on samples, one participant can be a sample, two participants or more than 40 participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:142). Only 10 participants out of 28 eligible participants were randomly selected to participate. The 10 participants were considered to be able to give sufficient information on their experiences to adaptation in the school.[14]

1.11.2 Non-probability sampling technique

In this study, non-probability, purposive samples were utilised, and they were appropriate for qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2018:219). Etikan et al., (2016:3) have added that homogeneous sampling is necessary when characteristics, such as culture of the school and age of the 10 participants is in phase. The 10 participants were purposively selected for this case study. They were assumed to possess the most appropriate qualities, for example they all joined the school in the previous years, and they were non-Catholics by denomination. (See information on VTP form.

1.12 The actual activity with participants

As the researcher, I was not involved in the sampling process leading to the extraction of the 10 participants who were to be interviewed. I taught the Grade 9 learners, and this would have conflicted with face to face in-depth interviews that would follow. This served as a limitation to the study. The school social worker volunteered to participate and handled the process of ensuring that the learners sought consent from their parents, as they were legally considered as

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[14] See Chapter 3 section 3.5.3 for the detailed sampling process, including the exclusion criteria and the willingness to participate.

minors. In assisting in the study, the social worker faced the possible dilemma of a dual role in the power relationship with participants. The selection process also ensured the social worker had not previously encountered the learners from her routine work in the school as the social worker. (See Chapter 3 for the social workers' role in the school and in the study). The social worker herself signed a confidentiality letter agreeing not to disclose to any other individual details pertaining to the learners' names, interview sessions, audio recordings, and sampling process.[15] Only audio recordings were used, which meant that I was not aware of the 10 participants. Ethical considerations requirements worked as a check point to protect all the participates and the site.

Two Grade 9 class teachers also voluntarily participated in the individual interview process with me as the interviewer. Their purpose was to contribute their views on the learners' experiences to adaptation.[16]

1.13 Research sites

The research site was the denominational school, Loreto Convent School located in the Pretoria CBD of South Africa at 135 Nana Sita Street. The participants were Grade 9s at this school.[17]

1.14 Validity and reliability

Some areas of concern measured credibility and trustworthiness as addressed by the validity and reliability of the study respectively (Cohen, 2018: 245, 268). First, the individual in-depth interviews were executed by the social worker as the facilitator ensured credibility. Secondly, the confidential clause signed by me and the social worker imposed a sense of trustworthiness. Thirdly, in the coding process, data was constantly compared with the codes and for reliable data thereby enhancing trustworthiness. Fourthly, qualified transcribers transformed the interview audio recordings to text format and these

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[15] See annexure 6 – A confidentiality letter to the social worker as the research assistance.
[16] See the class teachers' interview question in appendix 4.
[17] see Chapter 3 section 3.9 on research site.

transcriptions were used for the coding process. The transcription provided reliable information. Lastly, ethical clearance protocols were followed as required, thereby enhancing validity of the research to attain a certain level of credibility (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018:245).[18]

1.15 Ethical clearance

Ethical considerations were applied according to the ethical policy requirements set by the University of Pretoria's Department of Humanities in Education. Participants' identities were protected by using fictitious names to ensure the confidentiality of the 10 participants. Letters of consent are sent to Grade 9 parents since Grade 9 learners are classified as minors in this research and therefore had limited capacity to independently make decisions.[19]

1.16 Possible limitations and delimiters

The study discussed the various limitations and delimitations encountered in the study. In qualitative research study, generalisability is specific to subjects and setting rather than universally (Cohen et al., 2018:289). The 10 participants' results of their experiences could not be generalised to other school settings other than the school under study (See Chapter 5, section 5.5 for more detail). Another possible limitation is where the researcher is the key instrument of the research hence blurring the subjective and objective facts since collection of data is done by themselves and objective facts mediated through subjective interpretations (Cohen et al., 2018:289; Creswell & Poth, 2016:38). However, in this study the school social worker collected the data through interviews as I was conflicted and therefore reduced her subjectivity (See Chapter 3 on the actual activity with the participants). The use of the social worker, however, did add to the trustworthiness of the study. Delimiters were that, I analysed Grade 9 learners' experiences to adaptation and not

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[18] See Chapter 3, section 3.10.1 and 3.10.2.
[19] See Appendix 5 for the letter of consent sent to Grade 9 parents

Grade 8 learners' experiences, as they still had to go through the adaptation process (See more limitations in Chapter 5, Section 5.5).

1.17 Chapter outline

The chapter outline of the study is now briefly discussed.

Chapter 1 has presented the background of the study by first discussing the history of Catholic schools and how they evolved from the 1870s. The chapter also explored and presented the research questions and motivation with reference to the focus and purpose of the study, centred on the experience of Grade 9 learners to adaptation to the Catholic school environment.

Chapter 2 explores and extensively discusses the literature relevant to adaptation of Grade 9 learners to the Catholic school environment by unpacking the complexities within a Catholic setting. The CAS is discussed as the most suitable theory attempting to unravel these complexities inherent in the Catholic school environment.

Chapter 3 analyses the research design and methodology, outlining the fact that the qualitative approach of the case study method is deemed the most suitable, bearing in mind the research questions. The interpretivist paradigm is presented as the philosophical concept underpinning this study. The chapter also presents the step-by-step approach that was used in collecting the data in fulfilment of the ethics considerations, as required, to ensure the validity, reliability and rigour of the findings.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, paying special attention to the responses given by the Grade 9 learners who participated in the in-depth individual interviews. The findings are grouped into three broad themes, which are extensively discussed and interpreted.

Finally, Chapter 5 explores the conclusion, recommendations and limitations to the study. The chapter also attempts to link the research questions, literature and findings of the study, commenting on points of discovery pertaining to the three aspects.

The next chapter focuses on the literature relevant to this study. The literature review was developed with the main intention of addressing the research questions, focus and purpose. The main theoretical model crucial to this study and presented in this chapter is the CAS theory.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the existing research relevant to this study. Part of the reflection in this chapter considers empirical studies related to this study. Most literature in this study was extracted from international sources as denominational schools' origins were Western. Where possible, local and relevant sources were utilised. The chapter begins with a brief history of international origins and Catholic schools in South Africa. Literature is discussed on Catholic school identity, its culture, enrolment reasons and aspects of adaptation to a Catholic school environment. It provides insight into the adaptation of Grade 9 learners to the South African school environmental variables. The section also looked into the role played by the school's environmental variables and discusses the school environments mainly by distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' school environments and their possible influences on learners' adaptation. Importantly, the complexity of a Catholic school is examined, and it attempted to uncover the complexities of Catholic schools' environment. More importantly to the study is the unfolding of the complex adaptive system (CAS) theory as a theoretical lens to this study and its application to the Catholic school environmental complexities for adaptation. Finally, the last section draws a conclusion that briefly summarises the discussions in this chapter.

2.2 Origins of the Catholic schools

2.2.1 A brief history of Catholic schools internationally

Tapping into the evolution of the history of Catholic schools brings about an in depth understanding of Catholic education in South African schools. Maloney (2015:1) points out that in trying to comprehend something; one must explore its origins. It was of importance in this research to examine Catholic schools globally and in a South African context. A brief history of Catholic schools in the United States and Canada is also discussed.

The Spanish and French missionaries introduced Catholicism to the United States in the early 19th century (Maloney, 2015:1) According to Gutek (2012:5,

94), the Catholics started creating their own schools in small numbers with the learners being taught by nuns. Maloney (2015:3) suggests that around the 1950s there was a rapid increase in Catholic schools and a conflict arose between American culture and the 'Protestant'[20] in America. In addition, Maloney (2015:3), acknowledges that Protestant followers posed the critical question, 'What is Catholic schooling?' It was widely accepted that it was not simply about having prayers and catechism classes but also about promoting the true Catholic teachings.

The trend observed from the brief history of the origins of Catholic schools indicates that the Spanish entered the United States, and a sudden growth of Catholic schools was realised. The main objective was to offer Catholic teaching to those in the United States. Another brief analysis of the history of Catholic schools in Ontariois discussed in the next section.

2.2.2 The history of Catholic schools in Ontario

The struggle for Catholic education began around 18th century British North America, English Protestant colonised, claimed territory and disliked sending their children to Catholic schools (Brennan, 2010:21). McGowan (2013:20) adds that between 1837 and 1838 there was an uprising against government over Catholicism issues in Canada. Dixon (2009:1) points out that in 1841 Catholics built their own schools and Protestants saw Catholics as being favoured, which led to general disruptions in the education system.

However, between 1850 and 1860, there was a rise in the demand for a Christian values curriculum. Bishop Armand de Chardbonnel of Toronto demanded that Catholics cling on and develop their schools. In this regard, 1841 saw the birth of Catholic schooling within the Canadian system, although there was resistance from Protestants (Dixon 2009:1) Indeed, the history and development of Catholic schools would have diminished in the 19th century had it not been for the religious men and women who devoted their money, time and energy to the Christian curriculum (Dixon 2009:3)

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[20] Protestants - those of denominations other than Catholic, for example Anglicans.

A clear history of the origins, growth and development of Catholic schools can be traced in the United States and Canada. As already stated in this section, the Spanish colonised the US and the French moved into Canada. In both countries, there was a rise in the demand for Catholicism, Christian values and a Catholic curriculum and, as a result, there was great expansion in the number of Catholic schools. However, not all indigenous people accepted Catholicism. A similar trend of the origins, development and expansion of Catholic schools in South Africa, which was also traced from colonial times, is discussed in the next section.

2.2.3 A brief history of Catholic schools in South Africa

The first denominational schools to be opened in South Africa were Catholic, Anglican and Methodist schools (DuToit 2004:2). Baker (2016:54) presents a historical timeline of Catholic schools in South Africa. The first Catholic school was established in the Eastern Cape in 1849. Collins and Gillespie (1994:1) reported that the Catholic School system formed an integral part of the Catholic Church activities. Due to a number of developments that occurred between 1950 and 1980, largely driven by the prevailing apartheid government policies, the Catholic Church made some critical decisions in line with those made by other churches. Consequently, the Catholic Church significantly transformed its policy of running schools from 1954 onwards, to a more open system that allowed the enrolment of other races of learners other than Whites. Although this radical shift in policy on running schools by the Catholic Church led to heavy penalties in the form of the withdrawal of government funding to their schools, the Church maintained and continued on this path in South Africa (Collins & Gillespie, 1994:1). Moreover, by taking this stance of a multi-racial enrolment policy, the Catholic Church had joined a number of other mainstream churches also involved in the running of schools, in opposing the South African Bantu Education (Act No. 47 of 1953) which was viewed as oppressive and segregating non-White races, including black students (Wills, 2011:178). Thus, the Church continued to run a significant number of private schools, despite the heavy sanctioning by the government against this stance.

Wills (2011:178-180) adds that Catholic schools experienced a substantial reduction in the number of schools they were running to about 50 per cent of their previous enrolment, as the South African government started to close their schools due to their open defiance on legalising inequality in the education system.

However, by 1975 the Dominican Springfield School in Cape Town had already taken a decision to enrol eight female coloured learners; a clear demonstration that the school was departing from the previous Whites-only enrolment policy (The Southern Cross, n.d.). In 1979 there were 740 Catholic schools in South Africa, both aided and unaided (which today are the public schools on private property and independent schools). The number of learners in Catholic schools continued to grow. At the same time, the Bantu education system worked on principles of segregation, which resulted in Catholic schools losing their subsidy as they enrolled more Black children into the schooling system. In support, Hofmeyr and McCay (2010:2-3) present that in the pre-apartheid era, the Catholic schools were dominated by Whites.

In 1970 Catholic schools experienced financial woes and some closed, while others were handed over to the government. During the 1980s, in the time of the apartheid government, more Black learners were enrolled in Catholic schools and White people withdrew their children. Walbank (2012:170-171) adds that in the pre-apartheid era in South Africa there was the issue of Catholic church membership. Schools were very selective and only wanted children whose parents were Catholics. In support, Driesen and Tayob (2016:2) reveal that both post- and pre-apartheid religion in education were different, as during apartheid there were mono-religious and segregation systems.

The expansion of Catholic churches and their schools also sparked controversial issues such as Eurocentrism. Chryssides and Greaves (2014:53) argue that the expansion of Catholicism has been criticised for its Eurocentric stunts. This perception lies in the belief that the Catholic religion has Eurocentric religious beliefs. In contrast, indigenous people of South Africa are grounded in the African religion by origin. It would be of interest to

understand how Grade 9 learners experience adaptation to the Catholic school environment with its strong religious background in terms of its teachings. Learners have past religious experiences, such as with the African religion, however, some learners may be part of a different religious affiliation.

Naidoo (2015:168) states that independent schools are known for their high school-fee structures and that, in pre-apartheid times, these schools were well known to be for White learners. However, currently there are more Black learners, indicating racial diversification in Catholic schools as the socio-economic spread has increased (Naidoo 2015:168). Furthermore, independent schools are privately-owned schools according to the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA). Moving to recent developments in democratic development, conclusions by Driesen and Tayob (2016:17) indicate that British, Australian, the American and South African contexts are in favour of religious literacy which is in line with democratic education that is inclusive to all. This is a formal awareness that Catholic schools are no longer only for Catholics but that the general community comprises different people. (Catholic Institute of Education, 1998:58-59). This background history leads to more discussions on Catholic identity and culture on Catholic schools in the present day.

2.3 The identity and culture of a Catholic school

2.3.1 Catholic identity

In this section, the concept of denominational school identity is unpacked and contextually examined in line with fulfilling the objectives of this study. Denominational school identity with respect to this study refers to Catholic school identity as the denomination of the Catholic school under study. It is crucial to understand the term 'Catholic identity' as this gives clarity to Catholic school identity. It is noted that definitions and explanations on Catholic identity with reference to a Catholic school are interwoven with denominational school identity. Wardekker and Miedema (2001:36) acknowledge that the term 'identity' may be used in a double sense; first, to define denominational school identity, and, secondly, to analyse the emerging identity of adolescents within the school environment. However, it is also important to discuss

denominational school identity in relation to adolescent identity. This is important since Grade 9 learners are at the adolescent developmental stage in which they commonly seek to establish their identity while simultaneously experiencing adaptation to the new school environment.

Foldy and Su (2014:6) proposed that the term 'identity' has expansive meanings depending on the contexts in which the meanings apply (see also Gee 2000:99; Hambulo & Higgs 2017:4). For instance, some sources discuss identity within the Catholic religious system. Catholic identity has been reviewed by several sources in the past and some of the views put forward are now discussed. In this regard, Hagan and Houchens (2016:89) propose that Catholic identity emerges as teachers and parents share and live the core Catholic ethos as an essential component of the process of teaching and learning. Fuller and Johnson (2014:96) explore Catholic identity in greater detail by analysing what other scholars previously put forward. Fuller and Johnson (2014:96) present that some of the important components of Catholic identity include holistic education, community, relationships, visuals (symbols), religious values and other Catholic norms. This makes a Catholic school environment unique with specific identity components in a diagrammatic form as proposed by Defiore, Convey and Schuttloffel (2009:34).[21]
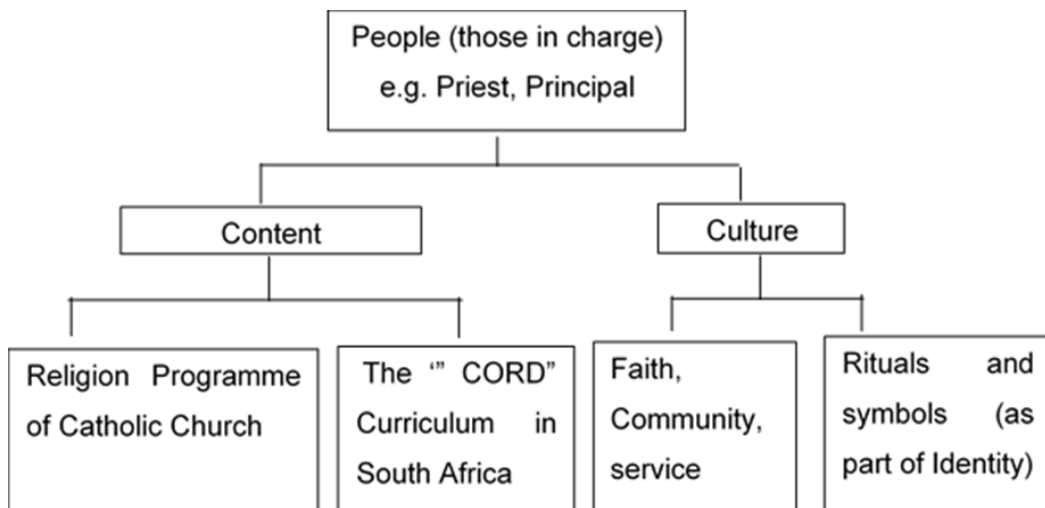
Figure 2.1: Catholic Identity model, adapted from Convey (2013:194)

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[21] See also Convey (2013:194); Hagan & Houchens (2016:88).

The Catholic identity model identifies several components that provide a clearer and more visible picture of the Catholic school identity. As indicated above in Figure 2.1, hierarchically, stakeholders such as the priests and the principal are the persons in charge of running the school. These people convey the required content (information), thereby formulating a cultural identity. Additionally, the presence of the faith community, statues, crucifixes and religious pictures supports the Catholic identity in a Catholic school environment (Convey, 2013:194). At the outset, Catholic identity is a culmination of people who are in charge and who cascade a certain type of content shared by the whole community. This results in the cultivation of a specific identifiable culture. This is what is in-built in a denominational school environment. As previously discussed, Catholic identity gives clarity to an understanding on Catholic school identity (denominational school identity). This leads to the discussion on Catholic school identity which follows.

2.3.2 Catholic school Identity

To begin with, Faas, Smith and Darmody (2018:4) propose that denominational school identity is embedded in the ownership by way of the Catholic Church, name of the school, admission criteria and the curriculum that is followed and shared within the school environment. Convey (2013:211) reports that the Catholic ethos, faith community, appearance of the school environment, celebrations and the name of the school give identity to the Catholic school (Convey 2013:211). The results by Convey (2013:211) were based on findings conducted with a sample of American Catholic school administrators and teachers on perceptions of Catholic school identity. Furthermore, the results showed that the percentage of Catholic students and the presence of the crucifixes did not give identity to the Catholic school. This brings to light a more refined explanation on the identity of a denominational school as previously reported by Wardekker and Miedema (2001:36). Wardekker and Miedema (2001:36) emphasised that identity in the context of a denominational school's identity influenced the emerging identity of learners within the school environment. Thus, denominational school identity plays a critical role in how the identity of the learner is established within the school environment. In fact, Vermeer (2009:208) suggests that the aim of the

denominational school is to make it easier for the construction of a personal identity for the learner. Empirical studies conclude that in some societies the adolescents' developmental tasks is linked to transition and identity. For instance, Jansen, Moletsane, Neves, Soudien, Stroud, Swart, and Wild (2012:204) presents evidence that in Western societies the developmental task of the adolescent period is indicated by the successful transition to high school as well as the development of a sense of identity by the learners. This leads to the discussion on adolescences' identity in a social perspective since the Grade 9 learners are in a Catholic school environment in a social context.

The school environment has been identified as a social ground where relationships and connections are enhanced. From a social perspective, McCarthey and Moje (2002:230) consider identity as 'a construction and sequence of interactions between people, institutions and practices.' Wardekker and Miedema (2001:37) explain that individual identity for an adolescent refers to a continuous activity of constructive and re-constructive applications in relation to developing, maintaining and evaluating personal commitments to values and practices of individuals. Hambulo and Higgs (2017:4) concur that the social perspective dwells on how individuals consider themselves, which is aligned to people's characteristics pertaining to their thinking, reflections and self-perception. Crucially, personal identity is not in-born, rather it is acquired and developed over a long period of time. This implies that developing personal identity follows a continuous process in attempting to reach stability in the identity (Vermeer 2009:205).

From the above contributions, it is important to understand how the Grade 9 learners experience adaptation to the new school environment as they undergo the construction and re-construction phases of their identity. Some schools of thought suggest that schools must provide the link between personal identity and school behavioural patterns. Consequently, Vermeer (2009:208) supposes that schools must facilitate the building of a personal and unique identity so that they may withstand the tension between social integration and individualisation. Wardekker and Miedema (2001:38) add that as schools attempt to assist learners to develop their own identities, learners on their own part are also seeking to advance their own individual identities.

This can either be helpful or problematic in developing the personal identity of the learners (Wardekker & Miedema 2001:39) but it can also present a possible conflict between the school's identity and that of the learners.

2.3.3 Catholic school identity critiques

Critiques exist in attempting to analyse the relationship between the Catholic school identity and that of the learners. Convey (2013:189) proposes that the distinctiveness of the Catholic school identity is also projected in the personal development of each learner in relation to religious dimension, knowledge in the gospel and the culture encountered. Wardekker and Miedema (2001:37) reveal that what is projected by learners in terms of their identity construction is different for every learner such that there is no such thing as the right outcome. However, Vermeer (2009:206) points out that 'identity formation is an interpretive process.' It is important for the Grade 9 learners to interpret cultural elements including rituals, symbols and images in the Catholic school environment and then formulate a collective meaning of their own life stories defining their identity. The interpretive process of the school environment may be positive or negative and this may influence the adaptation process of the Grade 9 learners.

Evidence exists to support the view that there is a certain level of dissatisfaction inherent within the Catholic school pertaining to identity matters. Fusco (2005:86) conducted a comparative research study focusing on analysing values in Catholic schools with a focus on identity and academic preparation. Results of the study showed that Catholic school identity faced a crisis in that schools had shifted from the basic identity principles to giving more priority to academic preparation. In another study by Brennan (2012:22) within the Canadian Roman Catholic school system, results revealed that modern-day Catholic and non-Catholic youths were not experiencing complete freedom of unique and valued identity in their Catholic schools.

In more recent studies, Díaz (2018:181) put forward learners' thoughts on their experiences on desired Catholic school identity study and remarked thus, 'education here has always been schematised mostly because we are very conservative'. In this case, the sense of belonging and establishing one's

identity with the Catholic school amongst the Grade 9 learners in adapting to the school environment is questioned. In this regard, Vermeer (2009:207) argues that denominational schools are not neutral places with reference to building personal identity and religious traditions since learners need to make sense of the world in which they exist. Convey (2010), Dean (2010) in Zoeller and Malewitz (2019:67) argue that the adolescents are at a stage of seeking spiritual and own identity in the Catholic school environment and that less attention has been given to this feature.

Convey (2013:194) asserts that the school's Catholic identity and the environment or culture are inseparable and tightly linked. Thus, Gee (2000:99) proposes that the world is so fast-changing and globally well-integrated that identity and its culture are being used as a tool to analyse and understand the school environment and its society. It is important to discuss the Catholic school culture as this gives the school a certain identity that influences the learners' identity.

2.3.4 The Catholic school culture

Culture forms part of the Catholic school identity. It is important to explain the culture that is embedded in a Catholic school environment. As indicated in Figure 2.1, the Catholic school identity is made up of several components. Convey (2013:190) acknowledges that a Catholic school environment as a religious structure possesses a distinct Catholic culture.[22] Vermeer (2009:204) uses the sociological perspective by Durkheim and posits that cultural and social systems are significantly influential for a long period of time as individuals adapt to a social environment. Vermeer's (2009) sentiments conform to this study in that as the Grade 9 learners are introduced to the Catholic school system, there are particular practices that learners become accustomed to. These practices form part of the Catholic school culture system; hence it is important to discuss the cultural experience in a Catholic school. Consequently, Idang (2015:98) acknowledges that there are various definitions have been suggested regarding. Idang (2015:99) explains that

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[22] See also Olasunkanmi (2015:2)

culture is noticed in the distinct behaviour of a particular group of people and this includes greetings, habits, dressing, social norms and taboos, food, songs and dance patterns.

With respect to this study, a more refined and contextual explanation on culture in a Catholic school environment is postulated as follows; 'Culture in a Catholic school refers to the tradition, norms, values, social interactions in terms of shared school life, and expectations that foster social and academic development' (Aldana, 2016:177). Within the context of a sociological approach, culture can be viewed in terms of religion as that which is practised in public by a given group of people encompassing their celebrations and norms in marriage, church service, initiations, music, art and other elements of culture (Little & McGivern, 2013:472). Consequently, culture can be treated as a tradition that includes the practice of confession for Catholics within a Catholic school church (Little & McGivern, 2013:18). Furthermore, the sociological approach to religion posits that religion includes beliefs and practices that particular members of the Catholic society believe in (Little & McGivern, 2013:482). In this regard, Convey (2013:190) provides an example of culture as a practice in the Catholic school day that typically begins with a prayer to set the tone for the day. Since the Catholic school culture is a distinctive practice that is followed, it is of interest to this study to understand how Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation amid these Catholic-school practices.

As already noted, the Catholic-school culture encompasses practices of specific religious beliefs. However, these religious beliefs can be considered exceptionally personal in a Catholic school as there is a well arranged and coordinated set of beliefs, behaviours and norms bordering on elementary social needs and values (Little & McGivern, 2013:472). Values are strongly linked to ethics and, in a Catholic school system, ethics, are, in turn, embedded in the educational mission through the code of conduct that learners are exposed to (Langlois & Lapointe, 2010:147,149). This research focuses on the context of the Catholic school culture as it relates to Catholic school identity and this is discussed in the next paragraph.

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Finefter-Rosenbluh and Perry-Hazan (2018:617) report that culture nurtures the identity of religious children in a school and it helps with a sense of belonging, emotional security and confidence. Futhermore, Finefter-Rosenbluh and Perry-Hazan (2018:617) add that a few empirical studies have identified denominational schools to be culturally centric in educating learners. This approach may undermine the ability of learners to choose from different paths pertaining to culture. It may be inferred that learners introduced into a new environment encounter the Catholic school culture which may either be unfamiliar or familiar to them. The newly acquired culture may be helpful or problematic to the Grade 9 learners as they experience adaptation to the Catholic school environment. As they experience the acquired culture, the Grade 9 learners' identities are constructed, and values are instilled. Since values have been influenced by the culture experience, a discussion on values becomes essential to this study.

2.4. Values within the Catholic school system

Various studies have contributed to the understanding of values experienced by learners in a Catholic school environment. In general, values can be spread through life and, as a result, different values exist, including religious, political, social, material, moral, cultural and personal (Idang, 2015:101). Olasunkanmi (2015:2) believes that values are the foundation of any culture. Idang (2015:100) clarifies that culture is shared and consists of cherished values which define people's identities. Donlevy (2008:166), in support, shares that in the Catholic school community, the norms and values are formed by those who teach and interact with the learners and their fellow peers (see also Kuusisto (2003:283)). On the other hand, Ntho-Ntho and Nieuwenhuis (2016:426) suggest that religious education is a source of moral values, including discipline, norms, respect and care for one another. Idang (2015:98) elaborates that individuals understand values as beliefs that they hold and enable them to differentiate between what is right or wrong.

From the empirical studies reviewed, it is evident that in the Catholic school different values are instilled in the learners through the Catholic school teachings. These values include religious values, moral values, and cultural

and social values amongst others. However, since the study's focus is not primarily on analysing Catholic values, this study only seeks to clarify that the Catholic school holds various values that are encountered by the learners. These learners possess their individual values, which emanate from interactions with their parents, community and friends and which they bring to the school environment. In this regard, Kuusisto (2003:283) asserts that parents often hope to pass on some of their values to their children and hope that their children will hold similar values from within family. However, the values that learners hold as they enter the Catholic school environment may conflict with the Catholic values of the school. Not surprisingly, it is therefore of importance to investigate how Grade 9 learners adapt to the various Catholic school values as they experience the new school environment.

The community also plays a role in how values are acquired by learners. For this reason, values are extended to the community, school and the country. From a cultural dimension, Donlevy (2013:308) opines that the culture exhibited by learners of the same age may differ from the Catholic school culture and behavioural expectations. Donlevy (2002:102-103) posits that an individual pre-exists within the society and his/her religious life behaviours could be stemming from cultural, family or social values. Ballantine et al. (2017:18) argue that the school possesses the task of instilling moral values (and other values) in the learners and the instilled values manifest in the outward behaviour demonstrated at school, at home and in the community. In particular, Baker (2016:54) reflects that the learners' place of values is diminishing in Catholic schools. Threats to the Catholic schools such as violence, bullying, alcohol abuse and sexual abuse continue to decimate the South African school system on account of the lifeless settings in which learners live (Baker 2016:68).

2.5 Catholic school dimensions

2.5.1 Religious Diversity

The South African population comprises a diverse religious community. South African diversification categories include race, language, and culture among other diversification groupings. Ntho-Ntho and Nieuwenhuis (2016:236) point

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out that the South African population is diverse in categories of culture, language, and religion. Based on the Pew Research and Statistics Center of South Africa on ancestral, tribal, animistic or other traditional religions, Hodgson (2017:186) stated that 85 per cent were Christians, 5,5 per cent belonged to no religion, 5,1 per cent were traditional Africans, 2,2 per cent were Muslim, 0,9 per cent were Hindu 0,2 per cent were Jewish and 0,3 per cent were other religions. The right to freedom and religious diversity was born out of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996. Section 15 of this act reads 'Freedom of religion, belief, and opinion' (Hodgson, 2017:188; Ntho-Ntho & Neiwenhuis 2016:238).

Francis (2002:79-80) identified a Catholic school as being comprised of practicing Catholics, non-Catholics, sliding Catholics and lapsed Catholics. Naidoo (2015:15) acknowledged the same fact that, in a democratic South Africa, Catholic schools were diversified in terms of the religious affiliation of the learners in the school. The diversification of current learners in Catholic schools is evident from information on the VTP forms that were filled in by all the Grade 9 learners to indicate their willingness to be participants in the research. The information gathered revealed that 74% of 84 of the Grade 9 learners in the school were non-Catholics. Although this percentage was not for the whole school but Grade 9 learners only, it gave an estimate of the number of non-Catholics in Loreto Convent School. Baker (2016) and Naidoo (2015) shared that in South African Catholic schools there are less than 30% of learners who are Catholics by denomination.

2.5.2 Religious teachings in a Catholic school

The constitution of the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) stipulates that public schools may conduct religious observances through the school governing body on a fair and impartial basis to learners and staff members in a non-mandatory free atmosphere (Ntho-Ntho & Neiwenhuis, 2016:238-239). However, Hodgson (2017:189-192) argues that the constitution does not spell out the extent to which private schools can have a religious ethos, religious instruction and observations. Hodgson (2017:192) remarked, 'Only private schools may adopt an exclusive religious ethos or character.' In concurrence,

Naidoo (2015:170) added that schools had the right to foster and maintain a noticeable religious character. Hence schools have a religious policy endorsed by South African Catholics enriched in the CORD[23] curriculum (Naidoo 2015:170). Part of the curriculum involves Religious Education classes on personal growth, relationships, religious communities and mass attendance and it is compulsory for both Catholics and non-Catholics.

According to Naidoo (2015:170), the religious ethos and character are embedded in the curriculum that is implemented in the Catholic school for all learners that are in the school. It is significant to understand how Grade 9 adolescent learners experience adaptation within a Catholic school environment with exclusive religious ethos or character as stated by Hodgson (2017:192) above in this section. Vermeer (2009:203) remarked that the traditional function of the denominational school was to acclimatise learners to church life and instil basic doctrines, norms and rituals of a specific denomination.

2.5.3 Enrolment in Catholic schools

2.5.3.1 Enrolment numbers in Catholic schools

According to statistics and research, there are more non-Catholic learners in Catholic schools than Catholic learners. Baker (2016:60) pointed out that there were about 24 per cent of Catholic learners in Catholic schools in South Africa based on the education statistics CIE database for the year 2014. Naidoo (2015:117) agrees that Catholics formed the minority 27 per cent and the rest were non-Catholics. Mathematically, a Catholic school, with, for example, 800 learners in high school would have 24 per cent of the learners being Catholics (102 learners) and 76 per cent (608 learners) being non-Catholics. There are many reasons why non-Catholic parents enrol their children in Catholic schools. This also addresses some engaging and compelling questions; first

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[23] The CORD curriculum is a programme followed by the Catholic schools in South Africa. It incorporates the organisation of the RE syllabus, principles of RE practice used for daily preparation of activities and it incorporates a faith profile for Catholic school leavers.

'How do non-Catholic learners end up in Catholic schools?' and secondly, 'What are the possible criteria used by parents and guardians to choose a Catholic school for their child's education?' There are several reasons mentioned by different authors as to why parents or guardians choose Catholic schools. These reasons are now discussed.

2.5.3.2 Some reasons for enrolling learners in Catholic schools

Donlevy (2013:310) argued that non-Catholic learners wanted to experience and approach a spiritual faith in Catholic schools. Walbank (2012:177) justified that Catholic schools should serve the community in a Christian way, making it an obligation for Catholic schools. Chetty and Govindjee (2014:44) put forward the legal perspective of the inclusion of non-Catholic learners thus, '… everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion'.

Chetty and Govindjee (2014:32) revealed that Section (29) (3) of The South African Constitution allows for the establishment of private schools that serve the needs of cultural-linguistic or religious-specific groups. This conforms to the International Human Rights Instruments, which stipulate that every parent has the 'Right to choose the kind of education' they want their children to receive (Chetty & Govindjee 2014:33). In a democratic South Africa, parents may feel that they have the right to choose the school they want for their child for subjective reasons. Chetty and Govindjee (2014:33) also added that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) confers on parents the right to choose the kind of education their children should receive. Parents may also want to fulfil international rights to education and the South African Constitution post-democracy.

Rupsienne and Kuncikiene (2005:1) acknowledged that choosing a Catholic School was for objective and subjective reasons. An objective reason might be that the Department of Education has a hierarchy in the schooling system concerning the progress from primary to secondary school. Ballantine et al. (2017:7) added that it was mandatory to progress from primary to secondary school. However, parents might offer subjective reasons in arriving at their decision to enrol their child at a specific school. For instance, Horgan

(2011:554) shared a legal perspective of Islamic students who were accommodated into a Catholic school environment on 'reasonable accommodation' based on the Irish Department of Education's laws and legislation. Some students were of the Islamic faith while others were of no faith but all were pressurised to attend a denominational school in the local area. The process of adaptation might or might not have been complicated.

Baker (2016:10) proposed that people might also take their child to a Catholic school based on previous good pass rates achieved by Catholic schools. The above-stated reasons for educating non-Catholic learners in Catholic schools are well accepted and valid. However, some of the non-Catholic and Catholic learners in the Catholic schools may find themselves in conflict with the Catholic school administration if they do not fully comprehend or adhere to Catholic system expectations (Donlevy 2002:113).

2.5.3.3 Possible conflicts in the school

It is important to remember that non-Catholic learners are enrolled at Catholic schools holding previous lived experiences gained from their families, community, their society, their culture and beliefs and these may be imported into the Catholic school environment and cultivate a way of adapting to the environment over years (Ballantine et al., 2017:7). Interpretivist researchers recognise that individuals have varied backgrounds and experiences that enable construction of reality in a wider social context. Wahyuni (2012:71) argued that society and the education system are inseparable and mirror each other, hence any change in the society is mirrored in the education system. The reverse may also be true: a dysfunctional education system may affect society.

Donlevy (2002:109) explained that parents enrol their children at Catholic schools even though they had little or no knowledge of the Catholic education system and expected values. Donlevy (2002:110) contended that once parents put a signature on the contract agreement, legally this implied that they would fully accept and abide by two main contractual terms. First, by signing, the parent was accepting that their children would attend school and participate in catechism courses, mass, and religious liturgies. Secondly,

signing also implied that the parent had accepted the crucial role of a parent as the first educator and moral agent of their child.

Donlevy (2013:307) shared the same view from a cultural perspective, that is, that non-Catholic learners enrolled and started school without adequate knowledge of the rituals, symbols, and practices of Catholicism. Chetty and Govindjee (2014:38) supported Donlevy (2002 & 2013) by suggesting that when parents and their children signed the enrolment contract they needed to understand and educate their children on the implications of signing that contract.

The following are examples of non-Catholic parents and their children involving misunderstandings of the Catholic education system. These were two separate incidents. A case in point was when a non-Catholic learner did not want to participate in Catholic faith activities on religious grounds. A second case was where a parent did not want their child to be involved in the Catholic religion, again based on religious grounds (Chetty and Govindjee, 2014:38). Furthermore, Chetty and Govindjee 2014:38) concluded in both cases that, while it was not mandatory to sign the contractual enrolment form at a Catholic school, all learners regardless of their denomination needed to adhere to the Catholic ethos of the school. Hambulo and Higgs (2017:6) reported that stakeholders in the Catholic school system did not satisfactorily comprehend the Catholic school policy. It was important in this study to understand how Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation with or without them choosing to be in the Catholic school environment.

2.6 Adaptation in a Catholic school environment

2.6.1 Adaptation contextualised

There have been a considerable number of views put forward attempting to analyse how learners are influenced by the school environment in which they are present. The different views are linked to adaptation and they are discussed in the paragraphs that follow in this section. Various conclusions were drawn from the different views on school environment adaptation.

At the outset, whatever conclusion is reached, it is imperative for a learner to adapt to the school environment at his/her disposal for the successful completion of the learning process. Thus, Rupsiene and Kucinskiene (2005:2) acknowledged that adaptation was a process aimed at coping with the unevenness between the student and the new school environment. Furthermore, Rupsiene and Kucinskiene (2005:2) emphasised that the process of adaptation included psychological, social and academic aspects. Borbélyová (2017:206) proposed that adaptation is a process in which a pupil adjusts to a new institution's social conditions which relate to the acceptance of new social roles and the development of new social relationships. In support of Rupsiene and Kucinskiene (2005:2), Borbélyová, (2017:206) reported that adaptation is viewed from three perspectives, namely the biological, psychological, and social. The psychological and social perspectives have been referred to as psycho-social adaptation, as the two perspectives are wholly interlinked in a social environment, such as the one provided by a school (Borbélyová, 2017:207).

Other views also existed, attempting to apply theories to explain the influence of the society to the school system for a learner. For instance, Ballantine et al. (2017:18) applied functionalist theory to indicate that the societal system has organs that are interconnected for it to function effectively. Ballantine et al. (2017:18) elaborated that the organs encompassed education, family, religion, politics, economy and health care. In this regard, the school was seen as a societal organ that belonged to the education sector and was therefore part of the societal system.

A school is a social environment and the adaptation to a school environment in this study was examined within a social context. Borbélyová (2017:207) asserted that when a child enrolled in a new school, the child must adapt by adopting the newly introduced social roles. In addition, the social roles might result in positive adaption which would lead to the adolescent building confidence in their academic and social roles (Eccles et al. 1993:93). Borbélyová (2017:2007) clarified that adaptation in a social context involved adjustment to social conditions and it led to an acceptance in both the social status and role. Furthermore, Borbélyová (2017:207) mentioned that

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adaptation at a social level was titled 'adjustment'. In this study, the term 'adjustment' was loosely used to mean adaptation to a school environment. As learners tried to adjust to the school environment, they might encounter challenges or opportunities, which will be discussed in the next section.

2.6.2 Adaptation challenges and opportunities

Complex interactions exist in the Catholic school environment, which will be discussed in section 2.7 on the complex adaptive system (CAS) theory in this study. The social interactions and connectedness of the different stakeholders, the school systems, and the social nature of the school environment pose both challenges and opportunities to the Grade 9 learners who experience the adaption process in the school. The challenges and opportunities are explored in the next discussion.

Hastings (2012:337) stated that generally when students transfer from primary school to secondary school challenges and opportunities become evident in trying to adapt. Rupsiene and Kucinskiene (2005:2) added that the problems associated with adaptation were mostly on account of a transition to a new school as a result of new environmental conditions and variables. According to Borbélyová (2017:209), school adaptation is a complex issue that is structured and defined by specific elements criteria and indicators. For instance, in a new school environment, the acceptance of school rules portray the level of adapting to a new school environment on the new social roles given to the learner (Borbélyová 2017:209). An opinion can be made to the effect that school adaptation is complex and is accompanied by both challenges and opportunities for learners in that new school environment.

As already explained, moving into a new environment presents both challenges and opportunities of an adaptation nature to learners. Rupsiene and Kucinskiene (2005:2) pointed out that safety, warmth, a welcoming environment and clearly documented ethos were pivotal factors to a student's adaptation process. Meanwhile, Hastings (2012:342) reported that refugee children who moved into new secondary schools revealed that they received minimal support to enable them to adapt to these schools. This ended up putting pressure on learners as they did not feel welcome in the new

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environment meant to induce a sense of belonging in them. Eman (2013:72) stated that in Israel, the Grade 9 stage is considered a defining period and thus presents adjustment problems manifesting in a decline in Grade marks, average attendance, a feeling of connectedness to the school, and school social difficulties as well as a change in the relationship between the learners and their parents. Booth and Gerard (2014:737) also emphasised that problems such as low academic achievement, lower self-esteem and increasing school-related stress were associated with trying to fit into new school environment. In a related study, Borbélyová (2017:210) added that adaptation problems such as ill-behaviour were among many others that were experienced in a new school life. These problems were posed with specific indicators related to adaptation.

Grade 9 learners might experience adaption to the Catholic school environment positively or negatively. Examples of indicators of adaptation to a school environment include disciplinary behaviour, not adjusting, dropouts, self-esteem, and school-related stress (Booth & Gerard 2014; Hastings 2012; Brennan 2012; Itzhaki et al. 2017; Baker et al. 2003; Bipath & Moyo 2016). On a positive note, the child may like the school and academically improve as illustrations of positive indicators (Correia & Marques-Pinto 2016:248). Furthermore, the indicators may fall into three broad domains being social, behavioural and academic (Correia & Marques-Pinto 2016:248)

Furthermore, a child who conforms to school may acquire excellent results, enjoy school and makes contact with teachers and fellow learners (Borbélyová 2017:210) Learners in a school environment may experience good and/or bad adaptation. This adaptation is also influenced by the adolescent developmental stage as evident in the discussion that follows.

2.6.3 Adolescents' developmental stage and adaptation

Adolescents' developmental stage is a crucial life-defining stage for all young people across the world. Frydenberg (2008:1) explained that the adolescence stage is the period between childhood and adulthood which can itself be divided into different developmental stages. Du Toit and Kempen (2018:3) revealed that the adolescent developmental stage is recognised across

societies of the world and is a period of transition to adulthood from childhood. In particular, and within the South African context, Louw and Louw (2014:303) added that adolescence represents a period of transition between childhood and adulthood, and it can be a developmental bridge between being a child and becoming an adult. Du Toit and Kempen (2018:3) further clarified that the ages of early adolescence lie between 11 and 14 years, middle adolescence is between 15 and 17 years and the late phase of adolescence is from 18 to 21 years. The Grade 9 learners (participants) participating in the study were all found in the 14- to 15-year age category as indicated in the baseline questionnaires used to obtain the characteristics of the participants.[24] Thus, in this study, the Grade 9 learners were classified under the early- and middle-adolescence developmental stages.

Du Toit and Kempen (2018), Louw and Louw (2014) and Frydenberg (2008) confirmed that the adolescence phase is characterised by several challenges ranging from cognitive, social and emotional to physical changes. It is important to discuss these challenges in order to understand how the different challenges could possibly influence the adaptation of Grade 9 learners to the Catholic school environment. Borbélyová (2017:211) asserted that the challenges related to the adolescence developmental stage led to either harmony or disharmony being 'disturbed', in attempting to adapt to the Catholic school environment.

The adolescence stage has been identified as a vulnerable period as children choose to indulge in risky behaviours and their psychological well-being is compromised (Tisdale & Pitt-Catsuphes 2012:118). Additionally, Symonds and Hargreaves (2016:55) have elaborated that the adolescence stage is associated with changes in self-perception, attitudes and general behaviour as evident in the psychological development phase upon entering the new school environment. Eccles, Buchanan, Wigfield and Flanagan (1993:91) used the environment fit theory to explain that behaviour, motivation and mental health are influenced by the fit between individual characteristics and

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[24] See Chapter 4 section 4.3 on Participants' profile.

the school as a social environment. Moreover, if psychological needs do not fit with the school environment, then the adolescents' motivation, interest, performance and general behaviour decline as they attempt to adapt to the environment. Empirical evidence suggests that the school environment has been identified as a potential predicator of youth's well-being during the early adolescence stage.[25] Jansen et al., (2012:213) have reported that as adolescents enter high school their psychological development changes either for better or for worse. Bearing this in mind, it is imperative to understand how the Grade 9 learners experience adaptation to the Catholic school environment.

Psychological changes do not only influence adaptation to school environments, but also adolescents' socialisation as they enter the school environment. Tisdale and Pitt-Catsuphes (2012:119) have pointed out that social environments such as schools provide risk and protective factors that may influence the adolescent's development and adjustment to the school environment. Eman (2013:72) elaborated that within the social context of the adolescence developmental stage involves having a sense of belonging, social support and acceptance. Furthermore, in this stage, individuals rely on friendship and relationships other than family to get support and guidance. Empirical evidence provided by Kelly (2017:5) suggested that further research was required to explore the learners' social development during the adolescence stage as they adapted to the school environment. Other research by Quinn (2018:69) claimed that further investigations were required into the Catholic school environment as a social environment offering multi-dimensional social contexts for the adolescent's developmental purpose.

Grade 9 learners interact with the school environment, peers, teachers and other school stakeholders. However, socially, at this stage the Grade 9 learners are at the beginning phase as they shift from home to peer group, although they remain well-connected to their parents (Tisdale & Pitt-Catsuphes 2012:119). In addition, at this stage, the Grade 9 learners greatly

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[25] See Buelhler, Fletcher, Johnston and Weymouth (2015:57).

accept social relations with peers more than with their parents. Being adolescents, the Grade 9 learners also encounter emotional, physical, and psychological changes during the adolescence stage. The home and school environments of adolescents significantly influence how they develop physically, cognitively and emotionally (Jansen et al., 2012:213). The school's environmental variables considered for this research are now examined.

2.7 Catholic school environment

2.7.1 Environmental variables

The school environment plays a critical role in influencing both the students and the school, depending on how the relationship is defined. Moore (2012:12) identified and suggested environmental variables or elements associated with the school environments that included shared beliefs and values, school rules and communication. In support, Baker et al. (2003:210) mentioned that there are a considerable number of environmental variables that have been pinpointed by both empirical studies and the ecological systems theory for a school institute. The school environmental variables mentioned in the empirical studies include the school climate, classroom practices, school organisation and peer-related aspects (Baker et al. 2003:210). In another study, (2015:55) Buehler, Fletcher, Johnson and Weymouth presented learning, the climate, academic rigor, teacher-support and school safety as the most important environmental variables for the school.

 In view of the above empirical studies, it is evident that a school environment has important environmental variables associated with it. Therefore, in this section, the term Catholic school environment also refers to the environmental variables since these variables make up the school environment. Although the above studies do not exclusively focus on adaptation to a denominational environment, it can be inferred that a school environment comprises several variables or elements.

In this research, the environmental variables that may be considered are school beliefs, Catholic values, school rules and peer related aspects, to mention only a few. These variables are discussed within the context of the

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Catholic school environment in South Africa. As discussed earlier, the school environments comprise environmental variables that are associated with them. School environments may also pose challenges or/and opportunities or both to learners' adaptation to the school environment. Consequently, school environment variables are widely considered as posing negative or positive influences on the school environment as well as problems or opportunities with respect to adaption for learners.

2.7.2 Environmental variable challenges and opportunities

Rupsiene and Kucinskiene (2005:2) have pointed out that a failure by the school environment to conform to the student's needs complicates his adaptation process. Symonds and Hargreaves (2016:55), in support of Rupsiene and Kucinskiene (2005), illustrated that moving to a new school environment for adolescents caused uncertainty in terms of the adjustment between adolescence and the school environment. Buehler et al., (2015:56-57) argued that school environments can have negatively perceived aspects such as inadequate support from teachers and a general feeling of insecurity, which ends up creating problems in adjusting to the new environment for the student. A positive school environment may bring opportunities for the learner such as academic achievement and stable social relationships in the school (Buehler et al., 2015:56-57).

Empirical evidence has indicated that adolescents engage more in school environments compared to home and neighbourhood environment, as in the school, there are rules, directions and systems that are followed by learners (Tisdale & Pitt-Catsuphes, 2012:133). Views from other researchers providing an analysis on a well-defined and interesting trend touching on school transitions are also presented (Rupsiene and Kucinskiene, 2005:1). The trend reveals the existence of strategies that can be put in place to ensure that a positive school environment is created where students easily adapt to a new school environment. Booth and Gerard (2014:738) recommended that further studies on the influence of school environments and the developing adolescents should be considered for future exploration. This makes the current study even more relevant and important, as it seeks to understand how

Grade 9 learners adapted to an environment that is comprised of various variables or elements.

As established earlier, school environments can either positively or negatively contribute to learners' adaptation process. This is because the negative or positive environment may influence learners both psychologically and socially. Rupsiene and Kucinskiene (2005:8) stated conclusively that during the process of adaptation to a new school, a point of equilibrium between the student and school environment was established in order to satisfy the student's critical psychological, social and academic needs. Barker (2003:209) suggested that schools function as psychologically healthy environments if, and only if, they meet and appropriately challenge children's developmental needs. However, there exists a view that considers a match between the learner's developmental needs and the school environment and how this might cultivate a positive influence (Barker 2003:209). Ballantine and Spade (2008:213) concur with Rupsiene and Kucinskiene (2005:7) by emphasising that the school environment exists within a social context. Furthermore, Jeanne et al. (2008:213) elaborated that learners bring values, beliefs, attitudes, abilities and behaviours to the school environment. Consequently, Tisdale and Pitt-Catsuphes (2012:19) identified the school as a social environment as being comprised of different elements.

However, I was more inclined towards the sociological perspective since Catholic schools have been identified as social systems by literature. This was, however, a limitation to the study since the developmental stages of Grade 9 learners is a psychological perspective and this study dwelled on a sociological view. The study still acknowledges that when learners adapt to a school, they also encounter developmental phases.

2.8 Interactions, relationships and connectedness

As both a teacher and researcher in this field, I have observed that schools are complex environments. Baker (2003:2017) regarded environments such as schools as complex and that studying children in this formal organisation as complex too. The school as a complex environment is comprised of different stakeholders, including parents, teachers, SMT, religious education

leaders, Department of Education, CIE and learners. All these stakeholders interact in the schooling system environment in different ways. For example, as a teacher at the research site, I frequently communicate with parents concerning school progress and behaviour issues. At home, the parents communicate with their children about school issues. The Department of Education sends instructions to the SMT which informs teachers, parents, and learners on various educational activities. These interactions allow for the school environment and systems to interact.

As is the case with other institutions, the Catholic school system is also influenced by its external environment. The Catholic schools' integral parts include the community, the family, the Department of Education services and the Catholic curriculum and education as prescribed by the Catholic Institute of Education . All these organs or systems have a role to play in the education process. Ballantine et al. (2017:18) have pointed out that education is part of the society and it works with other organs in society, for example, the family, so that the society can function.

Scholarly literature on the complexity of the education environment draws attention to the embedded layers of interactions and systems in the school environment which may influence the adaptation of Grade 9 learners to the school environment. Hardman (2012:213) mentioned that adolescents in their developmental stages encounter psychological and social changes as they enter high school. Hong, Espelage and Kium (2018:309-312) posited that psychological and social challenges of adjusting to the school environment are inevitable as one enters high school, although Baker et al. (2003:6) insist that, psychologically, schools contribute to a student's positive adjustment. Furthermore, Comen (2000) in Baker et al. (2003:7) added that as children interact with the environment there are behavioural indicators that show adaptation of individuals. Furthermore, Hong et al. (2018:308) elaborated that behaviour changes were also characteristic of the adolescent stage and adaptation. One may opine that if Grade 9 learner behaviour is compromised as she experiences the school environment then the adaptation process is compromised. Besides behaviour as an indicator of adaptation, Booths and Gerard (2014:737) emphasised that lack of fit into the environment by

adolescents is indicated by low academic achievement, low self-esteem and an increase in school-related issues.

2.9 Complex adaptive system (CAS) theory

This research will be theoretically underpinned by CAS theory. Stewart and Patterson (2016:14) reported that the CAS is relevant for studying complex school environments in the present day although challenges may be encountered. This perspective was empirically tested by Hawkins and James (2018), whose findings were that schools are complex, loosely linked systems. In turn, Hawkins and James (2018) findings were motivated by other prior researchers who also applied the perspective (Morisson 2012; Goldspink 2007; Callaghan 2014). More discoveries were uncovered by Hawkins and James (2018:730) who pointed out new-born complexity theories that theorists have modelled and which include the complex adaptive system (Gell-Mann 1994); complex responsive system (Stacey, 2015) and complex evolving system (Mitleton-Kelly & Davy, 2013).

The CAS theory has been successfully applied in studies of healthcare, economy and terrorism. For example, a study by Weeks (2014) entitled 'Managing service-based institutions in a context of unpredictable, complex change' successfully applied the CAS theory in economic studies. This theory is broadly used across sectors or organisation that consist of nested systems that interact. In this study, the CAS theory will be applied to the school system.

Clarity of the CAS theory within this study will bring about a better understanding of the CAS theory in the education system. Stewart and Patterson (2016:2) suggested that CAS represents a collection of components or agents (people, groups or ideas) that interact over time so that system-wide patterns emerge. Ellis (2011:100) suggested that a complex adaptive system is made up of various parts that have mini interconnections and interrelationships. Plsek (2001:n.p) explained that actors of different parts shared and became unified in an environment, with each part having some freedom to act separately. Furthermore, it is elaborated that the parts were diverse, and their backgrounds were not subject to school control. The sharing of the environment by different parts (actors give rise to the complexity of the

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environment) meant that the different actors interacted microscopically in their surroundings, making models difficult to formulate (Holland 1992:19).

Wang, Han and Yang (2015:382) pointed out that complexity arose as the system consisted of subsystems that interrelated in a non-linear trend. In support of a more focused opinion, Hawkins and James (2018:732) elaborated that complexity was the underlying aspect of schools where there was a high level of interaction. Stewart and Patterson (2016:2) presented that the macroscopic interdependence of actors or parts was not always evident. For example, in the school environment, teachers may have observed learners' actions or words that could have notable effects on the students over time. This is possible since learners are a diverse group in the school system. The learners' interconnectedness in non-linear directions build interdependence and after a long period, patterns emerge giving rise to 'the butterfly' effect (concept) (Stewart & Patterson 2016:2).[26] In unpacking this complexity in environments, the CAS theory is suitable to underpin studies in education.

The CAS theory key features that describe the nature of the system have been identified by different studies and several scholars. Wang, Han and Yang (2015:382) mentioned that scholars identified complexity, self-organisation, adaptability, dynamism and the ability to co-evolve. A number of sources identified interaction, emergence, non-linearity and nestedness as the key features of the CAS theory (Burns & Knox, 2011:6; Edson & McGee, 2016:431; Stewart & Patterson, 2016:2; Hawkins & James, 2018:731). Other empirical studies have reported on various findings pertaining to the CAS key features such as interaction, emergence, non-linearity and nestedness amongst others. The key features of CAS theory enable a comprehensive description of characteristics of systems such as schools and their environments. For example, in a school, classrooms are subsystems and the schools report to the state or national subsystem (Burns & Knox, 2011:6).

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[26] See also Fidan and Balcı, 2017:12-13 and Figure 2.2 depicting the symbolic visual of the CAS theory.

Edson and McGee (2016:431) explained that the CAS is one of the theories that is equally complex and dynamic and is suitable for educational system as a lens to exercise control over and comprehend today's education. In support, Hawkins and James (2018:730) clarified that schools are institutions that need to be addressed afresh with vigorous theoretical understandings of complexity. Edson and McGee (2016:431) identified actors in the system as teachers, administrators, students, parents, government officials, community organisation and other stakeholders, for example businesses. Hawkins and James (2018:745) conclusively declared that a school is made up of different systems and very different characteristics. The systems are embedded in their own cultures which play a role in the interactions with individuals or other systems.

The theory is criticised for its interdependence and complex web interactions in the education system and because CAS actors learn from past experiences and interactions (Edson & MacGee, 2016:431). This means that the theory operates based on historic or past experiences which are revoked and narrated concerning adaptability. The key characteristic of the CAS theory is the potential of the parts of actors to adapt (Holland, 1992:19; Edison & MacGee, 2016:433). Hawkins and James (2018:740) gave examples of the interaction of systems. For example, they found that the student system received the curriculum (see Figure 2.1) on school culture and identity. In this study, the Grade 9 learners may not embrace the Catholic culture as each learner possesses their own culture from the family or home background. The process of adaptation may be challenged and an emergence of differences and disconnections in actions or behaviours may be evident. Culture builds identity and it means identity formation will be compromised as well for the Grade 9 learner who may not embrace the Catholic school culture and its identity.

 In this research, the Grade 9 learners belong to the students' system. The learners are individual actors who interact with the teachers, parents, priest, peers and other stakeholders either directly or indirectly in the school system. For, example, a relationship may develop between the Grade 9 learner and the teacher in class. If the relationship turns out to be negative, the adaptation

process complicates, as there will be no positive connections. Negative relations may emerge between the teacher and learner and, similarly, positive relations will emerge if the learner and teacher build a positive relationship. Negative relations will pose a challenge to the adaptation process as differences will emerge, but positive relations will create an opportunity for good connections between the teacher and the learner. The good connections may emerge as good social connections between the teacher and learner.

Edson and MacGee (2016:435) articulated that the CAS theory is engrossed and bonded with contributions and understandings of the education system. A school comprises very diverse systems each with very different characteristics, for example, the culture of the school (Hawkins & James, 2018:745). A denominational school has its own distinct culture and identity in the social world. This gives rise to ontological issues. Ontological issues are now explored and discussed in the next section.

2.9.1 Ontological issues of the complex adaptive systems theory

According to Wahyuni (2012:69), ontology is the subjective nature of reality experienced by individuals. Hawkins and James (2018:745) have brought forth the ontological perspective of the complexity theory of social systems such as the school. Furthermore, Hawkins and James (2018:745) have presented an argument that the formulation of complex systems as part of the social world is a well-founded and trapped proposition in the ontological perspective (Byrne & Callaghan, 2013). In support of Hawkins and James (2018), Wahyuni (2012:69) confirmed that subjectivists theorise that reality is dependent on social actors and contribute to social experience. Therefore, the CAS theory is used to better understand the social experiences of Grade 9 learners embedded in the social world. As alluded to earlier, the Catholic school is a societal system.

2.9.2 The CAS theory as applied to a Catholic school environment

Interactions, Connectedness, nested, non-linear systems of the Catholic school

CAS THEORY

2. Interaction of systems and subsystems embedded but nested.

3. Interrelationships, linked. Interactions of systems and actors present.

Church, Culture, Society

School System & Actors

Emerging of Differences, similarities, Connections

parents

Loose link broken

Strong links solid

Priest

Learners

1. Actors (learners, teachers, priest, parents, peers, external organisations (i.e. all stakeholders)

Figure 2.2 The Complexity Adaptive System (CAS) Theory, adapted from Stewart and Patterson (2016:2)

The Grade 9 learner's experiences of the denominational school environment are associated with other societal integral parts such as the community, the economy, church, social labour, family and judiciary. Holland (1992:20) has pointed out that each integral part is embedded in some conditioned environment. In this regard, the school has learners that come from different backgrounds, family structures and communities as stated in literature on Catholic school environments. 'A school comprises of diverse systems, each with very different characteristics.' This makes a school organisation a nonlinear system and adapting to it may or may not pose challenges. It is of importance to this study to understand how learners experience adaptation in

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a denominational school environment which, according to the CAS theory, is complex as indicated by its parts and heterogenous dimensions.

The above diagram, Figure 2.2 shows the interactions, connectedness, and nested and non-linear systems of the CAS theory as adapted from Stewart and Patterson (2016:2). A few examples will be used to explain the links between systems. The actors pointed out in number 1 of the diagram include learners, teachers, the priest, parents, peers, and other stakeholders. The priest, through the principal of the school, indirectly interacts with the learners and therefore forms a loosely linked connection. The priest also leads mass and other religious rituals and connections are created with learners. These connections may emerge with difficulties or similarities in terms of the adaption of Grade 9 learners to the religious rituals. The rituals presented by the priest during mass or Catholic celebrations may be overwhelming and unfamiliar to non-Catholic learners. The adaptation process may complicate the situation in relation to religious aspects and tensions may build, for example, the learner may refuse or play truant so as not to attend any future rituals. Stewart and Patterson (2016:2) have clarified that as systems and actors interact, tensions may build since systems are diverse with respect to different dimensions within the system or among the actors. A pattern emerges through these interactions of the different systems. For example, positive or negative behaviour may emerge as the adaptation process becomes more complicated. This then becomes a negative experience for the learner in adapting to the Catholic school environment.

Another example of actors is the strong link between the learners and the teachers. As the two actors interact, possible similarities, connections and differences may emerge. An emergence of patterned behaviour is cultivated because of the systems dynamics that have non-linear feedback (Stewart & Patterson 2016:2). The systems dynamics are uncontrollable and not obvious. For instance, Grade 9 learners are of diverse religious backgrounds and the teachers are also different religiously. In helping Grade 9 learners to adjust religiously, this may pose challenges when they experience being in a Catholic school which has diverse actors on religious aspects. In contrast, if the Grade 9 learners adjust positively to the religious aspects, the adaptation process will

not be complicated, and this will lead to positive religious experiences in the school.

In Figure 2.2, the numbers two and three in the diagram indicate the different systems that also exist and interact with the Catholic school, for example, the Church, the family and the community in the external environment. These systems influence the social interactions of learners in the Catholic school environment. The learners' backgrounds in relation to family or community set-up plays a role in the interactions of these learners in the school.

In the studies by Stewart and Patterson (2016) on the CAS theory, they suggest that teaching and learning is complex in environments such as schools, which are in themselves complex. Furthermore, the systems are open to external influence, they are diverse allowing for tensions, and they interact in a non-linear shape. Similarly, in a Catholic school, systems are diverse and interact in a non-linear shape. The Catholic school is a complex system in that its environment has considerable varying variables mentioned in literature.

2.10 Conclusions

The brief overview of Catholic South African schools highlighted the inequalities in the Catholic South African education system which were permitted for Catholics only. The Catholic schools were preserved for the Whites in pre-apartheid era but post-apartheid they encountered all denominations and diversified Catholic and non-Catholic learners.

In this study, school identity and culture are analysed and discussed as crucial aspects to the Catholic set-up and its environment, as these give a distinctive identity to Catholic schools. Learners in a Catholic school environment may experience good adaptation or bad adaptation. The CAS theory examined the Catholic school, and this brought about a better understanding and prediction of the nature of the phenomenon of this study. The theory emphasised interrelationships between subsystems (actors) that are embedded and nested in broader systems such as the Catholic school system. These subsystems and broader systems capitalise on connectedness in a non-linear fashion and in adapting to such complexities it may or may not pose

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challenges. It is of importance to this study to understand how Grade 9 learners experience adaptation in a denominational school environment which, according to the CAS theory, is complex as indicated by its parts and heterogenous dimensions.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is aimed at presenting the research design and methodology that best suited the case study research. This chapter outlines the research process followed to obtain the data relevant to the study. All in all, the research process adopted included the research design, research paradigm, methodologies, as well as the capturing and analysing of data. It paid particular attention to important issues regarding ethical concerns and trustworthiness measures to ensure a high standard of validity, reliability and research quality were obtained. The research process is discussed henceforth.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The interpretive paradigm underpinned the study. Maree & van der Westhuizen, (2007:30) has suggested that a paradigmatic perspective refers to how the world is viewed from the perspectives of setting assumptions and favourable systems of meanings. In this study, the interpretive paradigm allowed for meaning making as to how the Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation in the Catholic school environment, as the intention was to interpret and understand their experiences. The interpretive paradigm as a philosophical positioning questions the core belief that reality is socially constructed, and this paradigm seeks to understand the context in which the research was conducted (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25). It may be implied that the Grade 9 learners socially constructed reality as they interacted in the Catholic school environment during the process to adaptation. This also gave rise to the use of the interpretive paradigm in this qualitative research. Cohen et al. (2018:174) have commented that if the purpose of the research is to understand a given specific situation then the type of research should be interpretive and qualitative in nature. Furthermore, a qualitative research approach is connected to searches that are associated with either an interpretive or naturalistic approach (Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015:209). Both Wahyuni (2012:70) and Creswell and Poth (2018:19) identified four philosophical assumptions guiding qualitative research as ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. The ontological position,

epistemological perspective, and methodology are discussed in more detail in this section.

3.2.1 Ontological position

Cohen et al. (2018:175) have proposed that an interpretive paradigm constitutes a subjective, interactionist, and socially constructed ontology. Also, Wahyuni (2012:70) pointed out that ontological identification exists in reality or what is called knowledge. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007:60) one of the assumptions underpinning the interpretive perspective is that the social world does not exist independently of human knowledge. Cohen et al. (2018:288) remarked that there was no single reality or truth, rather, the reality was created by individuals or groups and, as a result, multiple interpretations were obtained. Consequently, a researcher might start by making observations and then seek a deeper understanding of the issue under investigation. This leads one to draw meaning in a social context, as interpretations are made from participants' viewpoints. In that situation, the reality is socially constructed, subjective and is inconsistent (Wahyuni 2012:70). Berger (1967:5;15) clarified that scientific or philosophical or even methodical formulations of reality are not exhaustible as to what the meaning of 'reality' in the social world is. Furthermore, the sociology of knowledge is compelled to abide with the social construction of reality through common sense and not just ideas so that the society can exist. In support, Yazan (2015:137) underscored that qualitative researchers are motivated by the way people make sense of their world and their experiences in the world.

The ontological approach has been chosen for this study, as it supports the view that Grade 9 learners who join and learn in a Catholic school interact socially with the school environment as the natural setting in which they exist. The Grade 9 learners construct knowledge when they interact with other social actors in the school environment such as teachers, their peers, parents and the priests.[27] This knowledge becomes the learners' subjective, reconstructed

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[27] See the actors in the school system: Figure 2.2 diagram on the Complex Adaptive System Theory.

experience in the school. Each learner's experience is unique with multiple realities that the Grade 9 learners communicate concerning their experience in adapting to a Catholic school context. Creswell and Poth (2018:20) elaborated that researchers who applied qualitative research adopted the use of multiple realities in their studies. The multiple realities of the Grade 9 learners were gathered and interpreted by the me.

3.2.2 Epistemological perspective

Yazan (2015:137) has proposed that the epistemological tradition assumes that qualitative case study researchers are interpreters and gatherers of interpretations. In this regard, He has elaborated that the interpretations are reported as a constructed reality or knowledge that is gathered during the investigation. Indistinguishably, qualitative research ensures that researchers work with or adjacent to participants to collect subjective evidence based on participants' views (Creswell & Poth, 2018:21).

In this study, through the help of the researcher assistance, I gathered the Grade 9 learners' subjective experiences within their respective context to give an underlying meaning to their experiences of their terms of events and discovered activities. The individual views refer to the knowledge that has been gathered (Creswell & Poth, 2018:21). A key assumption that was made was that both the communication and dialogue applied and constructed between the researcher, participants and researcher assistance would yield an understanding of how the Grade 9 learners experienced adaption to Loreto Convent School as a denominational school in a social context. Wahyuni (2012:70) affirmed that epistemology is a perspective on what comprises justifiable knowledge which is socially constructed. Neve, Reinhard, Alexandra, Saunders and Mark (2015:157) elaborated that in sociology, the epistemological perspective is based on the trust that the researcher gathers data that is of full richness of the social world and knowledge is created. The knowledge gathered was extracted with subjectivity as I am employed by Loreto Convent School and this gave rise to an axiological grounding of the study, thus discussed in the next section 3.2.3.

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3.2.3 Axiological proposition

A combination of prior knowledge and experiences gained by me in the school environment spanning 10 years has significantly contributed to a high degree of subjectivity to the Grade 9 issues investigated by this study. Maree & van der Westhuizen (2007:31) suggested that the researcher becomes empathetically and subjectively engulfed in the study through the interpretivist perspective. Thus, the interpretivist stance allows the researcher to be an 'insider' in what is being researched, hence being the view that the researcher is considered subjective (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2007:31). One may also suggest that there is an element of subjectivity on the researcher's part as I linked experiences, prior knowledge values, and intuition in the study. Moreover, the interpretivist paradigm allows for a rich, in-depth exploration and descriptions of qualitative research, making the researcher an instrument through which data is collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:62).

3.2.4 Critique of the interpretivist approach

Like any other philosophical approach, there are advantages and limitations associated with applying the interpretivist approach as a concept. Okeke and Van Wyk (2015:54) have said that one major advantage of interpretive research is that participants' construction of meaning enables descriptions to the complex social worlds of participants to be made. It also allows for the production of rich and detailed information of the context (Cohen et al., 2018:288). The interpretive approach also endures criticisms. There is a crisis of interpretation, especially to meaning and the need to negotiate meanings among social participants. This may result in a great challenge of arriving at the truth (Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015:54). Okeke and Van Wyk (2015:54) have revealed that one limitation to the interpretive approach is the existence of a possibility that the research may be influenced by the researcher's agenda. The researcher is part of what is being researched and, therefore, deemed to be subjective (Cohen et al., 2018:289; Wayhuni, 2012:70). With that in mind, in this research, this has been addressed by engaging the services of an independent co-researcher to the process of gathering primary data during interviews with the voluntary participants.

3.3 Research design

The research design is a plan that is initiated to achieve set goals for a study. The study uses a qualitative research design to address the research objectives and aim of the study. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:22), a research design encompasses three types of designs namely qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. The research design and framework are so critical that Sousa, Driessnak, and Mendes (2007:503) remarked thus:

> Research design is the framework or guide used for planning, implementation, and analysis of the study; the plan for answering research questions or hypothesis. Research designs are often classified as quantitative, qualitative or a mix of the two.

Okeke and Van Wyk (2015:165) put forward the view that a research design is a comprehensive proposition on how to execute the various processes of conducting the research. In support, Cohen et al. (2018:173) suggested that a research design seeks to answer research questions based on proof and justification based on a plan that is well-organised and practicable. This research sought to address the various research questions posed and therefore focused on the purpose of the study by strategising on a suitably identified action plan. The action plan included executing a research design driven by suitable philosophical assumptions that included a rigorous selection of participants, data collection methods and a comprehensive data analysis process in attempting to understand how Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation in a Catholic school environment.

The use of the qualitative approach acted as a guide to planning, execution of appropriate research methods, implementation and analysis of the study. The qualitative design complements this research as proposed by Okeke and Van Wyk (2015: 2009) in acknowledging that qualitative research is attentive to understanding how individuals construct meanings through their actions as they interact in their world. In this regard, the research attempted to understand how individuals experienced adjusting to the Loreto Convent School environment. Wahyuni (2012:71) has stated that qualitative

researchers obtain data that is rich in descriptions of social constructs. Thus, a qualitative approach allows for primary data from participants and thereby affirms more in-depth accounts to data (Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015:209).

Yin (2016:10) has explained that qualitative research is motivated by the will to explain how individuals socialise, behave and think about current and upcoming concepts. New concepts of social explanations and reasoning in terms of adjusting to the Catholic school environment emerged. The purpose of this qualitative approach is to understand and investigate a situation without an idea of what is to be uncovered (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018:89). Lastly, Yin (2016:8) elaborated that qualitative research has specific written orders and dispositions which include the case study approach. In this regard, it is of paramount importance to understand what a case study approach is and why it has been deemed the most appropriate instrument to use. In this chapter, the case study approach will be discussed in more detail in the methodology section.

3.4 Methodology

Important aspects previously identified are discussed in the methodology for this research. The methodology is a model that is useful to conduct research; it is placed in the context of a specific paradigm (Wahyuni, 2012:72). Also, the methodology is accompanied by a substantive theory that guides the process of gathering and analysis of data and interpretation of findings (Cohen et al., 2018:289). Lastly, methodology is characterised by an inductive approach, emerging themes, and is shaped by a researcher's experience in gathering and analysing data (Creswell, 2018:21). In this study, a case study approach is used as a process to gather data.

3.4.1 Case study approach

This study uses a case study approach, which I deemed the most suitable. Cohen et al., (2018:375) have pointed out that a case study assumes many definitions depending on the context. For instance, Yin (2014:16) reported that 'a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-world context.' In this study, real-world

context, explains the interrelated conditions of the school environment and learners' real life experiences in this environment. Furthermore, Yin (2009:18) outlined that a case study relies on multiple sources of evidence which include documentation, focus group and individual interviews, direct observations, and physical artefacts, which result in data triangulation.[28] In this case study, the data collection methods used are: individual interviews from both Grade 9 participants; two Grade 9 class teachers; field notes in the form of a reflective diary; and my personal experience of the school. Also, Rule and John (2011:5) identified a case study as a process that involves steps that are logically followed in a given context as a way of reaching out to people and places of information. Furthermore, they revealed that information is analysed and written as a report but is presented in an academic style. Thus, Cohen et al. (2018), Yin (2014), Rule and John (2011) presented a clear definition of a case study in a manner relevant to this research.

Given the various definitions and elaborations on what a case study is, a comprehensive definition for this research was extracted. I am of the opinion that a case study is a way of understanding the experiences of people in a given world or context through a procedural method. The use of individual, in-depth interviews with Grade 9 learners and their class teachers, fieldnotes and researcher's personal experiences at Loreto Convent Catholic school brought about an understanding of Grade 9 learners' experiences to adaptation. The school as the research site presents the context in which Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation to a denominational school environment first-hand. A comprehensive description of the school's background and context were discussed in Chapter 1 section 1.2., Cohen et al. (2018:376) highlighted the fact that distinctive contexts are characterised by a constant change in life and, therefore, case studies investigate real-life complexities, dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique way.

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[28] Triangulation is the use of more than one type of data collection method to ascertain credibility and validity. If the same methods are used again in the same case study, the results will be similar.

3.4.2 Type of case study

The study focused on a descriptive type of case study. Rule and Vaughn (2011:8) mentioned that case studies can be categorised according to purpose as exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. Furthermore, they explained that a descriptive case study was one that presented a complete outline of a phenomenon within its real context. Indeed, Baxter and Jack (2008:548) concurred that a descriptive type of study is used to describe a phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred. In this study, the experience of adaptation of Grade 9 learners in a denominational school environment was examined. More detailed descriptions of the context (denominational school) were examined as the background and contextual information of the study in Chapter 1 section 1.2. Gay, Mills, and Afrasian (2014:404) concluded that a descriptive case study is a narrative with more detailed explanations on the phenomenon and it incorporates many variables and analyses. However, a case study approach has its weaknesses and strengths which are outlined in the next section.

3.4.3 Pros and cons of case study approach

Case studies have several pros and cons which have been identified (Cohen et al., 2018:378). Despite this view, this study identified a case study as a suitable method of inquiry. Several strengths of a case study exist. First, Rule and John (2011:7) have suggested that a case study allows for an in-depth study of complex relations within a case. The adaptation of Grade 9 learners to a denominational school environment required an in-depth understanding of the denominational school in the society that it exists in. A denominational school is engulfed in the complexity of relations as supported by the CAS theory, as discussed in Chapter 2 section 2.9.2 of this study. It relates to other parts of the societal system (the external environment) such as the community, the Catholic Church, the Department of Education, the parents and other academic organisations. In this case, the internal school environmental variables included school identity, its culture, religious aspects, the school Code of Conduct policy and enrolment procedures.

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Secondly, a case study is flexible and can use a wide range of methods for data collection and data analysis (Rule & John, 2011:7). As discussed previously, this study focused on the following data collection methods, namely, individual in-depth interviews with two learners and their Grade 9 class teachers, fieldnotes in the form of a reflective diary and my personal experiences of the school. Furthermore, Gay et al. (2014:406) and Hamilton and Corbett-Whitter (2012:11) added that case studies use multiple data sources to triangulate and legitimise conclusions drawn.

Another advantage highlighted by Rule and John (2011:8) was that a case study is essential when time and resources are constrained. This was important, as this study had a set time frame in which it should be done. Hamilton and Corbett-Whitter (2012:11) further clarified that data may be collected intensively in a short period. I managed to collect data within a specific time frame for this study.

As pointed out earlier, the case study approach is not without its disadvantages. Thus, the weaknesses of a case study research are of concern and need to be mentioned. Yin (2014:28) outlined that a case study research does not allow for generalisability. In this research, generalisability to other denominational schools is not an attribute as the experience of adaptation by Grade 9 learners for this study is specific to a context. Cohen et al. (2018:379) have also emphasised that case study results may not be generalised unless an application is observed.[29] They have further added that another weakness of a case study is that it is not easily open to cross-checking and, as a result, may be selective, biased and subjective.

In conclusion, the advantages of using a case study for this research outweigh the disadvantages. In qualitative research, generalisability is found in a given context, and specific settings and subjects, instead of universally (Cohen et al., 2018:89). Given these criteria, a case study approach was appropriate for this qualitative research, since it was in a specified context, that is, the denominational school environment. Yet, identifying the pros and cons of this

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[29] See Chapter 1 section 1.16 on limitations of the study.

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research, type of study and the contextual definition of a case study for this research is not enough unless the case is well articulated.

3.4.4 The 'case' in this study

Rule and Vaughn (2011:18) have pointed out that one needs to be persuasive about exactly who or what the case in their study is. For Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011:294), a case study's unit(s) of analysis means the key issue in the study is comprised of individuals, a group, a community, an organisation, and other aspects. In this research, the unit of analysis was the Grade 9 learners who were newly introduced into the Catholic school environment in Grade 8. Several case studies have been previously conducted in South Africa and these are used to bring to attention, 'What is the case in this study?' One such example was used to illustrate how my study identified the 'case', as presented by Rule and Vaughn (2011:17), as seen in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Case study application

	Title of thesis	What is the case/? (Unit/s of analysis)	What is the focus of the study?	What is it a case of?	What the case is not
Example of a case study in South Africa	'The inclusion of learner with a physical disability in the ordinary school setting: a case study.'	A learner with physical ability.	Inclusion	Learners with a physical disability.	The case is not the school but the learner within the setting.
In my research	'Adaptation to a denominational school environment: a case study of Grade 9 learners in a Catholic school'	Grade 9 learners who have experienced adaptation in the Catholic school since Grade 8.	Adaptation	Learners' experiences	The case is not the denominational school but the Grade 9 learners' experiences in the school'.

Adapted from Rule and John (2011:17)

The unit of analysis is rooted in other sub-units of analysis that contribute towards enabling an understanding of the case under investigation (Rule & John, 2011:19). In this study, the themes are embedded units of analysis. These embedded units of analysis are the sub-units of analysis that emerge as themes and it is the gathered data that is discussed in Chapter 4 of the study. Cohen et al. (2011:294) have argued that sub-units may be incorporated into a unit of analysis under certain conditions, although these sub-units may require their data collection technique. In this study, only one unit of analysis was investigated, that is, the Grade 9 learners who enrolled at the school from Grade 8. In this case study, the Grade 9 learners were the

main participants in the study as they held the experiences to adaptation in the Catholic school environment. Baxter and Jack (2008:246) contended that the case to be investigated should be identified upfront to put in place the applicable boundaries to remain firmly focused on it (Rule & John, 2011:19).
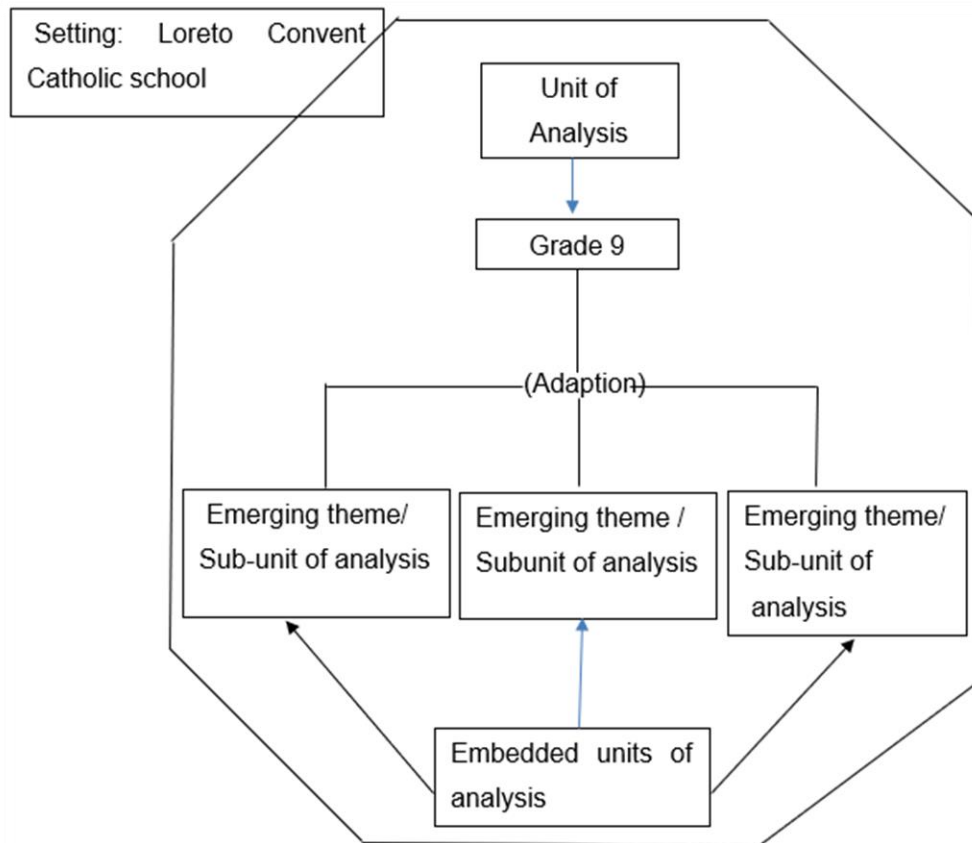
Figure 3.1: The unit of analysis and the embedded sub-units (Adapted from Rule and John (2011:18))

Figure 3.1 shows the 'position' of the embedded units that are well-connected to the unit of analysis at the top; that is, connected to the Grade 9 learners. The unit of analysis is not isolated from the school system and hence that part of the school system overlaps to the experience of adaptation and the specified embedded units. All in all, Rule and John (2011:19) have suggested that a case study incorporates certain aspects, specific participants and excludes others and this contributes to the richness, depth and texture of the case study. All in all, this led to a procedural activity that was implemented by the research assistant on my behalf to gather data that would result in the

embedded themes. The activity of gathering data started with voluntary participation by Grade 9 learners in order to extract eligible participants for the study. This required clarity to be given as to how both the population and sample aspects of the study were tackled. In this regard, the population and sampling aspects of the study are discussed in the next section.

3.5 Population and Sampling

3.5.1 Population identification

In this study, the population consisted of all 84 Grade 9 learners who were in the early and middle adolescence developmental stage between 11 and 17 years of age at a Catholic secondary school in Gauteng. This is discussed in literature review in Chapter 2. A population is generally is made up of all individuals that the researcher is interested in studying (Morgan & Sklar 2012:69). A closer view on population identification, according to Creswell (2014:407), identifies a population in survey studies as representing a group of individuals having a similar characteristic that differentiates them from other groups. Although Creswell's definition focused on surveys, it fits in well with the definition of the population for this case study research. Similar characteristics were revealed by the volunteer to participate (VTP) forms, which showed that all Grade 9 learners were adolescents and they all started Grade 8 in the previous year. This led to the assumption that the Grade 9 learners may have had subjective experiences of the school environment.

The VTP form assisted in reducing the non-response error in participation, thereby allowing a better screening mechanism (Creswell, 2014:408). Gay et al. (2014:406) had emphasised that screening helps the case study researcher to assess whether the participant has the required experience or prior knowledge of the phenomenon under study. This conforms to the epistemological perspective already mentioned in the paradigm section 3.2.2, stipulating that participants should possess the prior knowledge and lived experiences in the Catholic school (Creswell & Poth, 2018:21)

However, Leedy and Ormrod (2014:154) proposed that to collect rich data, qualitative researchers do not involve all individuals in the population, they

purposively select them according to the purpose of the research. Information on the VTP forms indicated that not all Grade 9 learners were willing to participate in the research. Gay et al. (2014:406) acknowledged that in case study research it is essential to determine the willingness of individuals who want to participate in the study and understand the nature of the commitment involved, hence not all Grade 9 learners were participants in this research. A selection process was necessary to select only those learners who were non-Catholics and were introduced to the denominational school environment for first time in Grade 8. To do this, there was a need to identify the target population.

3.5.2 Target population criteria

Creswell (2014:407) elaborated that a target population or sample frame is the actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected. In this research, there are 43 Grade 9 learners who comprised the sampling frame. McMillan & Schumacher (2014:143) supported the idea that the sampling frame consists of individuals from whom the sample is selected, and this places some limitations on generalisation. The results may not be generalised to all the 84 Grade 9 learners in the research but only to the target population. For example, in the Grade 9 population, some of the learners progressed into secondary school within the same school environment, as indicated in the VTP forms. The selection process allowed the screening of Grade 9 learners into those learners from within the target population and it excluded all Grade 9 learners not targeted in the population (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:143). Consequently, Bless, Higson-Smiths and Kagee (2006:9) reported that a sample is deemed good when the target population is well-defined, adequately chosen and representative of the sample. For this reason, it is important to identify a population in terms of its target and size (Cohen et al., 2018:225) in order to extract the required sample.

3.5.3 Sampling Technique

3.5.3.1 Sampling

Creswell (2014:407) has suggested that the sample is the group of participants in a study selected from the target population and the researcher generalises to this selected target population. Okeke and Van Wyk (2015:229) acknowledged that a sample in a case study is a specific sub-group of the population that the researcher is interested in. Further population screening was necessary to extract individuals of interest to this research. In this study, a sample of 28 Grade 9 learners was drawn from a target population of 43 learners who had already indicated that they were willing to participate in the in-depth individual interviews. The 28 participants were deemed to possess information rich in the realities of the experience of adaptation in the Catholic school environment (Gay et al., 2014:206). Therefore, the 28 participants sampled depended on research questions of the study (Leedy and Ormrod, 2014:154) and other criteria concerns elaborated in section 3.5.3.3 below

3.5.3.2 Sample size

The sample comprised 28 eligible participants who were rigorously selected, as outlined in section 3.7 of this chapter. In qualitative research, samples can range from one to forty or more participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:142). Morgan & Sklar (2012:73) has stated that in qualitative research, rich data on the phenomenon is obtained from small samples and there is no sample size that is the correct size. Gay et al. (2014:406) specified that in case study research, a small number of individuals is selected as the sample size and that this will assist the researcher to understand how Grade 9 learners experience adaptation to the Catholic school environment. Careful consideration was given to the criteria for the 28 participants who were eligible for this research (Maree & Pietersen (2007:178).

3.5.3.3 Sample criteria

Maree & Pietersen (2007:178) has pointed out that, for the sample to be a representative of the population, it depends on the homogeneity of the population with respect to the variables that are important to the study. In this

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study, the sample was comprised of learners who had joined the school in the previous year and who came from other schools that were not necessarily Catholic by denomination. The exclusion criteria of the sample also considered learners who had progressed to secondary school from the primary school and who may have previously experienced the Catholic school environment in relation to adaptation. Another criterion stipulated that the sample should be in line with the purpose of the study, research problem, data collection strategy and availability of rich information (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:142;Morgan & Sklar 2012:73). In this study, the assumption was that the 28 participants would enable me to understand how the Grade 9 learners adapted to the Catholic school environment. Lastly, the most important criterion for sampling the 28 Grade 9 learners was the willingness of these individuals to take part in the research. Their willingness to participate was indicated in three stages: first in the volunteer-to-participate forms; secondly, by the consent letters signed by both the participants and parents; and thirdly, by being willing to participate, so that the participants could provide in-depth information that addressed the research problem (Gay et al., 2014:406). However, in selecting the research participants, qualitative researchers should be mindful of time constraints, participants' availability and participants' interest (Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015:35). Only 10 participants of the sample were randomly selected to take part in the interview sessions, as all 28 participants could not be interviewed due to time constraints. Further pros and cons of the study were discussed inn section 3.4.3.

3.6 Non-probability sampling technique

In qualitative research, non-probability, purposive samples are utilised (Cohen et al., 2018:219). Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016:1) acknowledged that sampling is a technique that involves obtaining samples using a process that does not give all the participants of a sample an equal chance of inclusion. As alluded to earlier, not all 28 eligible participants were given a chance to participate in the research due to time constraints. Only 10 participants were selected to participate in the in-depth individual interviews, as they were willing to take part in the study. Etikan et al., (2016:2) shared that in qualitative research the researcher decides what needs to be known and finds the

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appropriate participants who are willing to share their experiences. Bless et al., (2006:100) also acknowledged that some elements from the population may not be included during the process of non-probability sampling. Furthermore, she argued that this is a drawback in that generalisability becomes highly questionable. For this reason, case study researchers typically use non-probability, purposive samples and the sample needs to be relevant to the case study being analysed (Cohen et al., 2018:386). In this study, the Grade 9 learners who were willing to participate, were deemed to be the most suitable and relevant participants in the investigation of their experience to adaptation in the Catholic school environment. From the outset, Cohen et al. (2018:386) remarked that it was of importance that in a case study the sample was suitable to specific people or issues.

3.6.1 Purposive sampling method

In case study research, the purposive sampling method is commonly used based on the main assumption that the researcher intends to explore a sample to draw meaningful conclusions from it (Gay et al., 2014:406). Another important dimension is presented by Etikan et al. (2016:1) who has reported that, in purposive sampling, a researcher has a preconceived idea on the issue under investigation and thus participants who suit the purpose of the study are included. Inclusion assumptions for the participants were that the Catholic school environment offered a new experience, as it was an unfamiliar environment and that learners from other denominations or no religious affiliation could have had variable experiences in adapting to the school. These inclusion assumptions called for purposive sampling in this case study. A noticeable benefit of purposive sampling in case study research is that the data collected contains more detailed information. It was hoped that the information collected would be comprehensive concerning how Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation within a Catholic school environment.

3.6.2 Homogeneous sampling consideration

The VTP form and the baseline questionnaire were used to ensure some homogeneity of the sample. The baseline questionnaire was used to identify similar characteristics for the sampling purpose and not as a data set for this

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study. It was administered during the interview session with the learners. (See Appendix 2 for the baseline questionnaire). 'Homogeneous' explains the similar characteristics for a sampled group to be studied, for example, the 10 participants for this study indicated on the baseline questionnaire that they were between the ages of 14 and 15 years of age. Etikan et al. (2016:3) reported that homogeneous sampling is necessary when specific characteristics are pointed out, such as culture, age and life experiences. The VTP forms included information about when the Grade 9 learners first joined the school, whether they belonged to a Catholic denomination, as well as whether they wanted to be selected for the research. The VTP form was filled in by all Grade 9.[30] Cohen et al. (2018:218) summed up those criteria as essential for judgement and purposive sampling to be achievable in qualitative research. The detailed sampling and interview procedures are discussed in detail in the following section.

3.7 Activity on voluntary participation

3.7.1 The research assistant

I approached the school social worker so that she could assist with the baseline questionnaire, VTP forms and individual learner interviews as I was a Grade 9 class teacher in that year and taught all the Grade 9 learners. I wanted to exclude bias in the sampling and interview processes. I was also conflicted in that I interacted with the majority of Grade 9 learners on a day to day basis, especially during the conduction of my teaching responsibilities.

The social worker as the research assistance was asked to do the interviews as a measure of trustworthiness to exclude my bias. She was also familiar with the specific ethos of the school and the challenges that learners may have encountered. She conducted the activities on the VTP form, baseline questionnaire and the in-depth individual interviews with the learners but she excluded the learners she had seen before in her social work field in the sample.[31] The social worker signed a confidentiality letter agreeing that

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[30] See section 3.7.2 on the actual activity with participants in step 2.
[31] See section 3.7.2 step 3 and 4).

learners' names, interview sessions, audio recordings, and sampling process would be kept confidential. The social worker also signed a letter of consent acknowledging that she had volunteered to carry out the sampling process, baseline questionnaire and individual in-depth interview with learners. She was, however, not involved in the data analysis, which was done by me after she had interviewed the learners and collected the data.

The social worker received guidance on how to carry out the interviewing process through a dummy activity with me and a teacher who had volunteered. The teacher and researcher assisted in identifying flaws in the activities before the social worker performed the actual activity. The next section gives a detailed account of the sampling and interview procedure followed by the social worker.

3.7.2 The actual activity with participants

The VTP form was given to all Grade 9 learners to recruit the learners who wanted to voluntarily participate. The participants voluntarily contributed and therefore could withdraw at any stage of the process as stated in the consent letter sent out to be signed by their parents and/or guardians to indicate that they were fully aware of what they were involving themselves in. I was not in any way involved in the sampling process for the 10 Grade 9 learners who were the participants to be interviewed, preferring to make use of the school social worker to perform the interviewing task. Finally, to eliminate any form of bias during the interviewing process, the interviewer was required to be of a certain professional status that would best ensure that learners would freely express themselves, and only the social worker possessed these qualities. Thus, the social worker carried out the sampling of eligible candidates using a four-step process. The four-step process is now outlined in more detail.

Step 1: Student briefing

The process started with a short briefing in the presence of the social worker and the school principal. I informed the learners that the purpose of the research was to investigate how Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation to the Catholic school environment. I elaborated and simplified it to, What has

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been your experience in Loreto Convent School since Grade 8 up to now in Grade 9? I also made the learners understand that I was the one doing the study, but I was not to be involved in the sampling and interview process so that they could comfortably participate in the interview process of the research.

Step 2: Volunteer to Participate Form

I then informed the learners that she was handing out a form to everyone in the class. She clarified that the form was called a Volunteer to Participate Form (VTP). She also explained that the purpose of the form was to see who was willing to participate in the research? The form ensured voluntary participation. The social worker then took over and she read the form with the learners (see appendix 1 - the Volunteer to Participate Form). The forms were placed in a box by the learners after responding. Only the social worker had full access to the VTP forms in the boxes and thus screened them to ensure that only the relevant forms remained.

Step 3: Screening of participants and ethical consideration

The social worker then drew out the names of the learners who indicated that they were willing to participate in individual interviews. This ensured that I was not aware of who the participants were. I acknowledged that the process excluded me from knowing who was to be interviewed and that no names were used in the interviews – this was solely for research purposes. I explained that I was conflicted as I taught Grade 9 learners and their individual experiences were deemed sensitive. As a result, I as the researcher, I was not available to witness the first-hand information during the individual in-depth interviews.

The social worker then purposively looked through the completed forms and took out the names of the candidates she interviewed. The reason for this selection was to eliminate candidates who had a previous or current relationship with the social worker. The social worker then identified the learners who would participate but these learners did not know who had been chosen. This also ensured that there was no breach of the confidentiality agreement between a learner and the other learners. The social worker then purposively chose only those learners she had not encountered in her social

work field before. In other words, this was to be the participant's first encounter with the social worker through this research. The social worker best knew the Grade 9 learners whom she had already seen in her field of work. She reminded them that they would have to volunteer to participate and that they were not forced to do so. They would later sign letters of consent with their parents.[32]

Besides the confidentiality clause, this also ensured that the dilemma of a dual role in the relationship of power over participants. This would be possible if I was to be directly involved with participants in the research. They also encountered their first meeting with the social worker in this research. This meant that the social worker did not know the learner from her past work as a social worker in the school.

Step 4: Letter of invitation to participate

Once the learners showed a willingness to participate, a letter of invitation to participate was given out. This letter invited the learners to willingly participate if they wished to do so. The learners were asked to inform their parents to permit them to participate. A letter of consent was sent out to the parents through the learners concerning this research and the activities to be carried out.

The principal of the school gave permission for Grade 9 class teachers to be interviewed as well (see permission letter in Appendix 1). In the year of this study, I was a Grade 9 class teachers and I was not involved as I was the interviewer for the class teachers. The two Grade 9 class teachers were asked if they were willing to volunteer to take part in the research through in-depth interviews. A letter of invitation to participate was sent to the teacher only if the teacher wanted to take part. The letter acknowledged that I would carry out the individual in-depth interviews and do audio recordings with the class teachers.[33] The teacher's participation remained confidential and their names were anonymous, as they used pseudonyms for the interview purpose. The

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[32] See Appendix 2 – Letter of request to Grade 9 learners to participate in the study.
[33] See Appendix 2 for the teacher's letter of request to participate in the interview.

two Grade 9 class teachers signed the letters of consent only if they wished to participate. If they were unwilling to participate, another teacher who was a Grade 8 teacher in the previous year was to be approached. The two Grade 9 class teachers were willing to take part in the in-depth individual interview with me as the interviewer. The class teachers' interview question was posed as, What are the experiences of Grade 9 class teachers to the adaptation of Grade 9 learners in a denominational school environment? The data from the teachers' interviews became part of the data for this case study. Multiple data sources were employed in this case study.

3.8 Data collection techniques

Cohen et al. (2018:387) and Yin (2014:106) identified multiple sources of data namely, documentation, interviews, observations, and physical artefacts. Yin (2009:102) elaborated that a researcher may use all the data sources or some depending on research questions. This research attempted to use individual in-depth interviews for both learner participants and Grade 9 class teachers, field notes (reflective diary) and my personal experience in the school. The in-depth interviews allowed for participants' experiences to be narrated and interpreted.[34] The field notes allowed for a better understanding of the school set-up and day-to-day activities and events in the Catholic school environment. The field notes gave a reflection on my school experiences as an educator and also acted as a memoir for Chapter 4 data analysis.[35] A case study allows for a thorough in-depth extraction of information. It uses various data collection methods and it is manageable in terms of trying to minimise bias. For example, for the in-depth individual interviews, the school social worker as the research assistance was chosen to facilitate the interviews instead of myself. The social worker interviewed only 10 participants in the Catholic school to obtain the research data and I interviewed two Grade 9 class teachers. The data sources for this research are now discussed.

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[34] See Chapter 4 on learners' experiences and the Grade 9 class teachers' experiences.
[35] See Appendix 10 on field notes.

Interviews are widely used in case studies. This study specifically uses the individual in-depth interview. Siedman (2013:9) has pointed out that the purpose of interviewing lies in seeking understanding in the lived experience of individuals and making meaning out of these experiences. In support, in a paradigmatic standard, Wayhuni (2012:71) clarified that interpretive resources prefer dialogue with participants which enables adequate comprehending experiences and subjective meaning. Dialogue is enabled through in-depth individual interviews with participants. The participants were the current Grade 9 learners during the time of the study. Ten Grade 9 learners were interviewed. Siedman (2013:14) further added that in-depth interview enabled the participant to recreate his/her experiences in the topic under study while the interviewer built and explored the interviewee's responses. An audio tape recorder was used by the social worker during the interview. The interview as a data collection method posed concerns about ethics. First, this was deemed a sensitive topic as other learner's experiences may have been embarrassing or uncomfortable to share with others. Secondly, the anonymity of learners was essential to protect the identities of the participants.

The 10 learners who were the participants used pseudonym names to protect their identities. The Grade 9 class teachers used pseudonym names for their individual interviews for non-identification and confidential reasons. The interviews were carried out in the social worker's office where it was quiet and enclosed. The participants' names were not revealed according to the confidentiality clause in the consent letters. The participants were asked to use identification codes so that no one could trace their identities from the audio recordings. The parents or guardians were asked to give consent for their children to participate in the interview and have their voices recorded. Only audio recordings were used which meant that there were voice recordings only. The social worker placed the voice recorder in the interview room. There was no video taken as I did not want to see who was interviewed for confidential reasons. Some questions that were asked in the interview were added later in the addendum section of the study. The question posed to the participants was, What has been your experience in a Catholic School? That is, what you have experienced since being at this school last year in Grade 8

up to present? (see Appendix 7). The question posed to the Grade 9 class teachers was, What has been your experience to Grade 9 learners' adaptation to the Catholic school environment as they join the school in Grade 8 and progress to Grade 9?

3.9 Research site

The research site for this study was Loreto Convent Catholic School in Pretoria. Maree (2016:36) explained that a research site is an area where the research is carried out. Creswell (2014:37) added that researchers should respect the site on which their research is taking place by asking for permission before entering a site and being a guest rather than an insider. Permission was granted by the school principal to carry out the research in the school.[36]

3.10 Validity and reliability

3.10.1 A brief insight into validity and reliability

Validity and reliability measure credibility and trustworthiness, respectively. In this case study, areas of concern of reliability and validity were addressed. However, a deeper understanding of these concepts in qualitative research and specific case study research was necessary.

Validity is defined as knowing if one has achieved an acceptable level of valid research (Cohen, 2018:245). Furthermore, Cohen (2018:45) has argued that if research is classified as invalid, it is a worthless study. Reliability is concerned with dependability, consistency, and replicability of time over instruments and over groups of respondents (Cohen, 2018:268). adds that Reliability is concerned with repeating the same case study and arriving at the same findings and conclusions (Yin, 2014:48).

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[36] See Appendix 1 the letter from the principal granting permission for the studies to be carried out in the school.

3.10.2 Reliability of the case study approach

Individual in-depth interviews were executed by the social worker as the facilitator. This was to minimise concerns of bias. Besides the confidential clause, this ensured the dilemma of a dual role in the relationship of power over participants since I was not directly involved with them in the research. They also encountered their first meeting with the social worker in this research. This meant the social worker did not know the learners from her past work as a social worker in the school. If the same participants had to repeat the same activities and interviews in the same way, similar results must be collected.

3.11 Ethical clearance

The level of ethical considerations displayed is an indication of the high level of professional integrity applied in the research. Confidentiality of information, results, and findings were expected to comply with all the requirements set by the University of Pretoria. I also familiarised myself with the ethical policy of the Department through her academic supervisor. The protection of participants' identities by using fictitious names ensured the confidentiality of the 10 participants. Letters of consent were sent to Grade 9 parents since the Grade 9 learners were classified as minors in this research and therefore had limited capacity to independently make decisions. The primary purpose of the letters of consent was to seek permission to interview Grade 9 learners using audio tapes. According to Cohen et al. (2018:89), a case study research safeguards participants and sensitive research information. Even though I am teacher at the school, I still followed the school protocol by seeking permission to carry out the interviews with the Grade 9 learners to ensure professional research was conducted with all participants at the site. Permission was granted by the school principal.[37]

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[37] See Appendix 1 for the consent from the school principal.

3.12 Conclusion

The research paradigm in the form of the interpretive paradigm was extensively discussed to understand the specific situation of the study. The ontological approach was chosen for this study, as it supported the view that Grade 9 learners who joined and learnt in a Catholic school interacted socially with the school environment as the natural setting in which they existed. Next, the advantages and disadvantages of the interpretivist approach were presented. The research design was then presented to show that the use of the qualitative approach acted as a guide to plan, execute appropriate research methods, implement and analyse the study. The case study approach used to collect data for the study was discussed as it was deemed the most suitable approach to apply. Finally, the procedure followed to come up with the sample of Grade 9 learners who participated in the interview was discussed to demonstrate its robustness and the fact that it was free from any form of bias.

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CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters included a literature review and a discussion of the related complex adaptive system (CAS) as a theoretical account of the research. An account of the methodologies and paradigm applied were set out. Ethical issues were carefully taken into account during the study as participants were adolescents and classified as minors.

This chapter focuses on data interpretation, presentation and a thematic analysis of interviews of 10 Grade 9 learners and how they experienced adaptation in a Catholic school environment. The outcome of the interpretation of the experiences to adaptation is then organised into categories, sub-themes and major themes. I engaged Tesch's eight steps of the coding process as applied by Creswell and Creswell (2018:194) to generate a description of the collected data and detailed interpretation. Data was analysed and presented as themes. The generated themes were discussed with mostly in vivo coding as the dominating coding method that honours and prioritises participants' voices (Saldana, 2016:294). Other coding methods used were values coding, pattern coding and attribute coding. A conclusion was then drawn for this chapter. In the next section the overview process that led to the generation of themes is discussed.

4.2 An overview of theme formulation process

The data description and interpretation led to the formulation of three major themes for analysis. In addition, the I utilised Saldana's (2016) paradigmatic, conceptual and methodological considerations. This approach was used in the coding process as a strategy for justification in the coding, interpretation and analysis of data. The coding process and strategies gave birth to three themes reflecting the Grade 9 learner's experiences to adaptation to a Catholic school environment. A sequence of how I arrived at the three themes used for data discussion is summarised in Figure 4.1 as a process of theme formulation.
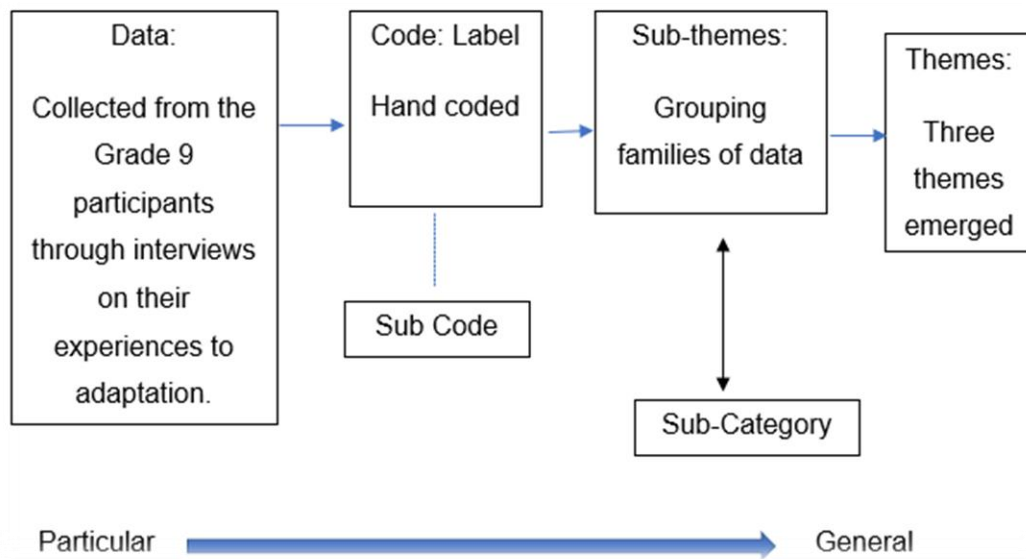
Figure 4.1: General Process of theme formulation (Adapted from Saldana (2016:14))

The flow in the formulation of the three major themes is from particular to general, specifically from the raw data to the themes as indicated in the figure above. The raw data was obtained from the 10 participants. An understanding of the participants' profiles is of importance as they provided the data to be coded.

4.3 Participants' profiles

In the following section, an overview of the participants' profiles is summarised. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, a baseline questionnaire was employed as a sampling tool. The questionnaire revealed that all participants were adolescents, entering a secondary school in a denominational environment. The 10 participants' demographic details are presented in Table 4.1. As already noted in Chapter 3, pseudonyms were used for the 10 participants in order to protect their identities and in this chapter the pseudonyms are maintained.

Table 4.1: Profile of interviewed participants

Name	Gender	Age	Year joined	1st time entering Grade 8	Influence to joining the school
A	F	14	2018	2018	Mother
B	F	14	2018	2018	Parents
C	F	14	2018	2018	Parents
D	F	14	2018	2018	Mother
E	F	14	2018	2018	Parents
F	F	15	2018	2018	Mine
G	F	14	2018	2018	Mother
H	F	14	2018	2018	Mother
I	F	14	2018	2018	Parents
J	F	15	2018	2018	Parents

The participants were all female students as the school is a single sex school from Grade 8 to Grade 12. All participants were adolescents in the age range of 14 to 15 years, and they were in the senior phase in Grade 9, based on South African education system (Macha & Kadakia 2017:n.p). It appears as though parents played a big role in influencing the decision to join the Catholic school. For example, participant C[38] responded that she liked Catholic schools and even her father, who believed that Catholic schools were more disciplined and preferred them. In another example, participant F[39] responded that her mother liked the discipline in a Catholic school. All participants joined the school in 2018 for Grade 8 level for the first time. The participants were all interviewed individually, and their interviews transcribed to text, which was utilised as raw data as it was filled with in-depth experiences.

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[38] Participant C13 (lines 74) is the identification code for participant C on the transcript, the page 13 and line 74 as on the printout.
[39] Participant F2 (lines 48-50) Identification code for Participant F on the transcript, pages 2 and lines 48-50 on the printout.

4.4 Detailed account of participants' narratives

Participants gave a detailed account of their experience in adapting to a denominational school environment. The participants shared their experiences during the interview sessions and their responses were recorded and transcribed into qualitative data. The interpretive philosophy employed sought to find meaning from the qualitative data collected from the participants' experiences. Thus, the interpretive philosophy was applied in order to establish how the Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation in a denominational school environment. The philosophy allowed for analysis of participants' perceptions, attitude, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences, that allowed for the construction of the phenomenon sourced in the qualitative data. Cohen (2018:645) affirmed that qualitative data analysis is typically inductive, with the researcher developing interpretations of the data and deriving themes which explain the phenomenon. An epistemological understanding of a phenomenon in qualitative research seeks to explore the real experience of Grade 9 learners to adaption of a denominational school (Saldana, 2013:61). To gain an understanding of the participant's experience, a coding process was deemed necessary. Importantly, consideration was also put into the coding strategies and methods which will be discussed below.

4.5 Coding strategies and methods

4.5.1 The research question as a coding strategy

I used the main research question as a guiding tool in interpreting and analysing the data. The main research question reads: How do Grade 9 learners experience adaptation in a denominational school environment? Linneberg and Korsberg (2019:259) have emphasised that first and foremost one should always keep the main research question in mind while analysing data. This was important to code the relevant data. Secondly, I made a judgement about the meaning of the sentences and paragraphs of the transcripts which enabled a deep, comprehensive insight into the data. Lastly, the researcher kept in mind the fact that codes are created as a means to understand the phenomenon and/or participants and their perspective (Linneberg & Korsberg 2019:259). I sought to understand the experiences of

Grade 9 learners to adapting to the Catholic school environment through reading the transcripts several times and assigning labels, thereby coding. Furthermore, the researcher understood that in trying to assign meaning to data, the codes emerged inductively (Linneberg & Korsberg, 2019:262).

4.5.2 Reading and rereading as a mechanism of interpretation

The mechanisms of interpretation and creating meaning may not be the same, however, as a social researcher, one seeks the rigorous interpretation of data and the production of new knowledge. In view of this, the stance utilised by the researcher considered both the qualitative case study and the analytical approach to be unique (Cohen et al., 2018:677). Furthermore, qualitative study is unique and there is no one who can claim final authority on the best way to code data (Saldana 2016:69). The researcher, however, takes various strategies into consideration to best code the data and construct knowledge. The researcher read the data several times, identified patterns, inconsistences, unexpected features and contradictions between groups, within groups, and between participants in what they said (Cohen 2018:677).

Importantly, while the researcher had no influence on the data collection process, she reviewed the collected data before deciding, in vivo, on the attributes, values and patterns as the coding methods to be used (Saldana, 2013:59-60). The researcher kept an open mind when reviewing the data and allowed these coding methods to construct knowledge. This approach yielded a substantive analysis which is termed 'pragmatic eclecticism', as it allowed for ideas or styles to be incorporated for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Saldana, 2016:70). The different coding methods were used as styles in understanding the phenomenon.

The coding methods that were used are explained and applied in the research in Table 4.2 that follows.

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Table 4.2 Coding methods and application (Source: own construction)

Coding method	Explanation	Application in this Research
Attribute coding (first cycle coding method)	Encompasses basic descriptive information such as field setting, participant characteristics or demographics data format or other variables of interests with multiple participants (Saldana 2016: 291)	**-** Characteristics of pattern participants are Grade 9 level and age range of 14 to 15 years. **-** Other variables of interest. They are all female learners as indicated on baseline questionnaire. **-** Influence to joining the school by participants. It appears to be both the parents, mother and at times the participant. 'Provides participants essential information' (Saldana, 2016:83).
In vivo coding (first cycle coding method)	Participants' own language forms interviews becomes data that is used as words or phrases (Saldana, 2016: 294-295). Furthermore, in vivo is suitable for qualitative research that prioritise and honour participant's voice.	- Adolescents' voices are often marginalised and in vivo allows for understanding of the Grade 9s' experiences to adaptation in a Catholic school environment. Primary goal was to capture meanings embedded in the participants' experiences using their words known as verbatim principle (Saldana 2016: 106).
Values coding (first cycle coding method)	A strategic coding method used in qualitative data reflecting values, attitudes and beliefs of participants as experienced and perceived by them (Saldana 2016:131). Furthermore, values are the principles, moral codes and norms that individuals live by. Attitudes described as the way we feel about ourselves,	Appropriate for this case study, research design as the study seeks an understanding of Grade 9 learners' experiences in the Catholic school environment. Value coding allows for exploration of cultural values, belief systems, identity, intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences of the participants in

	other people or ideas. Belief is part of a system that includes our values and attitude including personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals and interpretive perceptions of the social world.	the Catholic school environment (Saldana 2016:132). 'Indeed, codes sometimes spring directly form data often from phrases used by research participants' (Cope 2017:4).
Pattern coding (second cycle coding method)	Useful in identifying similarly coded data. The coded data is grouped into sets, sub-themes or constructs that attributes meaning (Saldana 2016:296). Furthermore, appropriate for developing major themes examining social relations and patterns of human relations. In addition, pattern coding assists one in understanding social phenomena as it allows for openness to emergence of new or unexpected patterns (Cope, 2017:4).	Secondary coding gives rise to patterns that indicate similarities, differences, constructs that were constructed from Grade 9 participants' interviews of their whole experience to adaptation in a denominational school environment (Cope, 2017:3).

The above table gives a comprehensive understanding of my considerations on coding strategies and methods. Other coding strategies and methods included by me are ontological and epistemological understandings of the research as discussed in the next section 4.5.3.

4.5.3 Ontological and epistemological understanding

The central research question and sub-question seek answers and these lead to specific coding choices (Saldana 2016:70). Furthermore, Saldana (2016:70) has expressed that research questions must smoothly fuse with ontological and epistemological reasoning. For instance, the sub-question in this research

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posed was: What are the experiences of Grade 9 to adaptation in a denominational school environment? This suggests an exploration of personal interpretive meanings that are embedded in the data. Table 4.3 is an application of the summary of the research question, meaning and coding method appropriate for coding in a qualitative study (Saldana, 2013:61) emanating from ontological and epistemological understandings.

Table 4.3 Coding and methods (Source: Saldana (2013: 61))

Two types of exploratory research questions	Meaning	Example	Coding method Chosen
(i)Type 1 Ontological research question	Capturing participants' realities	Sub-question: 'What are the experiences of Grade 9 learners to adaptation in a Catholic school?'	• Attribute • In vivo • Values
(ii)Type 2 Epistemological research question	Understanding of phenomenon of interest	Central question: 'How do Grade 9 learners experience adaptation in a denominational school?'	• Pattern

As shown in Table 4.3, the coding methods chosen are appropriate for the type of research question. The coding methods used in this research are attribute, in vivo, values and pattern. These codes were utilised in the coding process using Tesch's coding process.

Various perspectives were considered before carefully deciding on the best coding method to use. Firstly, the values coding was appropriate, as Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation in a Catholic school. The learners reflected their values, attitudes and beliefs representing their world view. Secondly, in qualitative analysis, case studies include cultural values, identity, intra-

personal and interpersonal experiences of participants which were experienced in the denominational school environment as evident in the data interpretation and analysis of data (Saldana, 2016:69). The strategies and methods chosen and explained in section 4.5 became part of the coding process. The next section presents an insight into understanding Tesch's eight steps in the coding process, which leads to the formulation of themes.

4.6 The coding process and its application

4.6.1 Flow diagram of Tesch's eight steps of coding process

Tesch's eight steps coding process was used to code, synthesise, categorise and formulate themes using the raw data as the basis. A diagrammatic flow of the coding process is outlined in Figure 4.2, the utilization of Tesch's eight steps in the coding processes.

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        ┌─────────────────────────┐
        │ Interpreting the meaning │
        │   of themes/descriptions │
        └─────────────────────────┘
                    ▲
        ┌─────────────────────────┐
        │  Interrelating Themes/   │
        │ description e.g. Case study│
        └─────────────────────────┘
            ▲              ▲
    ┌────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
    │   Themes   │   │ Description  │
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        ┌─────────────────────────┐
        │     Coding the Data      │
        │   By hand or computer    │
        └─────────────────────────┘
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        │  Reading through all data│
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        │ Organizing and preparing │
        │    data for analysis     │
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        │ Raw data (Transcripts,   │
        │ field notes, images etc. │
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Validating the accuracy of the information
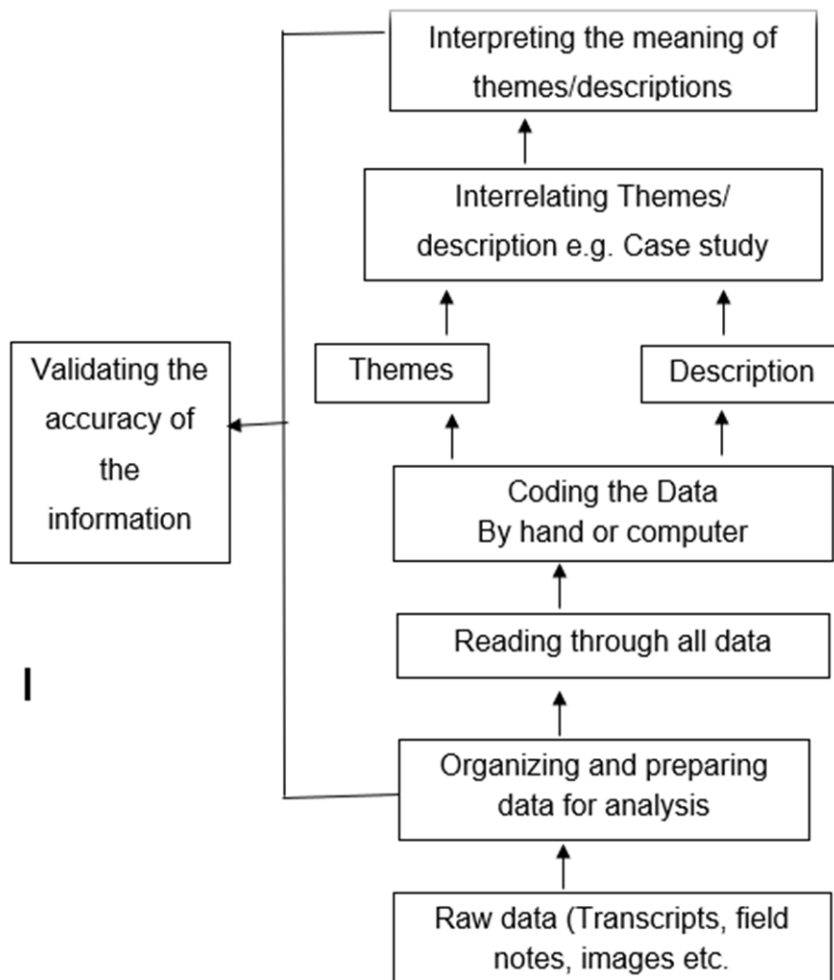
Figure 4.2: Tesch's eight steps in the coding processes [Source: Creswell and Creswell (2018:194)]

All the 10 participants were individually interviewed, audio-recorded and the content from the recordings was transcribed into text. Transcribing is commonly used in qualitative research where researchers want a written version of interactions with participants (Cope, 2017:1). Professional transcribers were engaged to transcribe into text as transcribing manually was tedious (Cope, 2017:2). Moore and Llompart (2017:408) have pointed out that Computer-Assisted Qualitative Analysis Software (CAQDAS) packages such as Atlas offer a sophisticated way of putting all interview information into text. The text became the raw data for the coding process.

Once the data was transcribed into text, I read through all the interview data a number of times to ensure thoroughness. I listened to the audio-recorded

interviews and paid close attention to non-word-audible expressions such as laughter, emphasis, pauses, and sighs to assist in interpreting the text (Cope 2017:1). The third round of reading the raw data prepared me to start assigning codes to it.

Creswell and Creswell (2018:192) and Cope (2017:5) have revealed that some researchers hand-code while others use computer-aided qualitative data analysis software programs. In this study, I used hand-coding. Note cards, coloured pens, highlighters, stickers, whiteboard diagrams and a list of codes and relationships were utilised (Cope, 2017:5). A systematic approach was followed in the coding process as Tesch's method is procedural.

The researcher, having familiarised herself with the interviews, assigned information codes at the edges of the margins (Creswell and Creswell 2018:193). The text for all the participants was detailed and the researcher winnowed the data to only focus on the relevant data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:92). More than 100 codes were generated when the data was organised into chunks of data – this became the first cycle of the coding process. Coding occurred in cycles. Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019:264) have suggested that it is helpful to have two cycles in an inductive coding approach. The first coding cycle tends to be more information-centric, while the second coding cycle is more research-centric as concepts, themes and dimensions upgrade the analysis to a higher level and enable patterns, similarities and differences to be noticeable. The codes were, however, reduced to between 50 to 70 as the researcher used selected codes repeatedly, identified patterns and sub-categories emerged (Saldana, 2016:79). Furthermore, one must code only the most important data that is relevant termed 'corpus relevant text' (Saldana, 2016:80). Sub-themes led to the themes in the second coding phase.

In general, up to five to seven themes are generated through the process of coding and these are the major findings in qualitative studies (Creswell & Creswell 2018:194). However, in this study, the sub-themes led to three main themes emerging and three themes is an elegant number for reporting qualitative research (Saldana, 2013:24) . Descriptions were generated of the Catholic school environment and the participants' experiences to adaption in

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the school which emerged as the three themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:194). Furthermore, researchers embarking on case studies generate codes for designing detailed descriptions and these descriptions are useful for discussions in the analysis of data. This section 4.6.1 has presented an insight into how I went about to arriving at the three themes to be discussed in the next section.

4.6.2 Utilisation of the coding process

This study employed coding as a tool to analyse transcripts and to make sense of the data collected. There are various methods of analysis such as critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis, content analysis, hermeneutics and coding (Cope, 2017:5). The coding process was suitable for this data analysis since the process allowed for a more general to specific procedure in analysing the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:198). Furthermore, the specific procedure involved steps immersed in specific qualitative design such as a case study, which involved a detailed description of the denominational school environment as the setting and the participants involved, accompanied by an analysis of the data for themes (Creswell & Creswell 2018:198). Saldana (2016:4) outlined that themes are sorted from the codes, therefore defining a code in qualitative research as 'the researcher's generated construct that symbolises or "translates" data and this attribute interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorisation, assertion, …' In this, study, I formulated concepts that gave meaning to the individuals' data and the objective was to develop themes relevant to the study. The section discussed above serves as a summary of the theme formulation in the next section.

4.7 Discussion of emerging themes

The reporting and discussions in this section are based on data emerging from the integration of the interviews, literature review and field notes. Figure 4.3

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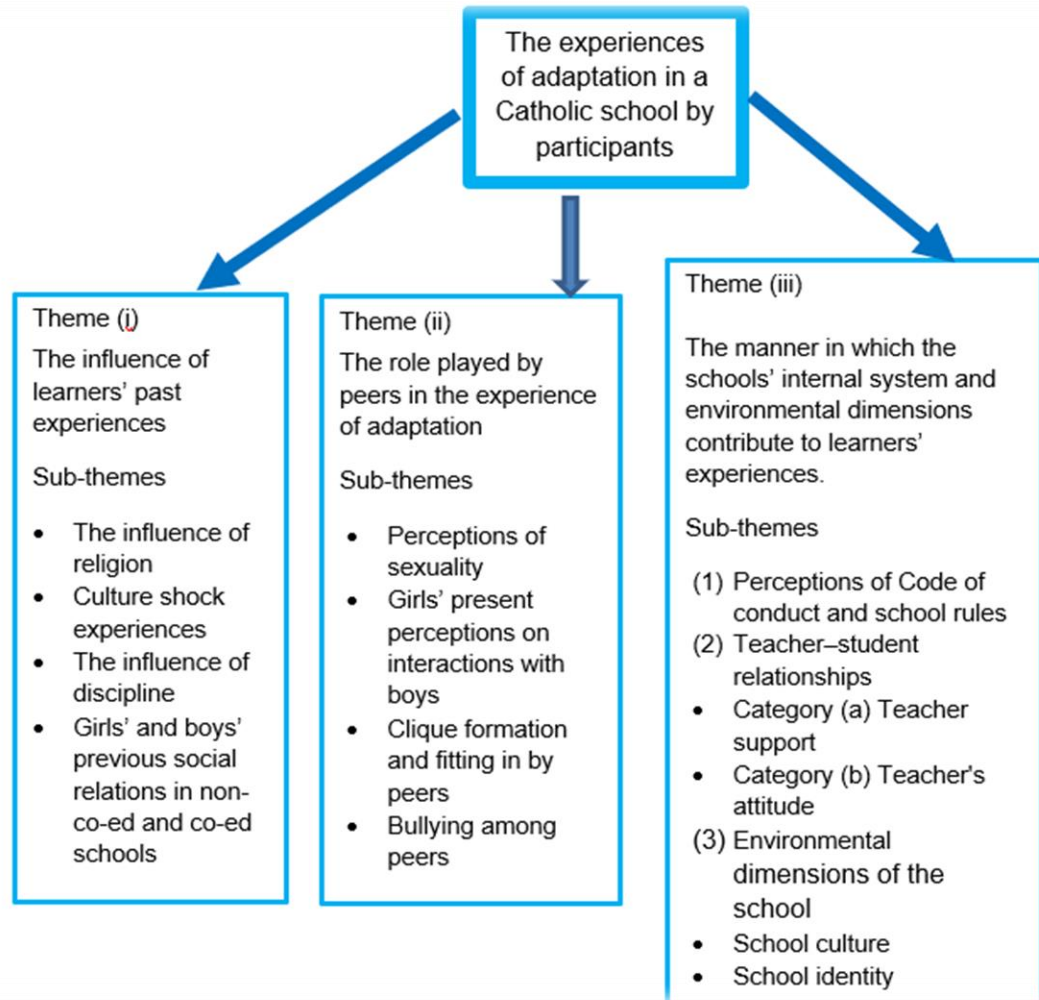
Figure 4.3: Summary of themes and findings

Three main themes evolved around how the Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation in a Catholic school environment. These are (i) The influence of learners' past experiences on adaptation, (ii) The role played by peers in the experience of adaptation, and (iii) The manner in which the schools' internal system and environmental dimensions contribute to learners' experience to adaptation. As shown in subsections 4.7.1.1 to 4.7.1.3, the three main themes that follow are well-connected and nested. Each major theme becomes a storyline that warrants a chance to review the whole process of data analysis, addition of ideas and gathering of more information to improve saturation of the themes (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove, 2016:107). The themes are formulated from the data collected and then discussed with the infusion of

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direct quotations backed mainly by the in vivo coding method. Quotations are discussed and used in sections 4.7.1.1 to 4.7.1.3

Direct quotations from the participants are presented and discussed. As alluded to in section 4.5.1, it is important to keep in mind, in the theme discussions, the main research question which reads: How do Grade 9 learners experience adaptation in a denominational school environment? The literature review becomes the control that keeps the discussions focused on the purpose of the study. The main themes and sub-themes are discussed below.

4.7.1. Theme (i) Learners' past experiences

The participants' past experiences emerged as an area of discussion when speaking about the experience of adaptation in the Catholic school environment. It was evident from the analysis that learners came from different school backgrounds and had been exposed to various school experiences. The following four sub-themes emerged: the influence of religion, the influence of culture, the influence of discipline, and the girls' and boys' previous social relations in non-co-educational and co-educational schools. These sub-themes emerged through the participants' reflections on their past experiences. More participants responded with their past experiences on discipline and its influence on adaptation to the school environment. The least responses were identified in the sub-theme, the influence of culture. It seems that participants carried with them past experiences from other schools that had an influence on how they experienced adaptation. The first sub-theme to be discussed in order to understand its influence on past experience is religion. This is discussed in the next section.

- The influence of religion

Religion may be viewed as a personal belief expressed in worship and faith. In the context of this study, Little and McGivern (2013:472) has clarified that religion is a system of beliefs, values, and practices that an individual holds as a dedication and a way of connecting with a God or gods as expressed in worship and faith. The Catholic school has its school system embedded in

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Catholic faith and worship. Furthermore, the practice of religion can include feasts and festivals, music, art, meditation, service and other cultural events (Little & McGivern, 2013:472). It seems as if participants were exposed to different and/or more religious practices in their new school, as they were confronted with it daily because of the school context. Half of the participants responded to the aspect of religion as influencing their experience to adaptation in the Catholic school environment.

Participant B found it strange to make a cross as they prayed. The feeling of experiencing strange happenings in worship shows that she was unaccustomed to the way they did it in the school. Participant B remarked, 'What was strange to me this school is that we to do the cross in prayer' (B3, lines 58-59).

Participant B seemed to be unfamiliar with this practice, while Participants C and D echoed that they now prayed a lot in the new school. It also seems that religious practices were more frequent. This is what Participants C and D said:

> Yes, because like for me, I pray at home with my aunt but then like I do not usually pray a lot like we do at school… (C2, lines 25-28)

> The big difference is that, in our previous school, we did not do religion things, and we did not have lots of things like religion that I am having in this school…' (D4, lines 62-63)

Similarly, Participants E and G felt that the new school had provided them with new experiences with a lot of seriousness in religion. This is what they narrated:

> At this school unlike previous school they take religion a bit serious and like they want you to know Bible verses and to also apply them to yourself… (E1, lines 29-30)

> … I was used to only prayers in the morning, at assembly we did not sing like most church songs. We did not have religious education as a subject.(G2, lines 45-47)

Participant's responses on experiences of religion indicate that they encountered new, unfamiliar and frequent practices as offered by the school's religious context. The observations from the responses are that they prayed several times and every day, read the Bible and applied it, attended RE classes, sang church songs regularly and made a cross sign as they prayed.

Another observation is that adapting to the school's religious practices is a process with stages and learners may adjust differently. It seems that adapting to the schools' religious practices is a process and some participants commented that they had not fully adjusted. Realising that the participants had joined the school in Grade 8, it seems that adjusting to the schools' religious practices can spill into Grade 9 and beyond. In the process, some participants may take longer to cope, and it can overwhelm them as they go through these experiences every day. Participants D and H related:

> Yeah, I am still getting used to it because I do not go to Catholic Church. (D3, lines 16-19)

> I'm still getting used to like sometimes when we are in the Cathedral Church and we have to do certain prayers. While we are doing the certain prayers, we doing certain things like kneeling or saying certain things by repeating after they are said. I am still trying to get used to, and also coming into class and immediately when you enter someone has to prayer, that still, I am still trying to get used to that. (H3, lines 56-60)

Two broad observations can be made in relation to adjusting to religious practices in the Catholic school environment. First, the participants feel the religious practices encountered are new, unfamiliar and frequent. Secondly, adjustment to religious practices is a process with stages. In the process of experiencing the religious practices, the learners may experience challenges and/or opportunities. Participant *G2* in lines 52-56 commented that she kept practicing how religious things were done in the Catholic school, but she did not do much as this possessed challenges for her.

Convey (2013:190) provided an example of the culture in the Catholic school that, typically, a school day began with a prayer to set the tone for the day. In concurrence, Naidoo (2015:170) added that schools have the right to foster

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and maintain a noticeable religious character. Hence schools have a religious policy endorsed by South African Catholics enriched in the CORD curriculum (Naidoo 2015:170). Part of the curriculum involves RE classes on personal growth, relationships, religious communities and mass attendance being compulsory to both Catholics and non-Catholics in the denominational school environment.

According to the complex adaptive system (CAS) theory discussed in Chapter 2 in section 2.9.2, Stewart and Patterson (2016:2) have explained the interactions, connectedness, nested and non-linear systems in the Catholic school environment. The priest leads mass or Catholic celebrations in the school and connections are created with learners. Non–Catholic learners may be unfamiliar with and extremely overwhelmed by the religious activities and this may result in possible connections, similarities and/or differences that may emerge as challenges in the system. Aldana (2016:177) confirmed that culture in a Catholic school refers to the different activities, traditions, norms, values, and social interactions such as school life, social and academic development. However, Wa-Mbaleka and Ryszewski (2012:15) have confirmed that moving into new environments such as schools, that have different cultural values leads to a culture shock for most individuals. Experiences on culture shock in the Catholic school environment are discussed below.

- Culture shock reflections

As learners venture into a new school environment, they are exposed to new cultures. Wa-Mbaleka and Ryszewski (2012:16) have pointed out that some people experience culture shock when they are confronted with differences in values, beliefs, attitudes, worldviews and customs. It seems some participants experienced discomfort in the new school environment which points to culture shock. Although this sub-theme had the least responses in Theme (i), it was evident that learners who joined the Catholic school environment differentiated between their culture, the school culture and other people's cultures. This evidence was exposed by participant C.

Participant C related that in the new school environment, she experienced strange happenings that she had not experienced in her previous school or

life. Last year, a girl in the same grade as the participant, removed her white beads from her neck; she had lost her sangoma (witch doctor) connection and she started behaving strangely. All the other learners were scared. It appears that the girl whom they supposed had behaved strangely brought past experiences related to her practice and traditions from her home into the school. Furthermore, participant C added:

> I think in her culture if you take off that necklace you become, I do not know, her eyes were white, and she was like walking around and it was just really scary for all of us and people were crying. (C11, lines 7-15)

Similarly, participant B expressed that it was strange that when you prayed in the Catholic school you made a cross sign. She said, 'What was strange to me this school is that we to do the cross in prayer' (B3, lines 58-59).

In line with participants C and B, participant H expressed her misunderstanding in some practices that had to be followed in the school. She seemed to be distressed as she was unable to follow in the Cathedral and classrooms. Participant H remarked the following:

> I am still getting used to like sometimes when we are in the cathedral when we have to do certain prayers and we have to do certain things. While we are doing certain prayers like kneeling or saying certain things, after certain things are said that I am still trying to get used to. Also coming into class and immediately when you enter someone has to pray, that still, I am still trying to get used to. (H3, lines 56-60)

As a matter of fact, in Catholic schools, there are diversification categories in culture (Ntho-Ntho and Nieuwenhuis, 2016:236). The observations are that participant C was exposed to another learners' traditions of their culture; participant B felt it was strange how one prayed using the sign of the cross; and participant H did not understand the proceedings in the church, such as kneeling and praying at the same time. Wa-Mbaleka and Ryszewski (2012:15) mentioned that when one moves to a new environment such as a school, they encounter new cultures and some people may take a long time to adjust. These seemingly strange happenings of experiencing other learners cultures

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and Catholic school culture indicate that learners experienced culture shock, as they had not been exposed to different cultures before. In a school setting, one may go through distress as they are psychologically and emotionally challenged, leading to academic performance being affected (Wa-Mbaleka & Ryszewski, 2012:15). Gudykunst (2005:380) emphasised that for a learner to adjust to a new school environment, the learner must embrace the school's culture. In addition, the CAS theory indicates that learners are the actors in the school system that interact and, as a result, differences may emerge as they experience the school culture and other fellow learners' cultures (See Chapter 2, figure 2.2) (Stewart and Patterson, 2016:2). The CAS theory diagram also shows that learners in the school have connections with their external environment such as their families, the church and their communities which have varied cultures.

It seems cultures can be carried by learners into the school environment as narrated by participant C that one girl was behaving strangely. At the same time the learners experience the school culture as evident and discussed in this sub-theme. Winkelman (1994:122) has asserted that as one experiences culture shock there is a stage of achieving stable adaptation and successfully resolving challenges and managing new cultures in the Catholic school environment. The third sub-theme that emerged in Theme (i) is the learners' past experiences with discipline and how it influenced adaptation in the school environment. The third sub-theme is discussed in the next section.

- The influence of discipline

Obeying rules, maintaining order and adhering to authority are some of the Catholic school's discipline commitments (Mckinney & Sullivan, 2013:194). Participants' responses pointed towards their past experiences of discipline from their previous schools. Some participants revealed their experiences regarding various discipline concerns in previous school systems.

Participant A responded that she was bullied in her previous school. This is what participant A indicated:

So…, like boys used to judge me a lot. So, sometimes the boys, they used to bully me … (A6, lines 45-53)

It seems that bullying has been experienced by participant A before. Other than bullying there are other discipline concerns that were experienced from previous schools. Participant D described how other learners used to sneak phones into her previous school, remarking:

Because most learners at my previous school, they never listened to our rules. Like some of the children, sneak the phones inside the school, in their bags. Even when the teachers knew, the child still took out their phones, do everything. (D11, lines 80-84)

Learners' responses seem to suggest that indiscipline was relatively acceptable as teachers did nothing about it. Participant E shared her experience that in her previous school there was no proper discipline system. This is what she shared:

I like the fact that in this school when you do your hair, they say do it in a certain colour, in my previous school you could do whatever… and I like the discipline system in this school but it is too strict… (E4, lines 5-8)

The observations from the participant's responses show that bullying was experienced, learners used to sneak phones into the school, some learners never listened to school rules and they could do as they wish even when the teacher was aware of it. Participant E was adamant that she liked the discipline system in the current Catholic school but that it was too strict. Gottfried and Kirksey (2018:24) clearly pointed out that Catholic schools have high levels of self-discipline and there is more discipline in the Catholic schools. In addition, the discipline that is expected of learners is reflected in the curriculum and in the discipline policies (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2018:24). It seems as though participants can differentiate the discipline systems between their previous and current schools. Also, participant's responses suggest that current Catholic school is stricter than in their previous schools.

However, the literature shows that examples of indicators of adaptation to a school environment include disciplinary behaviour, not adjusting, dropouts, self-esteem, and school-related stress (Booth & Gerard, 2014); Hastings, 2012; Brennan, 2012; Itzhaki et al., 2017; Baker et al., 2003; Bipath & Moyo (2016). Disciplinary behaviour is an indicator linked to adaptation challenges in the school system.

The CAS theory in Figure 2.2 in Chapter 2 explains that as actors such as learners interact with the school system adaptation challenges may emerge (Stewart & Patterson, 2016:2). Participant E appreciated the discipline system at the Catholic school but argued that it was too strict compared to the previous school and this could pose a negative experience to adaptation in the school. It appears as though the Catholic school system has a task of educating learners of different backgrounds in terms of discipline. Ballantine et al. (2017:18) have pointed out that the duty of the school is to instil moral values to the learners that manifest in the outward behaviours demonstrated in the school, home and community as discipline. The past experiences in the previous school on discipline became evident in the sub-theme on discipline. The fourth sub-theme on co-education or non-co-education is discussed in the following section.

- Girls' and boys' previous social relations in non-co-educational and co-educational schools

The school under study is a non-co-educational school, that is, it is a girls' single-sex school. The learners who joined the school came from either a co-educational or a non-co-educational school environment. As peers interact in the school environment, they build social relations. Many participants responded to how past experience in their previous schools influenced their experience to adaptation in the Catholic school environment through their social relations. It appears as if learners also brought with them previous social relationship experiences and compared these with the current social relations in the new Catholic environment. It was also noticed that most participants preferred schools with boys as they socially related well. Observations made from participants' responses clearly indicated

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that social relations were unavoidable in social environments such as the school.

All the respondents attended co-educational schools as indicated in their responses. The following are the verbatim responses from the participants. Participant D described her past experience in a co-educational school. She alleged that boys and girls were distracted and concentrated on romantic affairs. She added the boys and girls would often have fights after school. This is what participant D narrated:

> The change is like, in my previous school, most people were distracted, because they almost concentrate about having girlfriends and boyfriends'. (D6, lines 19-21)

> … like even at our school, when we are going out going home, they stay at school, getting fights between both boys and girls and other ones… (D7, lines 48-50)

In addition, participant D also compared here previous and current school and explained that in the Catholic school she now got good marks, as learners were able to concentrate. Furthermore, she remarked:

> … and in this school, we can concentrate more, because we are even getting there to 100 per cent like most people are passing in this school, because we concentrate. (D6, lines 16-18)

Similarly, participant H was previously in a co-educational school, however, she preferred to interact with girls only. She was adamant that moving to a new school with girls only did not change anything for her. These were participant H's comments:

> … At my old school I did not really talk with any of the boys or interact with any of them, so it did not feel any different because I was only talking to girls all the time...(H3, lines 45-46)

Other perceptions on their social realities and background past experiences were remarked on by participants F and J. Participant F believed that girls

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were not so loud but reserved when they related in a school with boys. This is what participant F said:

> Yes, Ma'am, I feel like if this was a Co-ed school Ma'am, most girls would not be as loud and as ... I feel like that would be the boys. I feel like girls would be more reserved because you know, girls will be girls and guys would be guys. (F11, lines 56-57)

Furthermore, participant F still affirmed that interactions in all girls' school is different from interactions in a co-educational school. She further remarked:

> Definitely Ma'am, because I feel like when you are in an all-girls school you kind of reserve yourself when it comes to interactions with the male species ... (F11, line 37-38)

Participant J felt that in a school with boys, girls would be reserved and mind what they did. It seems that their social relations would be different. This is what participant J commented:

> Because sometimes if you are in an all-girl school, it is just, oh, I can sit this way. I do not have to worry about who is going to see you or whatever. But then if there are boys you will sit property like a lady. (J5, lines 57-61)

Differently, participant A said that she was used to an environment with boys. It seems that she was less comfortable with her social relations in the new school that had girls only compared to her previous school. This is participant A's remark:

> Because I came from an environment where I was used to having boys around… (A3, line 38-41)

Similarly, participant C responded that she was used to a co-educational school and things were different for her in the new school as there were girls only. This is what participant C said:

> The impact of only girls in this school. Ma'am, I am used to co-ed schools, so this is different for me… (C6, lines 44-46)

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All the same, participant B elaborated that it was now different as they were girls only. In her view girls, judged each other. This is what participant B related:

> What is different is that here in this school there is only girls, and girls judge each other by the way they look or how their body shape is or what they are wearing when we are wearing civvies and all that. (B4, line 79-80)

Observations made from the participant's responses are that in their previous schools they encountered social relations where there were fights between boys and girls. Besides fights there were also distractions to schoolwork as learners concentrated on having 'boyfriend and girlfriends'. On the other hand, observations from the other participant's responses revealed that more participants preferred being in a co-educational school. Participants A and C clearly stated that they preferred being among boys. Participants F, J and B pointed out that if boys were present in the Catholic school more girls would be reserved and not relate or behave the way they did.

It seems most participants prefer co-educational environments. The participants' background experiences indicate that they preferred and fitted into a school environment with boys. Specifically, participant C found it strange not to have boys in the school. This emerged as a surprise to me. Creswell and Creswell (2018:195) have pointed out that coding may fall into three groups, expected, surprising and codes of unusual interest. Furthermore, it was not anticipated, and no literature or common sense supported it. Participant A clearly declared that she preferred being around boys, and this may pose challenges in experiencing adaptation in the Catholic school environment where there are no boys. Interpretivist researchers recognise that individuals have varied backgrounds and experiences that construct reality in a wider social context (Ballantine et al., 2017:7). Martin, Fabes and Hanish (2014:152-153) posited that social interactions that occurred among peers, whether structured or unstructured, were strongly influenced by gender. Furthermore, boys- and girls-peer relationships at school have a strong outcome for the learners' social and academic functioning. In addition, the

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CAS theory in Figure 2.2, Chapter 2, enables us to understand that in complex environments like schools, there are interactions among actors such as the interrelationships between and among peers (Stewart & Patterson, 2016:2).

Different schools of thought have presented discussions on co-educational and non-co-educational education. Single sex education has been placed on the table as a debatable issue that is complex and sensitive (Shah & Conchor, 2009:201). Further issues of debate are educational achievement and differences in cultural, social, economic, religious and other dimensions. Another study in Britain argues that single-sex school for girls are more academic whereas mixed schools are more social (Gill, 2004:108). Although the participant entered a single -sex school for girls, various reasons could have led to the choice of this type of school. However, background experiences about their previous schools may not be ignored as social relations among learners are inevitable. However, past experience in social relations among peers may pose a negative or positive influence on learners as they experience adaptation to a new school environment.

Theme (i) unpacked discussions on the participants' past experiences in their previous schools. Some participants compared their past experiences with the current experiences in the Catholic school environment. The sub-themes that emerged on participant's past experiences were based on religion, culture, discipline, girls' and boys' previous social relations in non-co-educational and co-educational school. These sub-themes were seen as influencing the experience of adaptation by participants in the Catholic school environment. It seems that participants had past experiences that posed challenges in the new school environment. Similarly, past experiences posed opportunities as learners were able to take up positive past experiences and apply them in the new school environment. In Theme (i), participants presented their past experiences in their previous school environment. In Theme (ii), the participants narrated the role played by peers in the experience of adaptation. Theme (ii) discussions are presented in the following section.

4.7.2 Theme (ii) The role played by peers in the experience of adaptation

Theme (ii) revolved around the participants' experiences and the role played by their peers. It is important to note that Themes (i) and (ii) are nested and participant's responses and discussions may be closely related. There was evidence of present social relations and interactions of the participants with their peers in the Catholic school environment. The participants' experiences were evident in the following five subthemes: perceptions of peers on sexuality, girls' present perceptions on interactions with boys, clique formation and fitting in by peers, and bullying among peers. Overall, there were many participants who responded to the sub-theme clique formation and fitting in. There were, however, few responses on the subthemes perceptions of peers on sexuality and Bullying among peers. All the sub-themes are discussed below. The first sub-theme to be discussed is perceptions of peers on sexuality.

- Perceptions of peers on sexuality

Sociologists view sexuality as the feelings, attractions and emotions that individuals hold (Little & McGivern, 2013:381). The responses on sexuality reflect the participants' experiences on the sexuality of their peers in the Catholic school environment. Very few participants responded by giving their experiences on sexuality. Being in a girls' school, this topic brought discomfort to the few participants as they were responding. In listening to the audio recording, the participants were uneasy as they responded on sexuality perceptions of their peers. Little and McGivern (2013:369) ha clarified that sexual orientation is the individual's emotional sexual attraction to a particular sex. Furthermore, Little and McGivern (2013:369) addresses four categories on sexual orientation, namely heterosexual, asexual, homosexual and bisexual. Recent studies have also uncovered pansexual as another category of sexual orientation that explains the sexual preferences of individuals (Sprott, Benoit & Hadcock, 2018:3), although this area still remains uncovered in terms of research. Pansexuality is explained as having a sexual attraction to individuals of all genders and/or sexes ((Sprott et al., 2018:1)

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Participant C narrated that some girls explored their sexuality [as being homosexual]; they did not feel comfortable being with their peers even in changing rooms. This is what participant C said:

> They hear stuff …that being a lesbian is not good and … Ma'am, other people, they do not feel comfortable around those people like they would not feel comfortable changing around them. They go to the other room because they feel like you are a girl liking another girl and you are going to look at them in a certain way. (C6, lines 61-63)

Furthermore, participant C observed that some of her peers had reflected that they were questioning their gender identity. This is what she added:

> I feel like some girls in my grade, the Grades 8 and 9, like last year and this year, I feel like if they are changing their sexuality, I feel like it is just a phase because when we ask them if they going to marry a guy or a girl they always say a guy but then I am like, now you this or yes but I feel like its fine but some people do change or find themselves while they in an all-girls school. (C6, lines 44-47)

In line with participant C, participant J responded that she had seen some of her friends change their behaviour when they saw boys. These were her observations:

> I think they can sort of change the way they behave with the friends because … you see one of your friends goes, oh, you are always changing for him to be a lady ... (J6, lines 76-78)

The observations made from the participant's responses are that the other girls in the school were exploring their sexuality as homosexuals. The participants seemed to be surprised that those exploring their sexuality were uncomfortable to undress and change into their sports uniforms in front of the others in the changing rooms. The participants also added that girls who explored their sexuality as homosexuals at school acted differently 'like ladies' when they saw boys. This seemed to surprise and confuse the participants as to whether these girls who explored their sexuality preferred girls or boys. It

seems as if the girls who explore their sexuality in the school shy away from the rest of the girls in the school at particular instances.

Little and McGivern (2013:369) has indicated that homosexual women, also referred to as lesbians, are attracted to of individuals to their own sex. Little and McGivern (2013:370) has added that research has evidence that homosexuals are treated more unfairly than heterosexuals in schools. Secondary schools are rich contexts where children socialise. Furthermore, social interactions include adolescents' same-sex or other-sex sexual activities such as sexual attraction, sexual fantasies and behaviours that are influenced by the learner's sexual orientation (Li & Wong, 2018:1026).

It seems as though these girls were confronted with the dilemma of their sexuality as they interacted with peers of the same gender in the Catholic school. At the adolescent stage in single-sex schools, sexual relationships were explored such as intense affections and intimate friendships, as the school by its settings already segregates (Li & Wong, 2018:1026). Additionally, at the point of puberty, individuals respond differently to this stage, some are able to claim their sexual orientation, while others are unwilling to disclose that they are homosexuals (Little & McGivern, 2013:369). On the other hand, in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, homosexuality is regarded as an unnatural practice and 'Traditions have always declared that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to the gift of life and under no circumstances can they be approved' (Hornbeck & Norko, 2014:145). In the Catholic Church homosexuality is forbidden and it seems that sexuality among the learners is secretly explored. This may bring discomfort to a learner's experience to adaptation as it is evident from the studies that homosexuality amongst peers is observed as they socialise. Besides the participants' responses on homosexuality as discussed in this sub-theme, the next sub-theme discusses the participant's responses on their preference for having boys in the school.

- Girls' present perceptions on interactions with boys

The second sub-theme in Theme (ii) presents the girl's present perceptions on interactions with boys. Participants echoed their different views on the fact that

in their current school there were only girls in high school and no boys. Participants' perceptions seemed to suggest that they preferred having boys in the school. Different reasons were given as to why the girls felt that the presence of boys in the school would change the girls' behaviour. Some participants echoed their views on interactions with boys in the school environment. The following are the various comments from participants.

Participant A was adamant that she preferred boys in her presence. The following is the verbatim response from participant A:

> But then, I also prefer having or being around boys in my environment because … girls, Ma'am, in general, they like drama and I do not prefer girls….   (A3, lines 58-62)

In addition, participant A narrated that in Grade 8 it was hard for her to adjust as there were no boys. This is what she said:

> But then in general if a girl is around boys, they don't face any drama and gossip and all that. So, yes, it is really hard for me to adjust in Grade 8…
> (A4, line 75-76)

Similarly, participants F, B and J felt that in a co-educational school, girls would be more reserved. Their behaviour would be different. This is what participants F, B and J commented:

> Yes, Ma'am, I feel like if this was a Co-ed school Ma'am, most girls would not be as loud and as ... I feel like that would be the boys. I feel like girls would be more reserved because you know, girls will be girls and guys would be guys. (F11, lines 56-57)

> But then here in this school I feel that the reason why these girls keep on gossiping about each other is because there is no boys to rectify them. (B4, lines 79-80)

> Because sometimes if you're in an all-girl school, it is just, oh, I can sit this way. I do not have to worry about who is going to see you or whatever. But then if there are boys you will sit property like a lady. (J5, lines 57-61)

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Observations made from the participants' responses indicate that they preferred being around boys, hence they found it challenging to adjust to the new school because there were no boys. Participant J said that,, they would 'behave properly like a lady' and in addition, participant F said that they would be 'more reserved' only if boys were present in the school. The participants seemed to believe that boys would make them behave differently. Participants B and G (B2, lines 23-25; G3, lines 76-79) expressed their feelings of discomfort with the current environment, echoing that it was only one gender and that it was difficult to get used to an environment with no boys.

More observations from the participant's responses revealed contracting views. Sharing the same views are participants A6 in lines 40-41 and D6 in lines 31-33. Participants A and D said that they preferred being in a school with girls only, where they could express themselves more and also have their own personalities. In view of this, Martin et al., (2014:174) expressed that in school contexts children actively construct their social worlds regarding their gender and other social interactions. Furthermore, strong same-sex interactions and feelings become central to their own gender and they feel more comfortable and knowledgeable about norms and culture of their group as girls (Martin et al., 2014:174).

It seems that more participants preferred having boys in the school and other participants were comfortable in the Catholic all-girls school environment. Martin et al., (2014:166) have argued that school environments that are naturally institutionalised to segregate boys and girls provide evidence of how gendered-peer socialisation is powerfully formed. In support, Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, Clark and Truong (2018:39) have put forward the idea that single-sex schools provide evidence of gender separation for learners. However, it is possible that the participants who preferred a single-sex school may experience less challenges in adapting to the Catholic school environment with girls only. Those that preferred having boys around them in the school may experience challenges and negatively adapt to the school environment with girls only. A different view has been put forward by other theorists such as Erikson (1959-1968) and Hall (1904) who addressed learners' adolescent years as a period of 'storm and stress' and, at that point, identity crises features

strongly (Simmons, 2017:3). Furthermore, Erikson's theory on classic conception, acknowledges that adolescence is that period when gender roles and identities increase and an individual's values of what they hold can change (Simmons, 2017:15). It can be argued that at the adolescent stage, as gender role identities change, some learners may identify with boys and other learners may identify with girls only. As discussed, participants could identify the gender they could associate with in the school environment. Participants also gave their views on clique formation among peers and their experiences in school adaptation. Clique formation is discussed as a sub-theme in the next section.

- Clique formation and fitting in with peers

Clique formation and fitting in with peers in the new school emerged as a sub-theme in Theme (ii). Cliques can be defined as 'exclusive and relatively tight groups of friends with whom adolescents spend most of their time' (Lodder, Scholtle, Cillessen & Giletta, 2016:133). Participants' responses indicated that peers in the school played a role in the new school experiences as they adapted to the environment. It seems social relations amongst peers in the school environment are inevitable. It also seems as though the social relations give rise to clique formation and fitting in among peers. Many participants responded on how their groups of friends were formed, their importance and how they kept within. The participant's responses are discussed below.

Participant A narrated that she had a couple of friends, that she was comfortable around them. She added that her circle of friends was tight. This is what participant A remarked:

> Ma'am, I have specific, like in my class, I have maybe a couple of girls, maybe they are like three or four out of the whole class, that make me…when I'm around them, I can be myself. I can just express myself. They will never judge me. They always understand my situation. They always understand me as a person, and they understand why I am that person. (A7, lines 93-84)

Even my circle of friends, it not very tight, because the more I let people in, the more they hurt me, and then the more I become that bad person that I do not want to be, ... (A8, lines 17-18)

Furthermore, participant A affirmed that having friends was a need in terms of safety. She added that:

… we need friends. We need interaction with people our own age, with our peers. So, how do you make sure that you are safe? (A20, lines 5-8)

Similarly, participant I pointed out that friends were important sometimes. This is what she said:

… yeah, friends can be important in some occasions, that is just, them, but they are there. (I10, lines 12-15)

It seems as though peers actually wanted to choose the groups that they fitted into. They felt that if they mixed with just anyone even in class groups then others did not cooperate or listen to each other. In line with this, participant B related:

…When we went to Bosco camp, we were grouped in two groups and I felt that it was not really necessary to group us into groups like that. Like, we could have just chosen our own groups. Because if the teachers group us, then we might be with people that do not want to cooperate or that do not want to listen to other people's ideas or opinions. (B2, line 3-5)

Participant F added more clarity to participant B's response. Participant F elaborated that not everyone was your friend in a school environment, she chose who to befriend. This is what she clarified:

Ma'am, I get along with the girls in this school Ma'am…, there are some girls I do not really interact with or I do not even want to interact with, because I kind of know what they are all about… (F21, line 76-78)

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Participants C and D felt differently in that friends could find a solution to help you and you could learn from their good deeds. This is what they narrated respectively:

> Yes, Ma'am. Because I think people cannot carry all their burdens on themselves like you have to tell someone or let it out to people so that they can find a solution to help you… (C10, lines 81-83)

> I learn by my friends, seeing them doing the good things that are have been said to do, I am learning by them. (D13, line 53-56)

Observations from the participants' responses reveal that making friends, developing friendships and fitting in of the Grade 9 participants reflected their survival tactics, powerful connections with tight circles, their friendship and peer identity connections. Some participants indicated how friends influenced each other and shared opinions. The belief was that friends shared information, friends were more important, friends were your own chosen peers whose opinions mattered and that they were important and valuable.

It is evident that learners form cliques and support each other in the Catholic school environment. Learners' support for each other is varied and this is evident in the responses made by participants. Participant A19 in lines 84-87 said that now she is better in her academics as her marks had dropped previously but a friend had encouraged her and assisted her with schoolwork. In line with academics and supporting one another, Participant C remarked:

> Me and my group of friends, now during exams and tests, we always help each other in the mornings, and we tell each other notes because if we ask questions and other person responds. We always leave that answer in our heads because we read it and not wrote it down. We always get like a picture of what we are going to write, and we remember the responses because someone else said it and it's not what we studied. (C9, lines 39-43)

The participants' responses pointed to the social actions of cliques and fitting in with peers. These concepts have demonstrated that learners may positively adapt and have good experiences with friends in the Catholic school

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environment. The desire to feel belonging or trying to fit in in social interactions in the Catholic school, may create additional pressure (Eman, 2013:72) for the learners. During adolescence, there is a growing involvement in cliques which are important for adjustment (Lodder et al., 2016:133). In addition, in the adolescence stage, there is growth in the sense of belonging, social support and acceptance from peers and friendship is of more importance (Eman, 2013:72). Instead of receiving the most support and guidance from home, friends become the guiding angels and they rely on each other even in terms of coping in school contexts (Sumter, Bokhorst, Steinberg, & Westenberg, 2009:1010; LangenKamp, 2010:3; Eman, 2013:72). The participants related their experiences to adaptation and the role their peers played in adapting to their new school environment in relationship to cliques and fitting in.

According to Edson and McGee (2016:432), the CAS theory promotes that in a school system, a dynamic group of actors, such as learners, possess dynamic behaviours and complex relationships. Furthermore, the learners' motives and needs vary, some are supportive, and others may be in conflict and unsupportive (Edson & McGee, 2016:432) to adaptation leading to negative experiences such as bullying by peers in the school. In contrast, participants also shared their negative experiences on bullying amongst their peers. This is discussed in the next section as sub-theme 4.

- Bullying among peers

Bullying among peers in schools is ongoing and unacceptable behaviour that involves intimidating others by physically or verbally abusing them (Apostolides, 2017:3). In addition, cyberbullying has been identified as bullying that occurs through communication devices and channels such as instant messaging, text and online forums (Apostolides, 2017:3). The participants indicated that general bullying and cyberbullying was evident in the school. Bullying among peers emerged as a subtheme relating to the role played by peers in experiencing adaptation. Very few participants responded that bullying was being experienced in the school by other peers. It was worth discussing as it becomes evident that the participants did experience how other learners were bullied in the school. These experiences of others being

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bullied seems to have constructed an understanding of bullying in the Catholic school.

Participant B witnessed other learners in the school being bullied. These were her comments:

> I have not been bullied in this school, and, yes, I know someone or some people who have been bullied in this school. I will not mention names. (B7, lines 90-92).

Similarly, participant C specifically mentioned that a lot of cyberbullying was taking place in the school. This is what participant C remarked:

> Ma'am, I have not seen bullying physically…Yes, but there is a lot of cyberbullying. (C9, line 53-56).

Observations from the participants' responses are that there is bullying in the school, and participant C specified that it is mostly cyberbullying that is experienced. Although very few participants responded, it is evident that bullying was taking place in the school. Research has indicated that generally bullying takes place in schools and as the learners progress through school, cyberbullying appears to peak in the eighth grade (Hinduja & Patchin, 2017:55). It seems that the participants' experiences of others being bullied plays a role in the way the participants have experienced adaptation in the Catholic school environment. In South African research conducted in 2014 in Catholic schools by the Youth Bureau of Market Research in Gauteng and the Western Cape on 'Emotions experienced from cyberbullying', the results showed that cyberbullying was on the increase; one in every five learners had experienced it (Apostolides, 2017:4). The study was conducted in Catholic schools and the participants were adolescents ranging in age from 13 to18 years. Similarly, as reflected in the participants' profile in section 4.3 of this study, all participants were adolescents in the age range 14 to15 years.

Hellström and Beckman (2020:90) have claimed that at the adolescent stage, peer relations are powerful and gender difference in bullying is evident. In addition, girls are less aggressive and assert their aggression obliquely. Similarly, Chukwuere and Chukwuere (2017:9944) supported that girls

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cyberbullied more, and their tactics included gossip and rumours as a way of bullying. Furthermore, cyberbullying seems to be increasing in schools in South Africa and around the globe (Chukwuere & Chukwuere, 2017:9). In support, Catholic schools in South Africa have encountered challenges such as violence, bullying, alcohol abuse and sexual abuse (Baker, 2016:68). However, cyberbullying, on the other hand, contradicts the efforts of the Catholic school in trying to eradicate negative behaviours such as cyberbullying. Research has shown that there is a growing number of cyberbullying problems on the bullied and these include social, cultural, mental, academic and psychosocial implications (Chukwuere & Chukwuere, 2017:9949). The bullied learners encounter negative experiences in the Catholic school environment due to bullying and this complicates their adaptation process. The CAS theory makes it clear that, as actors such as learners interact in the Catholic school system, differences will emerge between the system and learners and also between or among peers themselves (See section 2.9.2, Figure 2.2, the CAS theory diagram). On the other hand, learners are from different backgrounds in terms of family and community and this brings about complex interactions which may result in negative experiences such as bullying in the Catholic school environment.

Theme (ii) exposed the role played by peers of these adolescents in their experiences to adaptation of the school environment. The participants' views emerged in the roles of first, perceptions of sexuality, secondly, girls' present perceptions on interactions with boys, thirdly, clique formation fitting in by peers, and fourthly, bullying among peers. The adolescents under study also gave their views on the schools' internal system and environmental dimensions which is discussed in Theme (iii) the following section.

4.7.3 Theme (iii) The schools' internal system and environmental dimensions

The third main theme that emerged was the schools' internal system and its dimensions. Three subthemes emerged: first, the code of conduct secondly the teacher–student relationship, and thirdly, the environmental dimensions of the school. It is evident that as learners go through their day-to-day operations,

activities and practices related to the schools' internal system, certain experiences are encountered. For example, one component of the internal system is the code of conduct which governs day-to-day operations of learners' conduct. These components exposed positive and negative experiences to adaptation as described by the participants in their responses.

The sub-theme that had the most responses from the participants was the teacher–student relationship. More participants gave their views on the teacher to student relationship which become evident that, in school adaptation, teacher relations is an important aspect. The first sub-theme to be discussed reports on the code of conduct and school rules as experienced by the participants. The sub-theme is discussed below.

- Perceptions of code of conduct and school rules

The participants' perceptions on the code of conduct and school rules emerged as a sub-theme in theme (iii). Most participants responded giving various opinions on the schools' code of conduct and the rules contained in it. It seems that there were more participants showing discomfort in the way the code of conduct was applied. The discomfort may be viewed as a negative experience in adapting to the code of conduct and its rules. However, in terms of positive experiences, few participants seemingly accepted the code of conduct as offering proper guidance in their behaviour and their appearance. Participant B7 had this to say:

> My thoughts are that the code of conduct is a way of showing us the way we should behave and the way we should follow the code of conduct in the correct way. Like, for example, the hairstyles and the earrings. (B7, lines 74-78)

Furthermore, participant B revealed how comfortable she was with the code of conduct and the school rules in it. She had no problem in following it and added:

> I actually follow the code of conduct by my own decision… (B12, lines 7-11)

Similar views on appreciation of the code of conduct were shared by participant J who felt that it was good, although some 'things' were not clear. Participant J said that:

> Ma'am, it is a good code of conduct, but I feel like they do not really like to stick to it with some things. (J3, lines 69-71)

Though participant J did not specifically mention the things that she was not happy with in the code of conduct, participants F and E mentioned that they were happy with rules such as those for homework and class control to list a few. This is what the three participants shared:

> And I think it really kind of motivates you do your homework, to listen in class, no to talking and just to do everything in a right way. (F3, lines 83-85)

As alluded to earlier, similar views were shared by participant E, who accepted the code of conduct as providing them with direction in terms of discipline. However, the participant was not happy with the demerit system in the code of conduct. The participant remarked:

> I like this school's code of conduct because it actually shows that we can show pride and honour. Honour our school in our appearance and the way we act, and I like the discipline system… I like the fact that when you do your hair, they say do it in a certain colour…Even though I do not like the demerits.(E4, lines 5-8)

According to participant E, not all the rules in the school code of conduct were likeable. Most participants shared the same sentiments to a variety of issues related to the rules and their views were that the school rules were sometimes unfair. Participant B had this to say:

> I say it is unfair because, let us say, for example, you are not a person who usually forgets things the prefect does not understand why you do not have your name badge and they give you a demerit... (B6, lines 48-49)

Participant A explained that the demerit system quickly accumulated negative points that sent one for detention within a short period of time. It seems that, if the learner did not have their name badge then it was an easy way to accumulate negative points. The participants felt that was very unfair and unnecessary. Participant A remarked:

> Like the name badge, Ma'am. I do not get why I should get minus ten. At least minus five to actually get you into that thing that you need to get your name badge in order. But minus ten, Ma'am, it can get you into detention a lot…(A11, lines 10-11)

Seemingly, participants D, G and H all commented that the rule that every learner must have their name badge was not necessary and too harsh. Participant G actually witnessed a fellow learner being punished twice for not having their name badge. This is what the three participants asserted:

> But the most problem I have with the Code of Conduct, is about our name badges. It is because, maybe if we have lost our name badges, we cannot … I think for me, we would not need name badges. (D12, lines 8-13)

> Ma'am I don't know but like, there is someone I know, she got a demerit when she was at line-up, they asked where her name badge is and she said, she told another prefect but I think that prefect didn't believe her so she wrote her name again. (G10, lines 23-25)

> I do not have my name badge and at every corner you get a demerit especially when you leave from line-up and the prefects are everywhere where is your name badge you do not have your name badge, go somewhere.   (H8, lines 3-4)

As observed from the learners' responses, it can be revealed that the most common issue that brought discomfort to participants was the rule of the name badge. The rule was that learners had to wear their name badges showing their names and surnames for ease of learner identification. Other uncovered discomforts in line with the code of conduct were that the rules were too strict, unfair and discipline was very strict. The discomfort experienced by the

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participants may lead to negative experiences to adaptation in the Catholic school system. These findings are supported by Borbélyová, (2017:209) who opined that in a new school environment, the acceptance of school rules portrays the level of adapting to the Catholic school environment. It can be pointed that those participants who do not accept and embrace the school rules may experience challenges in adapting to some specifications in the code of conduct. Similarly, those participants that accept the code of conduct and the rules will positively adjust to the school system, for example, participant E who said, 'I like this school's code of conduct'.

In Chapter 2, Figure 2.2, the CAS theory is used to clarify that the school system has embedded and nested sub-systems such as the internal system's code of conduct and its rules (Stewart & Patterson, 2016:2). A visual presentation on figure 2.2, in Chapter 2 shows that the school systems and actors interact in an enclosed environment of the school. The interactions offer a ground for connections or differences to emerge between the actors and the system. Differences may result in tensions building since the systems are nonlinear with respect to different dimensions and the learners are diverse themselves. Furthermore, the visual presentation shows that patterns emerge between the system and the learners and these can be traced as either negative or positive connections. Positive connections between the learners and the internal system result in positive experiences to adaptation being gained and vice versa. The internal system is also composed of teacher to student relationships that are discussed in the following section.

(2) Teacher–student relationship

The relationship between teachers and students featured as a sub-theme in Theme (iii). Two areas of discussion evolved around this sub-theme, first category (a) teacher's support, and second category (b) teacher's attitude. More participants responded on this sub-theme of the teacher–student relationship and how they experienced adaption with regard to teacher's support and attitudes. It seems as if there were overwhelming responses in terms of challenges of both the teachers' supporting roles and their attitudes towards the learners. Overall, less participants felt that teachers in the school

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helped them construct positive experiences in terms of the teachers' support and attitudes. The first area to be discussed revolved around how the teachers supported the learners in the new school environment.

- Category (a) Teacher support

Teacher support is viewed as strategies and actions offered by the teacher in supporting learners in the school and, in turn, learners construct perceptions about the teacher's expressions of care, directing of behaviours, providing feedback and advice (Guess & McCane-Bowling, 2016:3). Participants' responses reflected that some teachers supported them with regard to various aspects in the school. More participants suggested that teachers offered them support in the school environment in different ways. Students seemed to value their relationships with teachers as implied by their responses. Participant D felt that when there were sad moments that one went through, such as failing schoolwork, the teacher would go to them and encourage them to do better. This is what participant D remarked:

> The teachers are good, Ma'am, because most of teachers like students and when you are maybe sad or something, they will come to you and talk to you and make you be…, even when you have failed, they will just encourage you to improve… (D9, lines 11-13)

Participant D added that, she now felt comfortable talking to all the teachers. This is what she added:

> The most important thing that I get used to is being able to talk to teachers. Right now, I can even talk to any teacher. (D13, lines 60-65)

In the same way, participant I acknowledged that some teachers checked on learners to make sure they were generally good. This seemed to be a general check-up that some teachers practiced, and learners felt supported emotionally. This is what participant I had to say:

> I feel like, also teachers can be involved in the learner ask if they are okay, it is just practically some teacher do and just check up on the learner, to make sure they are okay. (I12, lines 75-77)

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Similar views were echoed by participant J who explained how teachers sometimes offered emotional support to a learner who came into her class in tears. A sense of comfort seemed to be offered as the teacher supported the learner. This is what participant J explained:

> Sometimes yes like for instance, in another subject there was someone crying and then the teacher just like called her aside and then they went and talked outside and then the rest of us were just, you know and this is time that could be used to learn something. (J12, lines 80-84)

As remarked by all the participants above, it can also be said that as learners enter the new environment, they observe and experience any type of support that is offered by the teachers. Teachers provide guidance on how things are done in the school and also show them around. Participant H indicated below:

> … with the teachers, it was the guidance as well, yeah, guiding, showing like okay, this is how we do it and, showing me around. (H12, lines 37-39)

Although more participants revealed that they were supported by teachers in various ways, fewer participants' responses seem to suggest that teachers were unsupportive. The next discussion points out participants' responses that indicate that teachers were unsupportive. Participant F stated that:

> I am also afraid to disagree with the teachers in this school because, Ma'am but, in this school I am afraid to do that because, I have seen what has happened to learners who have tried to do that. (F4, lines 19-20)

It seems that participant F was afraid of disagreeing with teachers. She had witnessed learners who had disagreed and had seen what had happened to them. It seems there was no support as participant F further remarked:

> Yes, Ma'am but, I feel like as a teacher you also should be that support system for your learners. (F21, line 67-69)

It seems that disagreements between the teacher and learner resulted in the learner not being supported by the system, hence the teachers seemed to be

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unsupportive. Another form of lack of support by teachers was discussed by participant A who reported that she did not relate to some of the teachers and even asked for advice as she felt that she was judged. Participant A had the following comment:

> Well, Ma'am, there are specific teachers, Ma'am, that I cannot relate to. I do not think I will ever relate to them or I can go to them and ask them for advice, because I know deep down, they judge me as a person. (A8, line 30-32)

In line with participant A's views, participant J (lines 40-42) generalised that teachers must have an open mind to deal with many of the challenges that affected learners.

As observed from participant's responses, the findings are that learners expect a great deal from teachers, including relating, giving advice, and not judging which may seem as if being supportive to them. Some participants felt that teacher support was available in the school while some felt that some teachers were unsupportive, and all this revolves around the teacher–learner relationship. The learners could relate freely, to those teachers who supported them, talked to learners who were sad, encouraged those who failed to do better, and those who offered guidance and emotional support. The data seems to suggest that teachers play an important role in giving support to new learners and this becomes the learners' experience to adaptation in the new school environment.

As alluded to in Chapter 2, Buehler et al. (2015:55) presented that in a study carried out on environmental variables for the school, teacher support was one of the most important. This view is consistent with those of Langenkamp (2010:1) who remarked that transiting into secondary school involved complex negotiations with regard to teacher–learner relationships. Furthermore, relationships of teachers to learners in the school are most important for success in the school for learners as they adjust (Langenkamp, 2010:2). In this study, some participants indicated that teacher support offered challenges in the school and this resulted in tension building up. For example, participant A stated that she did not think she would ever relate to them or that she could

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co and ask them for advice. (A8 line 30-32). This indicates tension building up in the teacher–learner relationship. Other observations made from learner's responses on teacher–student relationship were glued to teacher's attitudes. This is discussed in the next section.

- Category (b) Teacher's attitude

The teacher's attitude emerged as the second category on the sub-theme teacher–student relationships. Das, Halder, Mishra and Debnath (2014:1) defined attitude as 'an established way of thinking or feeling or behaving about something or someone.' The learner's responses indicated that teachers in the school exhibited certain feelings and actions that were attributed to their attitudes towards them. The teachers' attitudes were found to be both positive and negative in different instances. Many participants responded that the teachers had reflected negative attitudes towards them. A participant had indicated that teacher's attitudes were positive towards them as they experienced the new school environment. Participant D remarked the following on the teacher's attitude:

> The most teachers that have helped me to get used to the school is Ms Toddle and Ms Yoyo … (D14, lines 85-88)

> The thing that I did to be able to get along with people and be someone in the school is, the first time when I got here, my teacher told me to get along and… told one learner in my class to show me around. (D3, lines 29-32)

Participant D felt that some teachers in the school had positive attitudes, like Ms Toddle and Ms Yoyo (pseudonyms), as they assisted her to get used to the school by asking other learners to show her around the school. It seems the action of asking other learners to show her around reflected the teacher's positive attitudes towards new learners, therefore a positive experience in school adaptation.

On the other hand, many participants' responses reflected that the participants had experienced negative attitudes from the teachers in the new school environment. This was what Participant A said:

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I look up to them, especially if they do good. If I see that, you are talking about another teacher with other learners, that's when I wouldn't look up to you, I wouldn't see the same person as I used to see, You can't be talking about other teachers with learners. That is just inappropriate. (A16, lines 8-9)

Participant A seemed to be unhappy with the teachers' approach of discussing other teachers with fellow learners. She seemed to have disliked the actions and regarded this as inappropriate behaviour portrayed by the teacher. The teacher seems to display a negative attitude towards other teachers. Another negative attitude of teachers has been observed by participant F who said the following:

Ma'am most Grade 9s that I know, they are pretty reserved on choosing a specific subject because of their teacher. (F15, lines 70-73)

Subject choice amongst Grade 9s seems to have been influenced by the attitude of the teachers. The students were reserved about choosing a particular subject because of the teachers' negative attitude. In terms of subjects, participant F also felt that learners did not take Mathematics because they felt that the teacher had a problem. This feeling amongst learners could be a reflection on the teacher's negative attitude toward learners in the subject. This is what participant F added:

Yes, Ma'am, so I think that the problem is ... it starts with the teacher, because we are the learners Ma'am. There are some learners who just do not take interest in Maths. I think the problem is mostly with the teacher. (F15, lines 82-83)

Participant F really felt the problem was with the teacher, which seems to be a negative perception in terms of teacher attitude. Participants C and J had similar feelings about other teachers, and they responded by commenting:

Like if you get teacher X Ma'am, they say she is strict, so you have to keep quiet. Even if she comes to invigilate our class, she just says do not come to me just sit down and do your work.(C4, lines 79-80)

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But sometimes say when they are angry and then you have a really good excuse a reason it is just they do not want to hear it and then, but then sometimes if they just in a good mood… (J8, lines 46-49)

Participants C and J seemed to have observed different moods displayed by the teachers as they related with them. For example, participant C had observed that teacher X ordered them not to come to her but should rather just sit and do their work. This may seem to be a negative attitude by the teacher towards the learners as also indicated by participant J below:

'Ma'am, especially high school teachers, I feel like they should just try to understand and stop being, so I do not know, but in a way kind of rude to us. Ma'am, because I feel like you need to have a lot of patience as a teacher and you should also be pleasant … (F20, lines 59-61)

The participant felt that the teachers were impatient, unapproachable and unpleasant to relate to. She also felt that teachers were not fair as they punished learners who tried to give their opinion in order to silence them. Participant F seemed to have a lot to say about teachers' attitudes and this was her final observation:

A teacher might like give a learner a demerit for disrespect, but the learner was not being disrespectful; she was just voicing her opinion. It is a type of thing that I see a lot Ma'am. Children, learners, they cannot really voice their opinion because to most teachers it is like back chatting or being disrespectful. (F3, lines 97-99)

Various observations were made by the participants about teachers' attitudes; these included being unfair, impatient, unapproachable, unpleasant, and having bad moods. Similarly, findings by Ulug, Ozden and Eryilmaz (2011:740) revealed that teachers' negative attitudes included favouritism, not caring, being intolerant, not understanding, and being uninterested just to mention a few. These negative attitudes cause discomfort to the learners as they experience adaptation in the new school environment. This discomfort was experienced by participant G who even struggled to express her discomfort. She said:

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Yes, ma'am. I have, yes ma'am, but like I felt scared of going to them cause I did not feel that comfortable. (G7, lines19-22)

On the other hand, those learners that experienced positive attitudes from the teachers may have experienced opportunities in adapting to the school environment. These findings are similar to those of the studies conducted by Engels, Colpin, Van Leeuwenk, Bijttebier, Van Den Noortgate, Claes, Goossens and Verschueren (2016:1193,1195) who found that positive teacher–student relationships are characterised by warm, sensitive, and responsive interactions offered by the teachers. Furthermore, findings by Ulug et al., (2011:740) revealed that some of the teachers' positive attitudes include compassion, understanding, helpfulness, being friendly, tolerant, supportive and motivating learners.

Negative teacher–learner relationships were theoretically unpacked in Chapter 2 section 2.2, where Stewart and Patterson (2016:2) shared the CAS theory and clarified that actors (teachers and learners) unavoidably interact in the school system. As a result, conflicts may build as systems are diverse with respect to different dimensions among the actors. Conflicts between the actors (teacher–learner) result in challenges in experiencing new school adaptation, making teacher–learner relationships an important aspect in the findings. The findings on teacher–learner relationships and clarification by the CAS theory assisted me in constructing the (teacher–learner triangular relationship) following diagram on figure 4.4 that follows.
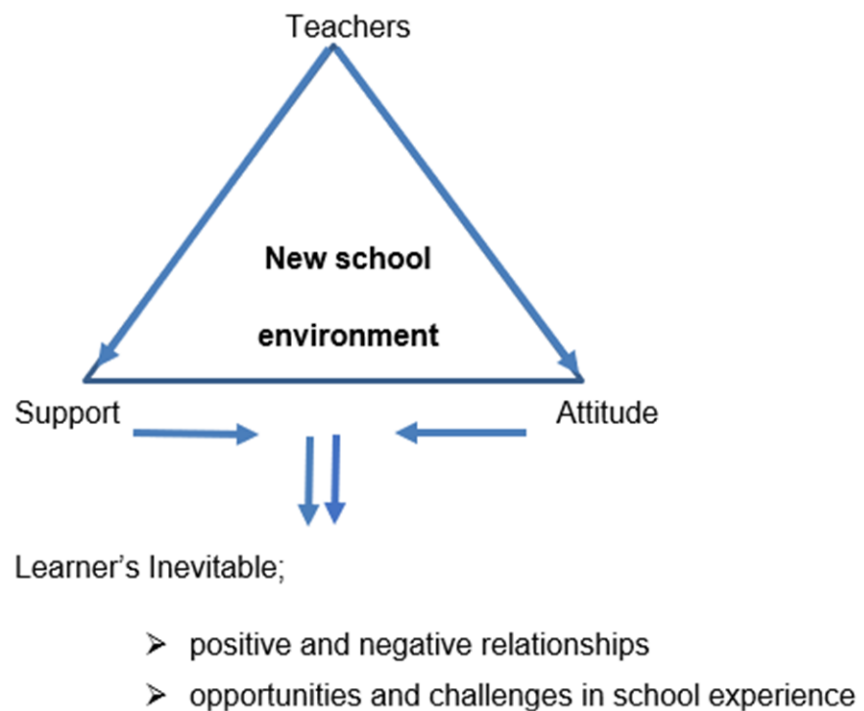
Figure 4.4: Teacher–learner triangular relationship: support and attitude [source own construction]

In conclusion the teacher–learner dimensions identified are support and attitude towards the learners. Both dimensions led to inevitable positive and negative relations which resulted in opportunities and challenges being experienced by learners. Other broader dimensions emerged, and these gave birth to the third sub-theme featuring on learners' experience in Catholic school environment.

(3) Environmental dimensions in the school

The third sub-theme featured is the school environmental dimensions. Participants' responses were identifiable with the following environmental dimensions of the school, religious education, identity, culture and practices. The various dimensions of the school were a testimony of the participants' experience in adaptation to the Catholic school environment. All participants responded in this sub-theme. There were more participants that discussed school identity and few participants responded on school culture dimensions.

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- School culture

As alluded to in Chapter 2 section 2.3.4, school culture in the context of a Catholic school is the shared school life and expectations which refer to the traditions, norms, values, social interactions (Aldana, 2016:177). These contribute to the school experience of the participants as evident from their responses. Some participants responded that the school environment was friendly with caring individuals. Participant I felt that there was a sense of connectedness and care that was being shared in the school by fellow students. Participant I had this to say:

I feel like as much as … Loreto, like the girls have their differences and they fight … but we kind pull together especially when we go out on camps or mass and you sing or something like that. It is just some connection. I do not know how to explain it'.   (I12, lines 82-84)

Similarly, participant G described how other learners who were not in her grade were very friendly and looked out for her when she joined the school and this is what she remarked:

Ma'am on the first day, ma'am I knew one like you said, but then other learners in Grade 10 came to me and they helped me with the books because I was carrying like two plastics of books and stationery. Like they helped me to get used to the surroundings, what is happening. Yes ma'am then I started having friends, ma'am, yes they also supported me, we supported each other and now things, I am used to like everyone .(G9, lines 71-76)

Participants A and E also felt that they had had good experiences in the Catholic school environment. They liked the environment and felt that there were good people in the school. This is what participants A and E indicated:

But then, being in a girls' school, especially this school, it is actually very nice. I actually like the environment in this school, but then Ma'am, I do

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not like the fact that I do feel that I am in prison. When I come to here, when I here, because Ma'am… (A20, line 30-32)

There are very good people here…, helpful people. They are there when you need them and all we just need to do is just greet and we will put a smile on their face or just smile at them and say good morning. Ask them how was your day, and how has things been going. (E5, line 52-54)

In contrast, participant C felt that the school focused more on Christianity and participant E responded that the school had less focus on school outings, which are more of out of school social events. In agreement, participant C seemed to suggest that there were few cultural and sport events. These were their views:

About this school? Ma'am, can I say if they like had more events or more cultural… And also, sports things like athletics for high school because I feel like they are more for Christian and academic rather than sports. (C4, lines 89-97)

Ma'am I would like to ask why high school do not go on school excursions like outings every term because my previous school we went to a, like a trip once in a while, but every term we use to have like just a day off and would go to a certain place to... (E11, lines 61-63)

Observations made from the participants' responses reveal that most of them appreciated the school culture in terms of shared school life and being comfortable in the school. For example, participant I confirmed that they pulled together and there was some connection amongst those in the school. Participant G also revealed they helped her to get used to the surroundings which made her feel comfortable. Some participants shared a different view, saying that there were fewer social interactions because of less social events, such as school outings and sports. They felt that the school concentrated more on Catholic school activities and academics.

It seems as if some learners yearned for connections through social interactions such as school outings and sports despite the observations that they attended mass celebrations and other academic activities. Participant C confirmed and expressed that the school was inclined to religious concerns and school academics, implying that that was the type of shared school life that learners experienced as they also connected. In order to promote the shared school life, the school must focus on students experiences and views of school and also increase their involvement in projects and initiatives that enhance connections and social inclusion (Sammons, 2007:32). As participants in this research 'were adolescents, (Foster, Horwtz, Thomas, Opperman, Gipson, Burnside, Stone & King 2017:3) related that adolescents had their own views on connectedness to schools and they might risk inadequate school adjustment. Furthermore, school connectedness has been related to better academic outcomes and absence of it has been linked to negative outcomes. Quinn (2018:69) proposed that more research work should be done to explore if Catholic school environments that were deemed social environments offered multi-dimensional social context, especially for adolescents' developmental purposes (see literature in Chapter 2).

- School identity

School identity emerged as another environmental school dimension in the sub-theme, environmental dimensions in the Catholic school. Learners' responses constituted a variety of school aspects that distinguished the denominational school and its identity. Almost all participants gave their testimonies of their experiences to adaptation in the Catholic school environment with respect to the identity of the school. Some participants responded that they had had good experiences in relation to aspects of school identity. A number of participants also responded that they had discomfort and challenges in the Catholic school environment and its identity which is distinctive. The participant's responses will be discussed below.

The following responses revealed positive experiences to the school environment and its identity. Participant C responded that she had good experiences to share about a Catholic school. She further pointed out that the

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aspect of mass and prayer were identifiable with the school. This is what participant C said:

> Ma'am, like it is something I am used to and it is become a part of me. Like it is something I will be able to tell …that I have always been to Catholic school and this is how they do things and yes it is a nice experience. (C13, lines 95-99)

> Well, man for me it is like it's school in general just that they have certain things they do like go to Mass and pray a lot…So, my mom was like, she should take me to a Catholic school. (C4, lines 89- 91)

Similarly, participant F related that the school had been identified as being a religious school. Furthermore, she added the discipline in the school actually pushed her mother to enrol her in the school. Participant F echoed the following sentiments:

> So, my mother was like, she should take me to a Catholic school because she knows that discipline there is, is the discipline. Yes, Ma'am, she really does not want me to lose my religion I guess while being in a non-Christian school. Ma'am, she just likes the discipline of the Catholic school. (F2, lines 48-50)

It seems the religious practices and discipline in the school were distinguished even by parents in the community. Participant E also indicated that she was comfortable with the discipline system in the school and the code of conduct which assisted them to honour the school. Participant E identified with the school code of conduct and was proud of the school. She remarked:

> I like this school's code of conduct because it actually shows that we can show pride and honour and honour our school in our appearance and the way we act ,and I like the discipline system. (E4, lines 5-8)

Participant B seemed to be proud of the school as well. She appreciated being identified with the school. Her appearance, for example, hair colour, was prescribed by the school as she wanted to be the good student in the good school. This is what participant B commented:

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… let us say for example I come to school with the wrong colour of hairstyle and the wrong earrings... It does not give other people outside the school when you are walking in the streets the impression…, that you are a good student who goes to a good school and all that, And that makes our school look bad… It is the student who is in that school that make the school look bad. (B7, lines 74-78)

Participants B, E, F and C's responses on school identity seemed to pinpoint various school aspects that they identified within the school. Also, in terms of school identity aspects of their responses suggested that they had positive school experiences.

However, this was different with other participants who responded that there were aspects that they did not understand or even get used to in the school. Participant A responded that she did not understand why there were specifications about which hair style, clothing and earrings learners should wear. This is participant A's verbatim response:

Okay, diamanté earrings, I understand that situation. They can take my earrings. I don't have to wear earrings. That is fine. But then Ma'am, with the hair part, I do not actually like the fact that …the school does not allow us to have Mohawks and I honestly feel like girls should actually have that…You are not allowed to have that certain hairstyle. (A14, lines 8-9)

Furthermore, participant A felt that she was no longer herself because of hairstyle and earring restrictions by the school. Her response indicated that the hairstyle concern was a big issue for her as this changed her appearance. She added:

No, Ma'am. It makes me lose who I am, like…yes; it actually makes me lose who I am. Because I just want to be myself. I am not saying, when I'm saying I want to be myself, I do not mean change completely and actually breaks the rules like dying my hair, wear long earrings and all that. (A14, lines 8-9)

Participant A's response seems to suggest that the school is too strict for her liking as she could not have the hairstyle she liked. Similarly, participants J, B

and F all responded that the school was too strict, and this is what the participants had to say:

> I think it is necessary, but the school does tend to just be like way too strict with it I, I feel like they tend to forget that we are young children and we kind of want our individuality. (J3, lines 85-86)

> I think it is very strict. (B6, lines 41-44)

> Ma'am, I feel like it is too strict Ma'am because, well at school… (F7, lines 14-15)

Furthermore, participant F felt that wearing the school blazer was too much for her. She suggested that wearing it on Fridays during assembly was fine. This is what she said:

> …our blazers everyday Ma'am, I think blazers should only be compulsory on Fridays because that's when we have assembly and mass obviously. (F7, lines 18-20)

The responses from participants J, B and F seem to indicate that the school was too strict, and the participants did not identify with the school in this regard. Participant J elaborated that they wanted to retain their individuality as learners. Participant B regarded the school as being too boring, too enclosed and resembled a prison. This was participant B's comment:

> I feel like this school might be boring in a way, and I also feel that like it's like a prison because of the gates and wall and all that.' (B8, lines 25-27)

The participants' responses seem to insinuate that they were indifferent to the school identity concerns. Generally, the observations made from the responses were that the school was too strict on some aspects like dress code and appearance. For example, wearing the blazer every day and not doing some hairstyles of their choice. This may lead to negative experiences to adaptation in the school environment. Participant F20 line 37-39 indicated that she felt like she would not manage to stay in the school until Grade 12 as the school was too strict, saying, 'Okay Ma'am, I feel like, Ma'am I do not want to stay in this until my Grade 12.' It seems that participant F does not identify with the school environment.

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It seems like there is an identity clash for the participants who do not identify with the school aspects. The above findings are supported Wardekker and Miedema (2001:39) in Chapter 2 who say that schools try to assist learners to develop their own identity and they positively or negatively experience the school. At the adolescent stage, the learners are seeking to advance their individual identities as highlighted by Erikson's theories of life stages discovered in 1959 (Simmons, 2017:63) and this could present a conflict between school and learners' identities. If conflicting identities are equally dominant, the learner will experience stress, resulting in challenges that are related to development of positive self-identity and acceptance (Wedow, Schnabel, Wedow & Konieczny, 2017:293). Sharing other views are Convey (2010) and Dean (2010) in Zoeller and Malewitz (2019:67) who add that in a Catholic school environment the adolescents are at a stage when they seek for their own identities. It is noted from the CAS theory that differences between the school and the learners may emerge (see Chapter 2 section 2.9.2 as adapted from Stewart and Patterson (2016:2)). The differences in school identity and learner identity and/or the dominating of school identity over learner self-identity may complicate the experience of adaptation of learners as exposed in participants' responses. The next section reviews the participants' responses with regard to academics as a dimension of the Catholic school environment.

- School academics

School academics emerged as a dimension in the sub-theme, environmental dimensions in the Catholic school. The participants' responses indicated that school academics was an area of discussion in relationship to their experiences in adapting to the school. More participants responded in the category of academics in the school. They indicated that some aspects on school academics made them feel uncomfortable. A few participants indicated they were appreciative of the academics offered in the school and therefore seemingly comfortable. This is what the few participants narrated regarding the academics. Participant G remarked the following:

> Ma'am it took me time cause at that previous school like they also used to speak like any language to us and then here we speak English, so and I also had to get used to the way they teach us. Yes ma'am, but now I am okay. (G11, lines 46-49)

Participant G responded that she had to get used to speaking English in the school and the way the teachers taught. She confirmed that was she is 'okay'. It seems that she was comfortable in the way she was being taught and speaking English. Participant H line 20-21 also acknowledged that the teaching methods were different. Similarly, participant, D, seemed to be comfortable in the way she learnt and extra lessons were offered by the school. This is what participant D had to say:

> I think, in this school, I learn more than in my previous school, because we all get the extra lessons and everything, and we have more... (D5,lines 94-95)

Furthermore, participant D remarks that they do well academically because they are able to concentrate in the school. This is what participant D added:

> The change is like, in … this school we can concentrate more because we are even getting there to 100 per cent like most passing people in this school, because we concentrate. (D6, lines 19-21)

Participants G and D seemed to be comfortable with some aspects of the school academics. However, participant D also indicated specific challenges that caused discomfort in experiences in school academics. Participant D feared failing in two subjects which were Mathematics and Afrikaans. This is what she commented:

Like, in the most fear in my life, I do not want to fail in school. So, the problem that I am failing, it's because of Maths and Afrikaans. It's the first time in my life, like since I was born, I have not learned Afrikaans in my life. This was the first time. (D10, lines43-46)

Similarly, participant A reflected that her academics had dropped in Grade 9 but she used to do very well. This is what she said:

I used to get like; I even have a trophy for Maths. Especially Maths, I was like one of the top achievers for Maths. I used to get trophies and all that academics and all that. Now, since I became that person, my academics just dropped, and it is really hard since I'm in Grade nine' (A18, lines 52-54)

Participant A felt that Grade 9 level was causing discomfort in her academics. Participant B echoed the same experiences by referring to this year (Grade 9), saying there was a lot of pressure:

Yes, and then comparing my last year and this year. I feel like last year was more like, it was fine, but this year, it is like there is a lot of pressure and all that. Like, in homework and everything like that, and assignments, and yeah.' (B2, lines 29-32)

Furthermore, participant B narrated that academically she felt that the school did not have boys as they would distract them (the girls). She added that they would concentrate more on the boys than on schoolwork. In addition, this is what she said:.

I feel like, they are scared that boys might distract us as girls, and we will concentrate more on the boys than our schoolwork. (B13, lines 47-51)

It can be concluded that as learners enter a new environment, they experience the academic aspects of the Catholic school. The findings point to aspects such as teaching styles, use of English language as a teaching medium, level of concentration on schoolwork, and too many homework and assignments, which seem to give participants a unique academic experience in the school. Some authors support the findings. Convey (2013:23) points out that Catholic schools maintain high academic standards which is a major contributor to their effectiveness. According to the literature referred to in Chapter 2, it is noted that improving academically is a positive indicator for a good experience in the new school (Correia & Marques-Pinto, 2016:248). Contrary to this, Booth and Gerard (2014:737) have pointed out that low academic achievement is related to adjusting to new school environment. Similarly, Rupsiene and Kucinskiene (2005:2) stated that the problems associated with adaptation are mostly on

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account of a transition to a new school as a result of new environmental conditions and dimensions. In line with that, Hastings (2012:337) reports that generally when students transfer from primary school to secondary school challenges and opportunities become evident in trying to adapt. Similarly, Borbélyová (2017:207) asserts that when a child enrols in a new school, the child must adapt by adopting the newly introduced social roles. Moreover, social roles result in positive adaption which leads to the adolescent building confidence in academic and social roles (Eccles et al., 1993:93).

Therefore, school academics, identity and culture have been discussed above as in the schools' environmental dimensions sub-theme 3. All these dimensions have influenced the learners' experiences to adaptation positively or negatively as described in theme 3. According to the CAS theory discussed in Chapter 2, school environments are complex as systems are diverse and school dimensions vary. Furthermore, different actors such as teachers and learners interact, and this may cause tension in the school environment. Teachers' experiences with Grade 8 and 9 learners as they joined the school were relevant to the study to bring about an in-depth understanding of the learners' experiences to adaptation. The teachers' experiences are discussed below.

4.8 Teachers' responses to learners' experience on adaptation

Class teachers play an important role in the guiding and advising of their classes. To achieve this, the class teachers are allocated specific classes from all the grades. Among other responsibilities, the class teachers are also expected to offer support to learners by attempting to address their various challenges, guiding them and ensuring that they obey the school rules. Considering the class teacher's responsibilities and their closeness to the Grade 9 learners, it was deemed worthwhile to include the class teachers' views on how Grade 9 learners experience adaption.

In this research, two class teachers (identified as Teacher X, and Teacher Y) were separately interviewed by the me and their responses were noted. The teachers responses were also transcribed, coded and analysed. In the same way that Grade 9 learners were treated, the teachers were also initially served

with letters of voluntary participation (See Appendix 2 for the teachers' letter). The only question posed to the two class teachers was, What has been your experience to Grade 9 learners' adaptation to the Catholic school environment as they join the school in Grade 8 and progress to Grade 9?. The individual interview procedure followed was briefly described in Chapter 3, Section 3.7.2, Step 4.

The class teachers were given the freedom to narrate what they had experienced as well as what the Grade 9 learners' experiences to adaptation in the Catholic school environment were. Overall, the teachers' narrations revealed that there were more challenges than opportunities faced by learners as they experienced adaptation to the new school environment. Different views on the experiences of the Grade 9 learners were given by the two class teachers and are discussed next.

First, both Teachers X and Y pointed out that the main complaint put forward by the learners was that the school's rules in the code of conduct were too strict. Secondly, the learners pointed out that they did not understand why they did RE as a subject and participated in Catholic church activities and practices, as they were only at the school to learn. In line with this, Teacher X revealed that when the learners are in Grade 8, they frequently complained that it was difficult to adjust and follow the Catholic prayers. In addition, Teacher X indicated that Grade 9 learners did not want to participate in activities such as the bible quiz and school outreach programmes, as they felt that these were being forced to them. On the other hand, Teacher Y pointed out that the learners were happy to do reflection on Friday, as they felt that this activity accommodated everyone spiritually.[40] Lastly, both teachers reported that the challenges that the learners experienced in adapting in Grade 8 and 9 were mainly due to poor parent-to-school relationship. In particular, Teacher X highlighted that some parents were non-Catholics and thus had no idea of the Catholic School system and therefore could not assist their children in adapting to the new experiences. In the same way, Teacher Y's view was that

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[40] See field notes in Appendix 10 on all Catholic activities and practices in the Catholic School.

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both the parents and their children needed to be supported when it came to skills required to for their children to adjust to the challenges in the new school environment.

Of importance to the study is the fact that both teachers felt that learners were not adequately assisted in adjusting to the Catholic school environment. Teacher X and Teacher Y remarked that the behaviour of the girls was very difficult at Grade 9 level to both subject teachers and to them as class teachers. However, Teacher Y attributed this to the adolescent stage and its influence on the Grade 9 learners. In this regard, literature in Chapter 2 sub-Section 2.6.3, suggested that the onset of the adolescence stage posed many challenges and could possibly be playing a big role in influencing their experiences in the new school environment.

In summary, both teachers revealed that there were more challenges in experiencing the school environment and its system in both Grade 8 and 9. Furthermore, according to the two teachers, the Grade 9 learners experienced more hurdles ranging from bad behaviour, drug abuse, social media abuse, clique fights and other challenges that contributed to their experiences in the Catholic school environment. That said, Teacher Y was adamant that each learner had their own way of adapting to a new school environment at both Grade 8 and 9 levels. It seems that the school environment that the learners encounter provides a rich experience for the learners. A better understanding was provided by the field notes in Appendix 10. A deeper understanding of the field notes contribution to the study and the findings is briefly described below.

4.9 A brief discussion on field notes and understanding learners' experiences

The field notes in Appendix 10 were pre-planned to give evidence of Loreto Convent Catholic school's contextual information, in terms of its systems, culture, identity and day to day school-life activities that were encountered by learners. The contextual descriptions highlighted in field notes gave meaning and aided in understanding the experiences of adaptation by Grade 9 learners in the school environment. For example, the school's religious practices and events such as mass, Ash Wednesday and other activities as described in the

field notes required that all learners take part. Learners were expected to show reverence and respect to these events in the Catholic Cathedral church at all times and also take part in them. Grade 9 learners therefore encountered different experiences to adaptation in these specific exposures. As revealed in the findings in theme (i) section 4.7.1.1 on learners' past experiences, it seems learners also experienced culture shock, as they experienced religious practices that they were unfamiliar with from their past religious experiences.

4.10 Conclusion

Three major themes were generated, (i) Learners' past experiences, (ii) The role played by peers in the experience of adaptation and (iii) The school's internal system and dimensions. The interpretations and findings of the participants indicated that the Catholic school environment posed both positive and negative experiences to adaptation. The Catholic school, like any other school, is a complex entity with high levels of interactions, interdependence and interconnectedness within the linear and non-linear dynamic structures (Hawkins & James, 2018:732; Stewart & Patterson, 2016:2; Wang, Han & Yang, 2015:382). As learners experienced the school environment, they were exposed to the complexities of the school. According to the CAS theory, the complexities are evident as differences, similarities and connections due to actors such as learners interrelating and interacting in the school system and as a result patterns emerge (see Chapter 2 Figure 2.2, the CAS theory) Furthermore, these patterns give rise to the 'butterfly effect' which depicts the symbolic visual interpretation of the non-linear interactions as underpinned by the CAS theory. As an analysis, the learners exist in the Catholic school environment with various complexities which are inevitable as they experience adaptation. This analysis leads to the chapter summary of Chapter 3.

4.10 Chapter summary

This chapter described the data presentation, analysis and interpretation. I engaged Tesch's eight steps as applied by Creswell and Creswell (2018) in the coding process to generate a description of the collected data and detailed interpretation. The coding methods used in this research are attribute, in vivo, narrative, values and descriptive. These codes were utilised in the coding

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process using Tesch's coding process. Data was analysed and presented as themes. Three themes were generated, as discussed above, using mostly in vivo coding as the dominant coding strategy. The ontological and epistemological understandings for the coding choices for specific strategies and methods were explained. Literature was used as a control in the theme discussions. The next chapter, Chapter 5, will examine recommendations to the findings and conclusions to the study.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 focused on the interpretation, analysis and findings of the data collected from Grade 9 learners' in-depth individual interviews. This chapter now focuses on discussing and outlining the research findings, recommendations, limitations and a summary of the study. The purpose and focus of the case study approach used in this study was an attempt to understand how the Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation in a Catholic school environment. The specific period of focus was from the time the learners were newly introduced into the school at Grade 8 level. In this regard, the Grade 9 learners were chosen as the main participants in the interviews conducted for this research. The research question was comprised of two parts: the main question and its sub-questions. The main research question attempted to establish how Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation in a denominational school environment. In addition, the sub-questions assisted in providing a more detailed understanding as to how the Grade 9 class teachers viewed and experienced the adaptation of their learners to the Catholic school environment.[41] Part of the Grade 9 class teachers' duty is to give advice and assist their learners to cope with the new school environment upon their arrival at the school while in Grade 8. Another sub-question sought to understand how the Catholic school environmental elements such as identity and culture, religious aspects and school policies, influenced the learners' experiences to adaptation as they attempted to adjust to their new school environment.

To address these questions and its sub-questions, a qualitative case study was conducted, guided by the interpretivist paradigm. Ten Grade 9 learners were selected, as explained in Chapter 3, to be participants and they were individually interviewed, and audio recordings obtained. The objective of the in-depth interviews with the learners was to establish their experiences to adjusting to the school environment. In addition, the literature review in

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[41] See Chapter 4 section 4. for a detailed discussion on the responses given by the Grade 9 teachers.

Chapter 2 explored a number of aspects in the findings. The CAS theory in Chapter 2 played the role of providing a lens to the study and gain an insight into the complexities inherent in the Catholic school environment. Furthermore, the CAS theory assisted in reflecting and providing an understanding of the participants' experiences in the school through the findings.

Finally, data collected in the form of audio recordings from the interviews was transcribed, coded using Tesch's eight steps of the coding process, interpreted and analysed. The coding process enabled a logical flow of information in this research. As a result, three broad themes inductively emerged giving a direction to this chapter. To ensure this chapter remains in sync with the research questions, both the background and context of this research were revisited and aligned. The chapter also attempts to ensure that the background issues previously raised are contextualised in relation to findings obtained as proposed by Okeke and van Wyk (2015:574).

5.2 Revisiting the background and undertaking made

The literature in Chapter 2 pointed out that schools are complex environments that may be difficult to understand. This implies that the different types of school environments that are in existence are complex. For instance, a government school environment offers its own experiences as it possess a particular set of complexities, while an independent Catholic school possess different experiences. The complexities can be explained by the interactions, relationships, connectedness of the systems and individuals found in the school set-up. The issues regarding denominational school environments, highlighted in Section 1.2, are of central importance to one's need to understand how Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation in that given environment (Okeke & van Wyk, 2015:574). Consequently, the issues underpinning this research are first that, historically, Catholic schools are of a foreign origin and are mostly composed of Eurocentric religious beliefs (Chryssides & Greaves, 2014:53). On the other hand, indigenous people of South Africa are grounded in the origins of the African religion.

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Secondly, the issue of diversity in Catholic schools is evident in the culture and religious affiliation of the learners in these schools (Naidoo, 2015:117). Again, outlined in section 1.2, Baker (2016:60) indicated that about 24 per cent of learners belong to the Catholic denomination in Catholic schools in South Africa as recorded on the CIE database for 2014. Not surprisingly, diversity amongst the learners is expected as about per cent are non-Catholics and possess other diverse cultures and various other religious affiliations.

The third issue concerns the identity of a denominational school, which includes ownership names of the school, the admission criteria and the curriculum (Faas, Smith & Danmody, 2018:4) as mentioned in Chapter 2 section 2.3.2. Denominational schools possess unique environments that have a particular identity. As the Catholic school is attempting to preserve its identity, the adolescents in that system are also seeking to establish their own identity within the same environment (Kroger, 2015:65).[42]

The fourth issue dwells on the past experiences of the Grade 9 learners before moving to a denominational school environment. As presented by Wahyuni (2012:71), interpretivist researchers recognise that individuals carry with them experiences from their past, gained from a variety of backgrounds and these warrant a construction of some reality.

The fifth issue pertains to why parents, in some instances, choose to enrol their children in Catholic schools. Parents may enrol their children in Catholic schools without any prior knowledge of the systems of these schools and the values the children are expected to follow. The decision by parents to enrol their children in a Catholic school may be swayed by past academic results, the geographical proximity of the school, the school rules, the perceived discipline within the school, and other subjective factors. In fact, parents should be at the forefront of assisting their children to adjust to the new school environment as the family members are considered to play a critical role in

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[42] See Chapter 2 literature on school identity.

influencing their children to adapt more easily to the school environment (Baker et al., 2003:215).

The several issues mentioned in Section 1.3 and in this section, help in bringing forth the purpose of the research as articulated in subsection 1.4.2. Despite all these issues that have just been pointed out by various empirical researchers (see Baker et al., 2003; Wayhuni, 2012; Chryssides & Greeves, 2014; Naidoo, 2015; Kroger, 2015; Baker, 2016; Faas, Smith & Danmody, 2018), little attention has been paid to analysing how Grade 9 learners experience adaptation to a Catholic school in a South African context. The participants' realities and experiences to adaptation in the school environment are revealed as the main findings of this study. The findings are evaluated using the themes produced and discussed in Chapter 4.

5.3 Main findings of the study

5.3.1 General trend in findings

Participants' responses regarding their experiences to adaptation in the Catholic school environment enhanced the findings. The findings revealed both negative and positive experiences by learners in the school. As analysed from the findings, it seems there were more negative than positive experiences in adjusting to the school. The findings brought a clearer understanding of what some learners go through as their experiences when they adjust in a Catholic school environment.

5.3.2 Outline of findings

Two key findings were made in relation to adjusting to religious practices in the Catholic school environment. First, the findings indicate that participants feel overwhelmed by the religious practices that are new, unfamiliar and encountered frequently. Secondly, the findings reflect that adjusting to religious practices in a Catholic school is a process with stages and, at times, the learners try to follow the religious proceedings, but they have challenges. These findings indicate that there are challenges in adapting and therefore negative experiences encountered by learners to the religious practices in the Catholic school as some of the learners are not originally of Catholic

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denomination. As described in the detailed field notes and school setting, the school Church often invites all learners in the school to attend Church services and other Catholic practices.

Further findings point to the learners' experiences of the Catholic school culture, which presented a culture shock the first time they were exposed to it. The literature shows that in a school setting, learners go through distress psychologically and emotionally if they do not first embrace the school's culture. In addition, the CAS theory indicates that learners are the actors in the school system that interact and, as a result, differences may emerge as they experience the school culture and other fellow learners' cultures.

Other findings related to the school culture in terms of religious experiences are that the school is more inclined to mass celebrations and religious concerns and less involved in other social interactions such as sports and school outings. Learners want more social interactions and different experiences besides religious experiences. As indicated in the learner's responses, some learners yearn for connections with the school through social interactions as they experience their shared school life. The literature in Chapter 2 reveals that in order to promote the learners' shared school life, the school must focus on learners' experiences and increase their involvement in projects and initiatives that enhance connections and social inclusion (Sammons, 2007:32). It is also realised that Grade 8 and 9 levels are early adolescent stages and adolescents have their own views on shared school life and connectedness, which influences their experiences as explained in the CAS theory in Chapter 2 on school relationships and connectedness within the internal system of the school.

Another key finding reflects on the school's discipline system. Very few respondents reported that the discipline system of the school was lenient. As evident from the information presented by the baseline questionnaire on the participant's profile, many parents had influenced the learner's decision to join

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the school for reasons such as the discipline system of the Catholic school.[43] Findings also indicate that the Catholic school was stricter than their previous schools. As reflected by the participants, they could differentiate their past experiences in terms of discipline between the previous schools and in their current school. Other findings in this research uncovered discomfort among learners in line with the code of conduct that the rules were generally too strict and unfair, for instance, hair styles, wearing of blazers all the time and name badge. This pointed to areas of learners' dress code and individual appearance issues. These issues were raised as concerns by most participants, indicating that the school was being rated as very strict in relation to discipline and the code of conduct.

However, findings from the literature in Chapter 2 reveal that as learners adapt to a new school environment, the acceptance of school rules portrays the level of adaption to the school. The CAS theory in Chapter 2 also reveals that as learners relate within the school system, differences emerge between the learners and the Catholic system and these differences can result in conflicts. In addition, the literature revealed that at the adolescent stage, the learners are seeking to understand their individual identities as adolescents, and this could present a conflict between schools' and learners' identity. If any one of the identities dominates, be it school identity or learner self-identity, then there are complications leading to negative experiences to adaptation in the new Catholic school environment. On the other hand, if there is a balance between the learners' identity and school identity then learners positively experience the school environment and embrace the code of conduct and the expected school rules.

Further findings relating to the participant's academic experience in the school are also revealed. The participants reported that aspects such as teaching styles, use of the English language as a teaching medium, level of concentration on schoolwork, and too many homework and assignment tasks

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[43] See the 10 participants' demographics details as presented in section 4.3 participants' profile in Table 4.1.

seemed to give them a unique academic experience at the school. The findings reveal that the participants were overwhelmed by the school academic standards. Literature in Chapter 2 supports the findings that Catholic schools maintain high academic standards which is a major contributor to their effectiveness. However, it also reveals that concerns have been raised about low academic achievement and its relation to learners' adjusting to new school environment.

Another key finding was that most participants preferred co-educational school environments. The findings reveal that not all learners who move into the school environment adjust positively as it is a non-co-educational Catholic school. The participants' background experiences indicate that in their previous schools they were used to having boys in the school. Furthermore, with reference to the current school environment, they pointed out that it was strange that there were no boys and their school experiences were complicated without them. These findings emerged as a surprise and were not anticipated as no literature or common sense could explain why they would adapt positively to the school with boys being around. This stands with the fact that in their families, communities and interactions outside the school, there are boys. However, literature in Chapter 2 attempted to explain and link these findings to social interactions that were strongly driven by gender, whether in school or outside the school. It could only be linked to social interactions whereby the participants preferred the opposite sex. Then a question maybe posed, What are the experiences to adaptation of girls in a non-co-educational Catholic school environment in the absence of boys?

In contrast, more findings revealed that few participants preferred to be in a non-co-educational Catholic school environment. It was evident that they were more comfortable and their experiences in the school brought more opportunities in that they could relate well as girls, share same views and personalities. The literature in Chapter 2 supports the idea that girls relate well among themselves and they have strong same-sex interactions, they feel more comfortable, knowledgeable about norms and culture of their group as girls. In addition, the literature in Chapter 2 backs the idea/theory/notion that adolescence is that period when gender roles and identities flourish and at the

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same time identity crises are also at their highest point. The participants who prefer a girl-only environment identify with same-sex gender roles.

The findings also show that in the girls-only environment, peer relations lead to clique formation amongst the learners. The participants pointed out that it was necessary to form small groups of friends in close circles that had members who supported each other in adjusting to the school. In addition, the findings reflect that the learners in their small groups assisted each other with bettering their academic marks, studying together and sharing of social issues. The learners saw this as a strategy or tactic to survive by forming cliques that helped with fitting in with their peers and also in the school environment. Accordingly, in forming cliques, these learners who are adolescents encounter various experiences to adaptation. The literature in Chapter 2 indicates that during the adolescent stage peers seek a sense of belonging and they want to fit in amongst friends and in school contexts. According to the CAS theory in Chapter 2, stakeholders, such as learners, form complex relationships among themselves, with the motive of supporting each other or sometimes causing conflicts. It is safe to say that some peers in the Catholic school helped each other in various ways to adapt positively to the Catholic school environment which has been identified in Chapter 2 as having a unique setting.

On the other hand, the findings revealed that peers also caused conflict among their peers through cyberbullying. A few of the Grade 9 participants indicated that cyberbullying was mostly being experienced and identified as a negative experience among their peers in the school. Research has indicated that Catholic school cyberbullying is evident as learner's progress to the eighth Grade and that one in every five learners experiences cyberbullying in the adolescent stage. Cyberbullying contradicts positive school experiences as perpetrators are also in the school and exist amongst themselves. Other studies suggest that girls use cyberbullying as a tactic to bring each other down; they gossip and spread rumours about each other as already explained in Chapter 2 literature review.

Another major finding was that in the Catholic school environment the learners are exploring their sexuality. According to some of the respondents, some of

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the girls are sexually attracted to the other girls, but they are afraid to come out in the open. They secretly explore their sexuality as they are fairly aware that in a Catholic school, homosexuality as a practice is unacceptable for learners. The literature in Chapter 2 suggests that the girls are confronted with a dilemma that at the adolescent stage individuals respond differently to sexuality issues and they explore sexual relations even in a girls-only school as reflected in this study However, the Catholic school traditions classify homosexuality as an unnatural practice and it is therefore frowned upon. According to the CAS theory, the Catholic school system is a complex environment, as it allows for differences to emerge between the school system and the learners as they interact. The Catholic school system views homosexuality as unacceptable, but at the same time the girls in the school practice it. This complicates the adaptation process as the girls have to secretly explore their sexuality.

The other two key findings were with regard to teacher support and teacher attitude to learners in the Catholic school environment. The two findings revolve around the teacher–student relationships in the school. The findings revealed that teacher support influenced the participants' experiences both negatively and positively. According to some participants, the teachers were unsupportive in terms of giving advice and guidance. A few participants indicated that the teachers did not relate well to them; the teachers judged them and offered no guidance. The findings indicated that some learners had negative experiences with their teachers, and this complicated the adaptation process for learners. On the other hand, more participants revealed that some teachers offered support by talking to them when they are sad, when they failed, and when they needed guidance and emotional support. The findings suggested that teachers play an important role in giving support to learners and this is the learners' positive experiences to adaptation as they relate with the teachers in the new school environment. It is evident that not all teachers offer support to learners in the Catholic school. However, the literature in Chapter 2 directs that the teacher's support is crucial to learners as they move to a new school environment. Furthermore, the CAS theory asserts that in complex environments such as schools, the environments offer challenges

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and opportunities to learners as they relate with teachers and hence complex negotiations are required.

Closely related to the findings on teacher support are findings on the teachers' attitudes towards learners. Learners recounted on both positive and negative experiences due to teachers' attitudes in the Catholic school. The findings reveal that very few participants had good experiences arising from positive attitudes from their teachers. By contrast, most participants had bad experiences due to the teachers' negative attitudes. As indicated in the findings on negative attitudes presented by teachers, participants reflected that teachers tended to be unfair, impatient, unapproachable, unpleasant, and displayed bad moods to them. In contrast, findings from some participants were that teachers displayed positive attitudes to towards learners. Participants' responses were that some teachers assisted them to get used to the surroundings, thereby experiencing a positive attitude from the teacher which made it easier to adjust to the school.

The literature review in Chapter 2 confirmed that teacher–student positive relationships increase the learners' chances of good behaviour, better social interactions and academic excellence. The CAS theory also clarifies that student–teacher relationships are inevitable on a daily basis and that conflicts and challenges may emerge as new patterns of relationships in the complex school Catholic environment. The conflicts and challenges with teachers result in negative experiences by learners as they try to adjust.

In summary, the findings showed that participants' experiences were both negative and positive when adapting to the school environment. It was demonstrated in the findings that learners do not only academically learn, they also learn socially through a shared school life. New school environments pose challenges and opportunities to learners as it is inevitable for learners to interrelate and connect with the Catholic school system. In the system, stakeholders such as the teachers, fellow learners and the priest are part of the Catholic school administration and all coexist at Loreto Convent School. Environments such as schools are socially important to learners as they socially construct their experiences and thereby shape their lives. The findings

reveal that learners in a Catholic school environment experience adaptation to the new school environment and that it is a process from the time they enter the school in Grade 8 level and continues well beyond.

5.4 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of and approaches used in the current study, the following suggestions for possible future research are put forward:

- As the current study analysed only Grade 9 learners at Loreto Convent School, it would be useful to consider how all Grade 9 learners, regardless of when they enrolled at the school, experienced adaptation to the Catholic school environment. Similarly, the same research questions empirically tested in this study can be used and the results can be compared. A similar approach may also be used to include all the learners at Loreto Convent School.

- Another area for future research pertains to exploring other important aspects inherent in a school environment other than adaptation as an experience. This would widen the scope of issues to discuss learner's experiences with respect to those other factors such as sexuality as according to the findings.

- The study could be conducted using a quantitative approach. The results to be obtained could be interesting, especially if compared to the results obtained in this study which used the case study method, which is a qualitative approach.

- The study could also be extended to include Grade 9 learners in other Catholic schools (Pretoria and all South African provinces).

- The results obtained if all the teachers at Loreto Convent School were included in the interviews could have been interesting to note – this presents an area for further research.

- It is further suggested that a study be conducted exploring experiences to adaptation by focusing on both public and government schools in their respective contexts, to possibly compare their results.

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5.5 Limitations of the study

The study has a number of limitations:

- The research focused on exploring how only the Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation to the Catholic school environment; no other grades were involved in the interview process. Thus, the majority of the learners and other grades (Grades 8, 10, 11 and 12) within the school who did not satisfy this criterion were not included in the study. Eventually, 10 Grade 9 learners, whose interview results were analysed, formed the final sample. Nevertheless, this does not make the results obtained in this study less significant.

- The input from only two Grade 9 teachers was taken into account, as the criterion for participating in the study required only that the participants' class teachers be interviewed in attempting to explore the teachers' views to how Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation to the Catholic school environment.

- The study was limited to Grade 9 learners at Loreto Convent School, which contributed to a limited sample size being considered. Hence, the results cannot be generalised universally but apply only to the subjects in the study.[44]

- The research was restricted to exploring how Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation to a Catholic school environment. Thus, adaptation was the only process considered and explored in establishing how Grade 9 learners experienced it.

- The interviews were restricted to Grade 9 learners who enrolled at Loreto Convent School from Grade 8 level. All other Grade 9 learners and learners from other grades were not considered in the study.

- The number of Grade 9 learners sampled was only limited to 10, based on the voluntary criterion previously explained, thereby reducing the sample size for the study.

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[44] See Chapter 1 section 1.16

- The learners' exploration of sexual relations and sexual identities emerged as an area of concern, however this study did not focus on this concern as it was not within the scope of this study. It may be of exploration in another study on exploring sexual relations and sexual identities in a single sex school.

5.6 Summary of the study

The study aimed at understanding how Grade 9 learners experienced adaptation in the Catholic school environment. The study indicated that the participants experienced both negative and positive new school experiences. Chapter 1 outlined the research questions and the motivation for doing this study which was born out of the research problem. Included in Chapter 1 was the history, background and context of Loreto Convent School. Chapter 2 explored and extensively discussed selected relevant literature on adaptation and Catholic schools. The CAS theory was discussed as the most suitable theoretical lens attempting to magnify and understand the complexities in social environments such as the Catholic school. Chapter 3 outlined the research design and methodology of the study. A case study method guided by the qualitative approach was deemed the most suitable in understanding Grade 9 learners' experiences of the new school environment. The interpretivist paradigm underpinned the study. Data was collected from learners through individual in-depth interviews. A field note diary and researcher's observations were used to enrich the case study therefore ensuring a high level of credibility and trustworthiness. Ethical considerations ensured valid, reliable and rigorous findings. Chapter 4 presented the findings from the participants' interviews. By utilising Tesch's coding process, three broad themes emerged from the data collected from interviews. The three themes directed the discussions in Chapter 5 were findings, recommendations, limitations and a chapter summary was presented.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter of consent from school principal

To Whom It May Concern,

I …… Suzette Truter…………………………………………………………… (full name) being the Principal of Loreto Convent School as of 26 March 2019, hereby grant Mrs Memory Muganiwa the full permission to have full access to the school's resources for the purpose of conducting her academic research. Mrs Memory Muganiwa has been teaching in Grades 8 to 12 at Loreto Convent School from January 2009 and is now pursuing a master's degree in Humanities in the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria's Groenkloof Campus. This letter of permission gives Mrs Memory Muganiwa (student no. 12263509) access to material, participants and buildings that she deems important for the fulfilment of her research objectives. Mrs Muganiwa has made a full undertaking that all the school resources and material accessed while conducting her research would only be used for academic purposes and that all information collected remains fully confidential.

By way of this letter, I hereby authorise Mrs Memory Muganiwa to conduct her research at Loreto Convent School.

Yours,

Mrs Suzette Truter

School Principal: Loreto Convent School

Signed:…………………………………………

Witness: …………………………………….

Date: …………………………………………………

Appendix 2: Letter of invitation to Grade 9 class teacher

Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

24 June 2019

Dear colleague (Grade 9 class teacher)

Ref: Letter of invitation to participate in my research

My name is Memory Muganiwa. I am a master's student at the University of Pretoria and am enrolled in the Education Humanities. As part of my academic journey, I am required to conduct research and I am doing a study on **"Adaptation to a denominational school environment: a case study of Grade 9 learners at a Catholic School"**. I would like to invite you to participate in my study so that I can understand how you as a Grade 9 class teacher experience Grade 9 learners' adaptation to the Catholic school environment. This will assist us in our teaching profession as class teachers are also concerned with how our learners adjust to the school as they become part of the Loreto family.

I am going to explain to you how you will be involved if you decide to participate. If you have volunteered to participate, you will be asked to attend an in-depth individual interview session with me as your interviewer. The interview will take place in the boardroom for privacy and will take about 60 minutes. You will be asked to discuss your experience of how Grade 9 learners experience the school environment as they join the Catholic school from other schools in Grade 8 and progress to Grade 9. In your view, what are the key aspects of the adaptation of Grade 9 learners at the school? I will probe further if I need any clarity as I lead the interview discussion. The interview sessions are private and confidential. Your valuable input will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Your voice will be recorded during the interview session and I will sign a confidentiality clause.

Yours sincerely

Memory Muganiwa

University of Pretoria student

As a requirement of the ethics department of the University of Pretoria you are required to sign a letter of consent, acknowledging your willingness to participate and that you may withdraw at any time. I also declare that no video recordings will be used; only audio recordings to capture your voice for the research report. Your participation will be treated with confidentiality.

Appendix 3: Letter of request to social worker

Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

24 June 2019

Dear research assistant (school social worker)

I am conducting the following study: **"Adaptation to a denominational school environment: a case study of Grade 9 learners at a Catholic school"**. I would like to invite you to participate in my study by assisting with the selection process, sampling process and in-depth individual interviews with learners as I am conflicted in that I teach all Grade 9 learners. I am conducting this study so that I can understand how Grade 9 learners have experienced being at a Catholic school since they started Grade 8.

I will address the Grade 9 learners about the research and the selection process with the permission of the principal or in the presence of the principal. After addressing the learners, I will hand over the selection process to you. This ensures that I do not know which learners are participating. It is done through completing the Volunteer to Participate form, which is placed in a box so as to ensure confidentiality. You will receive the forms and will identify eligible participants. I do not need to know who the participants are.

You will have to check if the six participants were not involved with you in previous sessions. The consent letter to the learners informs them that they are participating anonymously and that the information is confidential. You have to sign a letter with a confidentiality clause stating that you will only interview participants who you have not encountered in your social work sessions. You will interview learners who you have not encountered before, which means there is no previous link between the interviewer and the interviewee.

The eligible learners will move to stage two. In stage two, six participants are selected in the sampling process. As the researcher and teacher, I am not in a position to carry out the sampling process and in-depth interviews with the participants due to issues of confidentiality and influence on participants. You will receive guidance on how to conduct the activities.

The six participants will complete a baseline questionnaire before their interviews. Privacy and confidentiality are of the utmost importance and participants must not know who is being interviewed. Please remind the participants that only audio recording will take place. The baseline questionnaire is for background and context to study the information. The questionnaire will also make the participants feel at ease. They will only complete a questionnaire in the interview room. The learners may not write their names on this questionnaire and will use the assigned letters A, B, C, D, E and F as their "names". There are only five specific questions to be answered.

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Appendix 4: Letter requesting participation to Grade 9 learners

Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

24 June 2019

Dear learner

Ref: Letter of invitation to participate in my research

My name is Memory Muganiwa. I am a master's student at the University of Pretoria. I am enrolled in the Education Humanities. As part of my academic journey I am required to do research. I am busy with the following study: "**Adaptation to a denominational school environment: a case study of Grade 9 learners at a Catholic School**". I would like to invite you to take part in my study. I am doing this study so that I can find out how Grade 9 learners have experienced being at a Catholic school since they started Grade 8. This will assist you, other learners and future learners that join our school to adjust and be part of the Loreto family.

I am going to explain to you how you will be involved if you decide to participate. If you have volunteered to participate and you are selected, you will be required to do two activities. The school social worker will carry out the activities with you on my behalf. First, you will fill in a baseline questionnaire. The baseline questionnaire is for background and context information. You as a participant may not write your name on this questionnaire. You will only use the assigned letters A, B, C, D, E and F as your "name". There are only four simple and specific questions to be answered.

The second activity after filling in the questionnaire will involve an in-depth individual interview with you as participant. The school social worker will ask about your experience in Catholic school in grades 8 and 9. She will ask you to elaborate if there is a need for clarity. The interview session will take about 45 minutes and will be conducted in the social worker's office.

I will sign a confidentiality clause to ensure that your participation is private. Your contribution to this research is very valuable. The school social worker may also not discuss your views with anyone. Your names will not be revealed, and your contributions will be written in such a way that no other person will know who you are – not even the researcher.

The recordings (on cassettes) and your questionnaires will be kept in a safe and private place. Remember that participation in the research is voluntary. After the research report, I will share interesting news with you about what we understand in terms of adjusting to our school.

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Appendix 5: Letter requesting consent from parents of Grade 9 learners

Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

24 June 2019

Dear parent/guardian

I am a master's student at the University of Pretoria. I am enrolled in the Education Humanities. As part of my academic journey, I am required to carry out research. I am inviting your child to be a participant in my educational research. The title of my research is: **"Adaptation to a denominational school environment: a case study of Grade 9 learners at a Catholic School"**.

The aim of this study is for the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of how Grade 8 and 9 learners adjust to the school environment. It is important to conduct this research as adapting to the school environment influences teaching and learning.

Your child may volunteer to participate in the study and may also withdraw at any time. However, if they decide to participate in the research study, your permission is required. You may also explain to your child what this study entails. Not participating in this research will not affect your child's school record or relationship with the school.

During the interviews, the participants' voices will be recorded and the information will then be transcribed and used for the research. All recorded material is confidential and your children will not use their actual names in the research. The material is used strictly for academic purposes, is kept safe and confidential and is destroyed after the University's assessment. No names will be presented in the final research report.

The school social worker has volunteered to facilitate the activities and I trust her professionalism. As I am a Grade 9 teacher, I interact with the children every day and they might feel inhibited to discuss their experience at school in my presence.

If your child is selected to participate and they are willing, they will take part in two activities. The school social worker will conduct the activities with your child on my behalf. First, your child will complete a baseline questionnaire. The baseline questionnaire is for background and context information. Your child may not write their name on the questionnaire and will only use the assigned letters A, B, C, D, E and F as their "name". There are only four simple and specific questions to be answered.

The second activity, after completing the questionnaire, will involve an in-depth individual interview with your child. The school social worker will ask questions about your child's experience at the Catholic school in grades 8 and 9. She will ask you to elaborate if there is a

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Appendix 6: Volunteer to Participate form for all Grade 9 learners

Form to find out if you want to take part in the research

I am a master's student at the University of Pretoria. I am enrolled in the Faculty of Education. As part of my academic journey, I am required to carry out research. I am doing a study on **Adaptation to a denominational school environment: a case study of Grade 9 learners in a Catholic School.** I am doing this study so that I can find out how you Grade 9 learners have experienced being at a Catholic School since you started Grade 8. This will assist you, other learners and future learners who join our school in adjusting and being part of the Loreto family.

I would like you to fill in the volunteer to participate form. Filling in this form does not mean you are already taking part in the study. Filling in this form is part of the selection process should you indicate that you want to participate. Through the permission of the principal, I am letting the school social worker take over the process of selection as I do not want to know the participants for confidentiality reasons. After filling in the forms I will ask you to put the forms in a box and the school social worker will check who is willing to take part. If you decide to take part in the research, there are two activities to be carried out that the school social worker will discuss with the selected individuals. Let us read the Volunteer to Participate Form together.

Instructions: There are only four simple questions. Fill in the spaces with the necessary information and also place an (X) in the appropriate box.

Name:

_____

Surname:

_____

Grade:

_____

1). Please indicate whether you are Catholic or not.

Catholic (Yes)	
Catholic (No)	

2). Please indicate the year you enrolled at this high school for Grade 8 from other schools.

In the year 2018	
Another year	

3) Please indicate whether you willing to be selected to take part in the research.

Yes, I want to be selected	
No, I do not want to be selected	

Thank you for filling in the selection form.

Appendix 7: Baseline questionnaire

DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME

I, as your facilitator, will treat your answers with confidentiality. I will not include your name or any other information that will identify you. I will destroy the notes and audio tapes after we complete the study and publish the results. Feel free to treat this as an activity. The first activity you will fill in the baseline questionnaire. The second activity you will discuss what your experience at this school has been since Grade 8 to now.

Introductions (no names, identify learners as A, B, C, D, E and F. They should state their letter.

Instructions: Answer all questions. Fill in the spaces.

Provide the letter that has been given to you.

Place an **X** below the correct letter.

A	B	C	D	E	F

1.1   How   old   are   you?
_____

1.2   Please provide the year in which you enrolled at Loreto Convent School. _____

1.3   Whose idea was it for you to be at this school? _____

1.4   Did you know anything about a Catholic school before you attended this school? ANSWER yes OR no. _____

1.5   If your answer is yes to 1.4, mention any three things.

(i)_____

(ii)_____

(iii)_____

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.

Appendix 8: Activity 2. The Facilitator will lead the discussion

The facilitator will remind the participants that their voices will be recorded. She will ask them to further explain if she needs more clarity.

In-depth interview question for Grade 9 participant.

What has been your experience in a Catholic School? That is, what have you experienced at this school since the beginning of last year in Grade 8 up to present?

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Appendix 9: In-depth interview question for Grade 9 class teachers

What has been your experience to Grade 9 learner's adaptation to the Catholic school environment as they join the school in Grade 8 and progress to Grade 9?

Appendix 10: Field notes

Loreto Convent School, January 2018 – December 2019

Introduction

My name is Memory Muganiwa. In fulfilment of the requirements of the Master of Education (Humanities), I ventured into this two-year journey of studies. I have been teaching at Loreto Convent Catholic School since January 2009. Field notes may contain personal information about the researcher (Phillipi & Lauderdale 2018:386). I am a high school science educator teaching Grades 8 to 12. The experience of teaching in the same school for many years left me wondering about how the new learners adapt to the Catholic school environment. I sought to understand the learners' experiences as they entered the new school environment and moved from Grade 8 to Grade 9. I was more interested in participants that did not necessarily attend the Catholic Church or a previous Catholic school. As part of my research, I recorded important school events, practices and activities in my diary as field notes. I recorded only what was deemed important for the study field notes, paying special attention to the areas of focus and purpose of the notes.

Areas of focus

Areas of focus for the field notes included observed events, practices and activities. I recorded unstructured observations as notes (Cohen et al., 2018:387) in the researcher's school diary. These notes were hand-written. I listened, watched and attempted to gain a full understanding of the real-life events (Yin, 2016:170) taking place in the school as new Grade 8 learners joined the school activities. Observations made included relations within the school's special events (such as mass), practices in the school and other activities of interest to the research. Most importantly, I attempted to incline more towards those events that focused on the research questions. The research question served as a strategy in guiding the recording of field notes (Yin, 2016:167). I did not find it necessary to record daily, but only when I made observations of interest to the study.

The school diary was useful as a source of note-taking in that it contains school events and activities with their dates and time (Yin 2016:170) which assisted in organisation of the field notes. As previously pointed out, it is imperative to gain an understanding of the purpose of the field notes and this is now discussed in the next section.

Purpose of the field notes

This case study research uses a qualitative approach, and the use of field notes enables it to become robust (Phillipi & Lauderdale, 2018:387). Furthermore, field notes give a better understanding of the school context by providing thick and rich descriptions which are well-documented for the study. These descriptions are recorded in the events, activities and relations within the school that serve as valuable data to be used at a later stage in the research.

The school activities, practices and events

Loreto Convent School has approximately 700 learners and 54 educators. The school is only comprised of girls from Grades 3 to 12. It offers pre-school, primary and secondary education phases. The primary phase acts as a feeder to the high school. The baseline questionnaire assisted by screening those learners who came through from the school-feeder programme, Catholic-denominated learners, and those who previously attended other Catholic schools. However, at Grade 8 level, the school admits both Catholic and non-Catholic learners. The participants considered were those who joined Grade 8 from other schools.

The school is located in Pretoria Central Business District (CBD). As a Catholic school the school is adjacent to the Roman Cathedral Church of Pretoria. Being part of the community, the school uses the church to carry out its religious events and practices from time to time. A typical day for a learner starts with line-up in the morning (around 7:30am) and during the second break (around 11:55am) there is Bible reading, a prayer (for example the Hail Mary prayer) and religious quote of the day, to mention but a few practices. It is also compulsory to end the school day with a prayer. If for some reason, the

educator overlooks having this closing prayer, the Representative Class Leader (RCL) reminds the educator for the prayer to be done. Friday sees the occurrence of reflection (around 12:45pm) and assembly (around 12:55pm). Reflection is done by a designated class teacher who guides the learners in prayer, Bible reading and sharing of religious teachings and songs with the whole school at that point in time through the public address (PA) system. During assembly, the learners hosting the event provide the first and second Bible readings, under the guidance of their class teacher. The class leading assembly also provides a religious teaching in the form of an act, song or poem. It is common tradition for the school priest to attend the school assembly in order to preside over mass for that day. For example, the priest may attend assembly on opening day and any other unfortunate event such as death in the school.

Religious observations and activities

Attending mass in the cathedral is compulsory for all learners and educators and this requirement is part of the Code of Conduct. The priest and religious teachers in the school lead and guide the mass. Learners are required to participate in the mass by reading the Bible, performing altar service duties and any other necessary duties. The learners are mandated to follow all proceedings as required such as kneeling, reciting prayers, genuflecting and other practices. These proceedings are observed during the school events.

Church events also celebrated by the school

In order to follow the events, I diarised the events as quickly as possible during or after the observations (Cohen et al., 2018:387). It was not possible to be fully present at all events, for example during confessions. The events occurred in the Church Cathedral. The events are presented according to what occurred in the school terms in the table below.

Table showing Church events celebrated by the school

Term 1 Events	Dates	Brief explanation of activities
Mary Ward week	23-30 Jan	All learners take part in the Mary Ward activities. Catholic ethos are incorporated exploring Mary Ward values such as Hope, Justice, love, Sincerity and Freedom. The activities are marked and marks are allocated for the subject RE
Inauguration mass	25 Jan at 11:00am	Marking the beginning of the year for school learners. Welcoming the new learners in the school.
Confessions with Priest	15 Feb 9:30-11:00am	Learners volunteer to go for confession. A common practice in the Catholic church.
Ash Wednesday mass	6 March at 7:45am	This is a long mass service that is led by the priest. The normal mass proceedings are followed as described above in religious observations and activities. What is unique is the placing of ashes on each and every learner's forehead in the form of a cross marking 'Ash Wednesday' as beginning of lent.
Stations of the cross	20 March at 7:45 am	All learners participate. A ceremony that involves kneeling, praying and turning to each and every artistic image that symbolises the passion of Jesus and how he was crucified on the cross.

Term 2		
Confession with Priest	10 May 9:30-11am	Learners volunteer to go for confession. A common practice in the Catholic church.
Ascension day of our Lord Para liturgy mass	30 May 7:45 am	Mass is celebrated by all learners and teachers to mark the ascent of Jesus into heaven. Normal mass proceedings are followed.
School birthday mass	7 June 7:45am	The school celebrated 141 years of its existence in [give the year]. All learners attended mass and followed the normal mass proceedings. The whole school received sweets and celebrations out poured into the classes and corridors.
Term 3		
Assumption of Mary mass	15 August 7:45am	All learners attend mass to mark the occasion when Mary Mother of Jesus was taken into heaven.
Spring mass	6Sept 7:45am	Mass celebrate and mark the beginning of spring season. All learners attend and take part.
Valedictory mass	16 Oct 7:45 am	This mass is attended by all learners, teachers and parents. It marks the new journey that is about to be embarked on by the matric learners when they finish Grade 12. A farewell after being empowered by the school in various ways.
All souls mass	1 Nov 7:45 am	This mass commemorates all the people who have passed away and are known by any school members. The learners are

		asked to write the names of family members or friends who passed away during the year. Mass on those who have departed was conveyed.
Term 4		
Gift mass	26 Nov 7:45 am	Gifts are brought into the mass and blessed by the priest. These gifts are collected and wrapped by learners for outreach: places such as children's homes, old age homes and other disadvantaged places of the society receive these gifts.

It is compulsory for all learners and educators to observe and celebrate the church events which are guided by the school rules. The school's religious events also require that all learners take part in them and thus learners are expected to show reverence and respect to these events in the Catholic Cathedral at all times. For instance, learners should wear a school blazer and be presentable overall while in the church. It is a punishable offence to go against any of those rules and religious observances. At one time, I witnessed a Grade 9 learner being punished by being issued with a demerit form for being found sleeping in the Cathedral during Ash Wednesday mass without a valid reason. The Grade 9 learner, however, complained that the mass service was taking too long. In other instances, other learners have been heavily taken to task for talking in the Church during service. It is a place of worship and it seems no intolerable behaviour is acceptable during that time.

Some undesirable behavioural instances observed

A number of ill behaviours were observed which were not in line with what was in the school code of conduct and other Catholic norms. For instance, learners were found cheating during exams and class tests in a particular subject - which is against the school rules and academic practices. Such offences are only dealt with by the school management. The learners were subsequently

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found guilty and suspended after going through a disciplinary procedure. On a number of occasions, demerit forms were issued by prefects for offences such as improper hairstyle, violation of the school dress code, a failure to wear a name badge, and other offences deemed punishable. On the other hand, learners have been punished by teachers for failing to do homework, classwork, class projects, and also for eating, unproductive talking, and sleeping in class, to mention but a few. Not surprisingly, I have observed over time that there are more Grade 8 and 9 learners in detention on Fridays from 2pm to 4pm. It would appear, there are more learners from Grades 8 and 9 in detention compared to the other Grades.

Social activities contributing to social relations in the school

Social relations in the school are evident at certain important events in the school. These events include Heritage Day, celebrated annually by the entire nation. Thus, on 20 September 2019, the learners were permitted to wear clothing symbolising their cultural identity as their 'civvies day'. On the same day, learners engaged in different traditional activities and songs to celebrate the day. This plays a pivotal role in accepting and tolerating the cultural diversity present at the school.

Sports also appear to contribute to social relations, apart from maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The sports that are predominant at the school are netball, tennis, hockey and swimming. In particular, the swimming gala was held on 21 February 2019 during which different school house teams competed. The learners seemed overjoyed as evidenced by teasing opposing house learners and dancing to trendy music in a jovial manner.

A number of school clubs exist that are led by teachers. These school clubs include environmental science, green team, yoga, outreach, liturgical and school choir, to mention but a few. The schools clubs events are held within the school environment with no external engagement with learners from other schools. One can observe that this enhances internal social relations. This seems to have created dissatisfaction among some learners who strongly feel that they would like to engage with both boys and girls from other schools through the school clubs.

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Academic activities

Historically, the school has placed itself amongst the top academic performers in the city. This is evidenced by the remarkable results covered by the print media on 15 January 2018 in an article titled 'City School scores 100% pass rate for 24th time'. As part of the school's academic activities, extra lessons are compulsory from Monday to Friday for identified learners falling behind in their curriculums. Learners also have tutor groups to assist each other as peers. Parent evenings are held in all the school terms to assess the academic performance of each learner with their parents/guardians. In addition, I have observed that prize-giving events which are held every year to reward top performers amongst the learners are highly regarded by the school. As part of efforts to maintain the school's high academic status, learners participate in science and mathematics Olympiads from time to time which are run nationally.

Other important school activities for new learners' adaptation

Apart from the activities and events previously mentioned, the school also provides a systematic orientation programme for newcomers. For instance, 9 and 12 January 2019 were new learners' orientation and new learners' parents days, respectively. On those days, the new learners and the parents were introduced to the school rules, the school's expectations of the learners and the role that parents can play in supporting their daughters to adjust to the new school environment. The new learners and parents were also advised of the implications of undesirable behaviours such as alcohol and drug abuse, ill social media tendencies and bullying, among other bad behaviours.

In conclusion, from the observations made pertaining to school activities, events and practices, it is evident that the Catholic school environment is a platform for learners to engage in religious events as well as sports, academic, cultural and social activities during the school year. From my own assessment it is not clear whether the school has an existing follow-up process to check the progress made by the new learners in adjusting to the new environment.