



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

**INSIDE THE 'BLACK BOX': A CRITICAL-INTERPRETIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE
INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF SCHOOLING AT LEARN TO LIVE AND THEIR
IMPACT ON YOUTHS' AT RISK SOCIAL-EDUCATIONAL STATUS.**

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER IN SOCIOLOGY

BY **SAARKE BUELENS** (BLNSAA001)

SUPERVISOR: PROF. JEREMY SEEKINGS

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

JULY 2013

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Saarke Buelens

Date: 10 July 2013

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Abstract

Participation in social and educational environments is crucial for young people's development, well-being and opportunities for leading a fulfilling and successful life. Many South African youngsters – and particularly street children – are often excluded from meaningful participation in their communities. This involves participation in social, educational, cultural, political and economic life. The family and the school are two important arenas where such participation can take place. In addition, these youngsters are confronted with unpredictable future life chances. Thus, they often find themselves in a disadvantaged position within society. In light of this observation, the theme of *youth at risk* has been much discussed in South Africa for the past three decades. This study focuses on a group of especially disadvantaged adolescents, who do not live in safe and nurturing family environments and who are excluded from formal education. I investigate whether 'theories and practices of education', featured in non-formal educational interventions, have an impact on the reproduction of disadvantage and risk among its students. My research focuses on the case of *Learn to Live*, a non-formal educational intervention that tries to counteract the disadvantages that especially disadvantaged youth in Cape Town face. My findings show that educators and students try to find a balance between, on the one hand, emphasising the uniqueness of students' extremely disadvantaged situation and the need for a particular kind of education that results from it, and on the other hand, the desire to conform to mainstream ideas and mainstream adolescent life. In their attempts to find this balance, nearly all participants acknowledge that *Learn to Live* is a necessary stepping stone in students' lives towards success and happiness. The educators believe that the school itself can contribute a lot to the students' situation and emphasise their role of victims of their circumstances. The students, however, state that *Learn to Live* is merely there to give them a second chance. They do consider their own role in the schooling process and the path to success to be paramount. This is also reflected quite clearly in the students' aspirations, their feelings of hope, and their looking to the future. The implications of these findings for *Learn to Live* include: building on students' strengths, talents and resiliency by offering them an empowerment-based intervention, creating more opportunities where students can experience feelings of success and pride, and making use of testimonies of successful students.

Foreword

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all those who provided me with the possibility to complete this dissertation.

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Table of contents

Abstract	i
Foreword	ii
Table of contents	iii
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Perspective on research in/and education of youth at risk	3
1.2. Rationale	4
1.3. Methodology	5
1.3.1. Approach	5
1.3.2. Data collection and data analysis	5
1.3.3. Sample	6
1.3.4. Research ethics	6
1.4. Structure of the paper	7
2. Youth and education at risk	8
2.1. South African youth at risk	8
2.1.1. Conceptualising 'youth at risk'	8
2.1.2. Profiling the South African street child	9
2.1.3. Sources and consequences of disadvantage and risk	10
2.1.3.1. Risk factors	10
2.1.3.2. Protective factors	12
2.1.3.3. Dimensions of risk and life chances	13
2.1.4. Students at Learn to Live: children of the street and children at high risk	14
2.2. South African education at risk	15
2.2.1. Profiling the South African educational landscape	15
2.2.2. Non-formal educational interventions for especially disadvantaged youth	16
2.2.3. The paradox of schooling in addressing disadvantage and risk	17
2.2.4. The Salesian Institute and Learn to Live	22

3. 'Theories and practices of education' at Learn to Live	23
3.1. Introduction	23
3.2. Characterising the educators	23
3.3. Personality of the school	23
3.3.1. Creating a sense of belonging	23
3.3.2. Learn to Live as a stepping stone and a last resort	25
3.3.3. School climate and positivity	26
3.3.4. Don Bosco as an inspiration	26
3.4. Focus on the social-educational	27
3.4.1. Focus on education and learning	27
3.4.2. Focus on the child	28
3.4.3. LEARN TO LIVE	29
3.5. Student-educator relationships	30
3.5.1. Nature of the relationship and teacher roles	30
3.5.2. Educator authority	31
3.5.3. Educator expectations	32
3.6. Conflict and resistance	32
3.6.1. Different norms	32
3.6.2. Change, failure and rejection	33
3.7. Normalisation	34
3.7.1. Different from mainstream schools	35
3.7.2. 'Mainstreaming'	35
3.7.3. Students' attitudes	36
3.8. Educational success	37
3.8.1. Inhibiting risk factors	37
3.8.2. Contributing protective factors	37
3.8.3. Attribution	38
3.9. Hope	38
3.9.1. Values as means to inspire hope	38
3.9.2. The role of the school and its teachers	39
3.9.3. Educational aspirations	40
3.10. Perspectives on the role of the individual: agency	40
3.11. Conclusion	41

4. Adolescents' schooling experiences and perspectives	43
4.1. Introduction	43
4.2. Characterising the students	43
4.3. Personality of the school	44
4.3.1. Sense of belonging	44
4.3.2. School climate and positivity: "I feel" vs. "it is"	45
4.3.3. Values and rules	45
4.3.4. Learn to Live as a stepping stone and a second chance	46
4.4. Focus on the social-educational	47
4.4.1. Focus on education and learning	47
4.4.2. Focus on the future	47
4.5. Student-educator relationships	48
4.5.1. Nature of the relationship	48
4.5.2. Educator authority	49
4.5.3. Educator expectations	50
4.6. Conflict and resistance	50
4.6.1. Active and passive resistance	50
4.6.2. Coping with conflict and resistance	51
4.6.3. Change is a challenge	52
4.7. Normalisation	52
4.7.1. More mainstream	53
4.7.2. Uniqueness	53
4.7.3. Mainstream, normal, real, right	54
4.8. Educational success	54
4.8.1. Inhibiting risk factors	54
4.8.2. Contributing protective factors	55
4.8.3. Attribution	55
4.9. Hope	56
4.9.1. The role of the individual	56
4.9.2. Educational aspirations	56
4.10. Perspectives on the role of the individual: agency	57
4.11. Ideas of school improvement	58
4.12. Conclusion	58
5. Discussion and conclusion	60

6. References	65
7. Appendices	69
7.1. Informed consent sheet and interview format school staff	70
7.2. Informed consent sheet and interview format volunteers/interns	74
7.3. Informed consent sheet and interview format students	78

University of Cape Town

1. Introduction

For the past three decades the topic of youth at risk, and particularly the street child phenomenon, has been one of the most important social-educational issues in South Africa (e.g. Schurink *et al.*, 1993; Lewis, 2001; Kok, Cross & Roux, 2010). Many young people seem to be negotiating a complex reality, caught between a cruel apartheid history, a post-apartheid era characterised by widespread poverty, violence and social deprivation, and an awareness that they will inherit an unpredictable and uncertain future. These young people have a disadvantaged position in society: they are at risk of having unfavourable chances for success in life, in both the present and the future.

Two domains of young people's lives generally act as both social and educational arenas, which are crucial for their growth, their well-being and their life chances: the family and the school. Firstly, the family is of fundamental importance for young people, as it is an environment for nurture and socialisation. However, apartheid policies as well as the legacy of apartheid have devastating effects on many South African families. Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses and Seekings (2010) offer clear evidence to support this claim. They state that the policies and legacy of apartheid are "reproducing in family life the divisive hierarchies and separated living imposed on society by the state" (p. 48). They describe the high rate of physical fragmentation in the families of children and adolescents, the prevalence of extended family households, the nature of family relationships, and the (dis)ability to positively invest in family dynamics, which do not longer accord neatly with the racial divisions of apartheid and which affect many young South Africans to at least some extent. However, it is stated that "the restrictions of the past are not deterministic and young people remain positive about their familial environment and creative in their efforts to secure nurture within and beyond the boundaries of 'home'" (p. 95).

Secondly, the school is another important context on young people's path towards opportunity and success, since education plays such a pivotal role in so many aspects of life. Schools also account for a large part of the everyday lives of young South Africans (Bray *et al.*, 2010). Educational institutions in South Africa, however, do not seem to be offering the kind of quality education that young people need to succeed in different domains of their lives (van der Berg, Taylor, Gustafsson, Spaull & Armstrong, 2011). Receiving a quality education is neither the general experience nor a realised human right for the majority of children. In addition, performance levels are very low (van den Berg, 2011; UNICEF, 2012). Therefore, many adolescents fail to acquire the desired skills or qualifications, which contributes to their often non-successful life chances.

This study looks at a group of especially disadvantaged adolescents. These adolescents are perceived as an especially disadvantaged group, given their situation in regard of the importance of the family and school domains and the struggles of many South African youth within these domains. They do not have the luxury of living in a safe and nurturing family environment. They live on the streets or have been living there. They may also be at risk of having a life on the streets or may be residing in institutionalised care. Moreover, they are and have been excluded from formal educational institutions for quite a while. For these young people no sound social-educational basis seems to exist, which enables them to acquire the necessary educational qualifications, skills and useful social and cultural capital, necessary to develop, grow and dream. They often do not succeed academically and get caught up in the sphere of delinquency. This, in turn, affects their opportunities and prospects in life, thus creating a vicious cycle.

The problems of academic failure and juvenile delinquency among youth at risk have been the object of study within various scientific domains (Reynolds, 1976). A variety of individual, cultural and environmental risk factors have been identified to explain these adolescents' paths and to address the problem. There is indeed clear evidence that the aforementioned factors have a significant influence on the academic performance and delinquency of youth at risk and that this influence cannot be underestimated (e.g. Maree, 2006; Mendoza, 2009). In this dissertation, however, I focus on another influential environment, namely the school. Reynolds (1976) argues that a growing body of research suggests that the failure to develop the sociology of the school has greatly limited our understanding of the process of adolescent social and educational development. My research project builds on the assumption that individual schools might have a substantial impact on the sort of young people that its children turn out to be (Reynolds, 1976). The school is the primary institution in the adolescent experience. Rist (1977) argues that it promises the future status available to the adolescent and gives or denies status in adolescence itself. In other words, the school as an institution is of particular significance for the actions of youth. It is supposed to counteract the disadvantages young people might experience in the private sphere of the home or elsewhere. Nonetheless, it is hypothesised here that schools might be worsening the problem by reproducing inequalities rather than solving the problem by reducing them. Consequently, the main research question of my study is whether and how the educational structure reproduces the problems that it is supposed to address. If the reproduction hypothesis is confirmed, I also explore to what extent, how and why this is happening.

There seems to be reason for hope in the form of education policy reforms and inspiring initiatives of teachers and school leaders, hereby taking the first steps on the path to creating a system that provides the most disadvantaged children and adolescents in South Africa with a

quality education (van der Berg *et al.*, 2011). One of those initiatives is a non-formal educational intervention for an especially disadvantaged group of adolescents in South Africa, called Learn to Live. This initiative is one of the four youth projects established by the Salesian Institute in Cape Town, providing remedial education to former and current street children, children who are at risk of ending up on the street, and children residing in institutionalised care. Learn to Live defines its student population explicitly as 'youth at risk'. The programme remedies their lack of schooling, offers them a chance of rehabilitation into local communities and enables them to earn an honest living. More specifically, Learn to Live offers basic education, life skills and technical skills to about 80 students of school-going age, who attend school on a voluntary basis. In this dissertation, I examine the Learn to Live project to find out whether the internal dynamics of schooling, in other words the 'theories and practices of education' at this particular school, have an impact on the reproduction of disadvantage and risk among its students.

1.1. Perspective on research in/and education of youth at risk

The perspective I use to approach the research problem and analysis is informed by an article by Brian Smith (2000), entitled *Marginalized youth, delinquency, and education: The need for critical-interpretive research*. Smith describes these youngsters as "excluded from meaningful participation in economic, social, political, cultural, educational and other forms of human activity in their communities and thus are denied the opportunity to fulfil themselves as human beings" (p. 309). Smith's description concurs with the observations of Iris Marion Young (1990) who identifies youth as a marginalised group of people. This also and particularly includes youth at risk and young people in extremely disadvantaged situations. I will use the terms youth at risk and disadvantaged youth to refer to children and adolescents having a future with less than optimal life opportunities and outcomes, since this is also what Learn to Live calls its student population.

Smith argues that there is a need for a different type of approach in investigating, understanding and improving the educational experiences of marginalised youth. He suggests that researchers should critically investigate schooling objectives and processes to explore how the educational system might be implicated in reproducing these marginalised youths' academic failure and delinquency. This critical investigation is both a way of understanding education as well as addressing the performative nature of agency as an act of participating in shaping the world in which we live (Giroux, 2013). The critical-interpretive perspective he proposes is a political and a moral project rather than a technique. Approached as such, critical pedagogy illuminates the relationships between knowledge, authority and power. It draws attention to questions concerning who has control over the conditions for the production of knowledge, values and skills, and it

illuminates how knowledge, identities, and authority are constructed within particular sets of social relations (Giroux, 2013). According to Smith, this would enable us to make 'better' schools, which serve youth at risk. *Marginalized youth, delinquency, and education: The need for critical-interpretive research* draws on the idea of social reproduction: the schools' organisation and internal dynamics play a role in the reproduction of extant inequalities. Smith's analysis suggests the need for a reconceptualisation of the educational experiences of youth at risk.

An awareness of critical pedagogy perspectives enables one to recognize schools as political sites where there is a selective ordering and legitimating of privileged language forms, modes of reasoning, social relations, and lived experiences. And most important, such research would strive to interpret and critically assess a school's structure and objectives in relation to marginalized students' everyday lives and identities. (Smith, 2000, p. 305)

Smith further argues that this is maybe the only way in which we can get a better understanding of the significance of schooling and education for youth at risk. Moreover, critical pedagogy and a critical-interpretive perspective on the internal dynamics of schooling means raising questions about what knowledge is of most worth, in what direction one should desire, and what it means to know something. As such, critical pedagogy and a critical-interpretive perspective stress the importance of understanding what actually happens in classrooms and other educational settings (Giroux, 2013). More important still, is the fact that it takes seriously the need to understand how we learn and how this is related to our mode of action as individual and social agents. In my research, the attention for modes of learning and acting is translated in a focus on students, their schooling experiences and their perspectives on school-bound education.

1.2. Rationale

Three factors encouraged me to engage in this research project. First, the study combines two areas of personal interest: sociology and education. The subject and field of research I am presenting in this dissertation is at the intersection of my current field of study, sociology, and my previous training, educational studies. Second, the coordinator of Learn to Live expressed his interest in this kind of research, i.e. research that gives insight into the influence of key actors, activities and interactions on the education of the students at this school. I hope that my dissertation can be useful for current and future educators working at the school and, consequently, for the children and adolescents attending Learn to Live. Third, as is clearly argued in Smith (2000), the research area seems to be in need of this type of research: "Little is known about how schools' objectives and internal dynamics may foster or reproduce at-risk youths' school failure and marginalization" (p. 301). I believe my research is a first step towards filling this

gap in scientific research as well as a contribution to the body of knowledge concerning the problem of youth at risk in South Africa.

1.3. Methodology

1.3.1. Approach

To address the central research problem I use a qualitative approach, which takes the experiences and views of young people at risk seriously. "There can be little doubt that pupils' own interpretations of school processes represent a crucial link in the educational chain" (Hammersley & Woods, 1984; in Smith, 2000, p. 304). The purpose of my study is to gather an in-depth understanding of young people's behaviour and meaning-giving in a schooling context. Following Smith (2000), I find it necessary to conduct field research at disadvantaged schools with large numbers of especially disadvantaged students, many of whom are unlikely to even finish high school and have little hope for the future.

1.3.2. Data collection and data analysis

Wilson and Wyn (1993) claim that, very often, the processes of planning and implementing a research project are discrete activities. In reality, however, the opportunity to conduct a single, self-contained project depends on having a sufficient level of resources and time (p. 7). While tackling the methodological issues outlined above, I needed to keep in mind the context of a Master's dissertation. Therefore, I conducted a focused, ethnographic case study, which combines three distinct methods: a small-scale document analysis of important school documents of Learn to Live, such as objectives, mission statement, handbooks and student records; participant observations in the classrooms and the playground; and interviews with different participants in more and less formal settings and circumstances, which were recorded and transcribed. These methods enabled me to generate rich descriptive ideas and use multiple data sources. As mentioned earlier, my research project focuses on a particular body of students, a particular school staff and particular volunteers and interns, all attached to the Learn to Live initiative. According to Phillipson (in Reynolds, 1976) it is important to focus on particular schools: "Throughout the literature the reference is to the school rather than to particular schools; sociologists seem to be operating with highly abstract models of the school which rest on their intuitive hunches about what schools are really like" (p. 217).

1.3.3. Sample

The key interest of my project is in the intersection and interaction of three different cultures, daily present at Learn to Live, and its influence on the education of the students. I am referring to the cultures of the students, the school staff and the volunteers and interns. It should be noted that not all students involved in this study were attending the school during my research. In fact, I also collected data among former students who had either completed their schooling (i.e. who have 'succeeded') or who had dropped out for whatever reason and live on the street or in other unsafe environments. I relate the data collected from the students to those collected from the school staff, volunteers and interns. I do this in order to explore whether the educators contribute to attendance, success and failure at this particular school. The exploration focuses specifically on schooling experiences and perspectives.

As my project focuses on a very specific context, it was difficult to draw a random sample from a student population, which, moreover, is itself not that large. I needed very particular cases, purposively drawn from this context. Further, the school staff is quite small and the volunteers and interns are variable. A more detailed account of the individual participants will be given in chapters 3 and 4. The participants studied in this research form a representative group of current educators and students at Learn to Live.

1.3.4. Research ethics

Every research that involves human beings in general, and children in particular, requires careful consideration of ethical issues. I have addressed these issues during my research in a number of ways. First, I have been cautious about causing unintended physical harm, psychological distress or social disadvantage to the participants as a result of the research process or its outcomes. I have also considered the ethnographic feedback loop. This feedback loop has allowed me to compare my interpretations with those of the participants, but it has also allowed me to return the results of my research to the educators. Informed consent was obtained by all participants. The adolescents under 18 who participated in this study did not have their parents close by, so I made sure that the school acted as the consenting party in collaboration with the children themselves. A detailed introduction to the study purpose, methods and possible outcomes in written and spoken form was always provided beforehand, and all participants were involved on a voluntary basis. The information was handled anonymously; in the paper I use pseudonyms, so that the individual participants and their stories and statements are not identifiable. Further, research participants had the right to withdraw at any point during the

research process. Finally, one should continuously realise that a research situation is always a power situation. The majority of the participants knew me before I started the data collection, which contributed to a relationship of respect and trust.

1.4. Structure of the paper

Chapter 2 gives an overview of the available literature on youth and education at risk. It conceptualises and profiles both the idea of 'youth at risk', in general terms and in a specific South African and Learn to Live context, and the South African educational landscape. Bringing the two elements of adolescents in especially disadvantaged and high-risk situations and schooling together, the chapter further elaborates on the paradox of schooling in addressing risk and disadvantage. While the school should be addressing the unique situation of youth at risk, it often fails to do so. Experiencing school failure to a high degree, most of them are, therefore, functionally illiterate and still lack the necessary educational qualifications, skills and useful social and cultural capital to succeed in life, which only exacerbates their current disadvantaged position.

Chapter 3 looks at the 'theories and practices of education' at Learn to Live and tries to unfold and expose the school's internal workings and dynamics, based on the evidence gathered through interviewing and observing important actors in the teaching process at Learn to Live: school staff, interns and volunteers.

Chapter 4 focuses on the schooling experiences and perspectives of the students themselves. My research seriously considers and emphasises the encounters and views of young people at risk. Giving them a chance to talk about and express their schooling experiences at Learn to Live, gives insight in the way young people experience the relation between their disadvantaged position and the school, as well as the way Learn to Live can offer a successful educational intervention on young people's paths towards a happy and successful future.

Chapter 5 features a closing discussion and conclusion. In this chapter I will compare the findings presented in chapters 3 and 4, focusing on the overlaps and distinctions between the perceptions of educational actors at Learn to Live at the documented situations at the school, and students' personal schooling experiences. Furthermore, the chapter discusses strengths and limitations of this study and gives suggestions for future research.

2. Youth and education at risk

2.1. South African youth at risk

2.1.1. Conceptualising 'youth at risk'

In very broad terms, the multifaceted concept of youth at risk can be described as children and adolescents having a future with less than optimal life opportunities and outcomes. The term youth at risk, and even the extreme and seemingly more straightforward case of street children, has many conceptualisations in different settings, perhaps demonstrating the fact that it is not a homogeneous group and that the particular circumstances dictate who should be included in the definition (Owoaje, Adebisi & Asuzu, 2009). Many conceptualisations do not reflect the cultural diversities across and within countries as well as the transitional pattern that sometimes occurs within the same children's lifetime.

UNICEF (2005) has developed a universal typology of youth at risk, and street children in particular, which recognises that there are different types of highly disadvantaged youth and which differentiates between children and adolescents according to their degree of involvement in street life and family contact. Firstly, children at high risk are generally urban children who, because of extreme poverty and deprivation in their homes or inadequate care and supervision by parents, are at high risk of becoming involved in street life; they are 'candidates for the street'. Children *on* the street are children who spend most of their time on the streets, usually as child workers. They maintain a strong family and community link and are likely to return home at night having spent all day away. The families are usually very poor and extremely deprived, living in homes which lack basic necessities. The children can be characterised as having primarily an economic involvement with street life, making a substantial contribution to the overall family income or obtaining the basic necessities for themselves. Few attend school regularly, the street being their main learning ground. In contrast, children *of* the street are children who have in some sense chosen to fully participate in street life, not just at an economic level. They may have a family accessible to them whom they may visit from time to time, but the street is their main home, where they seek shelter, food and companionship. Finally, abandoned children are those who have no home to go to, usually because of the death or rejection of parents and the unavailability of extended family. Owoaje *et al.* (2009) add to these groups of youth at risk the group of children in institutionalised care, young people living without their parents in children's homes or shelters. Official data about the state of institutionalised care in South Africa is extremely vague. Similarly, it is unknown how many children are resident in such facilities (Meintjes, Moses, Berry & Mampane, 2007). Draft

findings from an audit of children's homes countrywide in 2006 revealed at least 193 registered children's homes across the country (Meintjes *et al.*, 2007). For this incomplete set of homes the registered capacity was 12 920 children. In the Western Cape, there were about 40 registered children's homes. The Directory of Organisations Working with Street People (2008) lists over 50 temporary shelters for children and adolescents with a difficult or no home to go to in the greater Cape Town area alone. It is very hard to collect data regarding the actual number of children residing in shelters, since they continually drop in and leave again. These data include all registered children's homes and shelters and it is, therefore, likely that the officially available data is a substantial underestimate of both numbers of facilities and numbers of children resident.

Research (e.g. Tidwell & Garrett, 1994; Maree, 2006; van der Merwe & Dawes, 2009) indicates that being in a highly disadvantaged situation is related to a range of risk factors and harms that interact with each other in complex ways. Children and adolescents in a highly disadvantaged situation can, therefore, be placed on a developmental continuum, and any child confronted with disadvantage and risk of this kind could be located at any point on this continuum, and may move along it.

2.1.2. Profiling the South African street child

An extreme case of youth at risk is the phenomenon of the street child. The South African street child is known by diverse names which describe its circumstances and characteristics (le Roux, 2003). In Cape Town, street children are known as *strollers*, describing their ambling along and hanging around on the streets, their free spiritedness and being an authority unto themselves. In Johannesburg and elsewhere they are often called *twilight children* – children of and active in the dark; *malunde* – those that sleep on the streets; and *malalapayipi* – those who sleep in the storm water pipes. These terms inherently portray who and what these street children are: they are children who lack parental or alternative responsible adult care; they are children who lack the provision of basic needs and guidance; they are children who are vulnerable to exploitation and (sexual) abuse; moreover, they are children for whom the street offers the opportunity to manage their own lives and to meet their own needs (le Roux, 2003). The majority of South African street children is black, although Cape Town has a significant number of coloured street children. Specific South African circumstances have resulted in black children being more vulnerable to poverty and poor parent-child relationships than other population groups. The majority of children seems to start life on the streets from about the age of 10. More than 90% of children living on the streets is male. These demographic characteristics are abundantly discussed and confirmed in the literature (e.g. le Roux, 2003; Kok *et al.*, 2010; Ward & Seager, 2010).

2.1.3. Sources and consequences of disadvantage and risk

As mentioned earlier, there exists a range of sources of disadvantage and risk that interact with each other in complex ways. In what follows, I will give an overview of these specific risk factors. A risk factor can be defined as “a characteristic of the individual or the circumstances that are associated with a harmful or otherwise negative outcome” (Maree, 2006, p. 53). The overview is mainly based on the work by Ward and Seager (2010) and the work by Maree (2006), unless mentioned otherwise. I will also briefly discuss the contribution of possible protective factors and resilience, which can have the power to mediate the effects of risk and disadvantage. Finally, I will briefly touch on the consequences these sources of disadvantage and risk might have for young people’s present and future life chances.

This section explicitly explores young people’s lives more broadly and situates their everyday lives within wider contexts. Despite the much-needed focus of previous work with youth at risk and street children, drawing attention to their capacities and capabilities and illustrating resourcefulness in their environments, van Blerk (2012; 2013) puts an emphasis on their lives as also being shaped by structures beyond their control and influence.

2.1.3.1. Risk factors

A first group of risk factors includes individual factors. Before the child even entered this world, pregnancy and delivery complications as well as genetic factors might have a crucial influence on the health and development of the child. Physical and mental health problems, whether having a biological or a social cause, are very common risk factors for young people. In South Africa specifically, the confrontation of children under 18 with the issues of HIV/Aids and depression is eminent. This usually goes hand in hand with the experience of loss and grief, without receiving support from caregivers in this process and turning to drugs and alcohol to find the necessary support. However, substance misuse doesn’t necessarily have to be a consequence of experiences of loss and grief. As Ward and Seager (2010) explicitly state, this “may be evidence of unidentified and untreated mental health and substance misuse problems among children that, if treated, might have prevented their taking to the streets” (p. 90). Another individual risk factor concerns aggressive behaviour and – or as a consequence of – early initiation in violent behaviour. This might impact on young people’s beliefs and attitudes towards deviant and antisocial behaviour, which, to them, has become the norm. There are also some factors that pull young people to a life on the streets. The search for a better, easier or more exciting life outside the home environment is one of the main factors why the streets are attractive for children and adolescents. le Roux (2010) further describes rebellion against authority and an attempt to live a life of freedom

devoid of rules and acquiescence to authority. Most of the time, this goes hand in hand with the search for employment and financial capital on the streets. Some children also seek shelter there or use the streets as a survival strategy.

The family environment encompasses another influential group of risk factors. Many children never had the adult role models they needed to book success in life. They grow up in a context with poor family relationships, low levels of parental involvement and high levels of neglect, and are often confronted with domestic violence and maltreatment or abuse. Finding themselves caught in the middle, they try to find responses to their family situation characterised by conflict or violence, often by running away. Furthermore, there is parental criminality and parents' attitudes favourable towards substance misuse and violence. Finally, parent-child separation and the loss of caregivers, whether they passed away or their whereabouts are unknown, form important risk factors as well. Very often, it is not simply the separation or loss of a caregiver that influences the child, but also their own vulnerability to poverty and abuse when their caregiver is no longer there to protect them.

The next large group of risk factors includes peer-related factors. Delinquent siblings and peers have a major influence on children and adolescents' behaviour and choices. Many young people are affected by peer pressure: running away with friends or being influenced by friends to run away. A lot of the time, peers who are already living on the streets or who know someone who is, make children believe that life in the city is easier and fun and that it will provide access to material goods or the means to make a living. Finally, gang membership puts youngsters at a higher risk, especially where gang life forms an integral part of a child's world, is the way of life and is the place to learn about respect and acquire status, often because – where gangs are the norm – individuals are at risk of being the targets of violence if they don't comply.

Next, there are neighbourhood and community factors that can pose a risk to youth. Growing up in a dangerous neighbourhood or disorganised community with inadequate housing and in the daily context of poverty, seriously disadvantages young people and deprives them of important life chances and opportunities. Another neighbourhood risk factor is the availability and easy accessibility of drugs and firearms. There are also more distal macro-factors influencing risk and disadvantage, such as government policies, norms and ideologies, urbanisation and poverty.

Lastly, school factors play an important role in creating disadvantage and higher risks for children and adolescents. Young people are at a higher risk when experiencing a lot of academic failure. Academic failure can easily lead to demotivation and low academic aspirations, although the latter might also be a risk factor on its own. Not feeling part of the school and having a low level of school attachment can also cause children to be in a more disadvantaged position. Truancy and dropping out of school, perhaps as a consequence of the previously mentioned school risk factors, further disadvantage young people. Service providers in Cape Town emphasise that playing

truant from school or dropping out of school is often an early sign that a child is likely to take to the streets (Ward & Seager, 2010, p. 89). Children who have particular learning disabilities and don't receive the necessary help and support are likely to find the school environment punishing rather than pleasant, which increases the risk of their dropping out.

Maree (2006) adds on to these more universal risk factors to characterise the particular South African situation. Regarding individual factors, she adds poor young people's self-concept, laziness of the offender, need of recognition, status, and protection. Regarding family factors, she continues with poor parental monitoring, loveless parents, harsh and erratic parenting, and poor early childhood care. A high proportion of unsupervised time spent with peers is an additional risk factor with regard to peer-related factors. Regarding community and neighbourhood factors, an emphasis is put on apartheid legacy, political transition, socioeconomic conditions with reference to a lack of decision making power between sexes and races, the gap between rich and poor, HIV/Aids, the fact that freedoms and rights are taught but not responsibility, lack of spirituality, and lack of commitment to participate in community-related crime prevention efforts. Finally, school factors are supplemented with a lack of (quality) education, inconsistent discipline at school, inadequate or no school facilities, lack of role models, poor learner-educator relationships, school disorganisation, and lack of parental involvement. Mendoza (2009), further, touches specifically on the serious disintegration of families that leads young children and adolescents to seek, mainly, protection in gangs. Although researchers are reluctant to consider gang involvement as a risk factor because it carries with it so much participation in delinquent activity (Howell, 2003), it still is a noteworthy issue, especially in the context of South Africa. To get an idea of its seriousness: in the Western Cape region of South Africa there are about 90 000 gang members (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002). Klein (1971) defines a 'gang' as any denotable adolescent group of youngsters who a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in the neighbourhood, b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariably with a group name), and c) have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistently negative response from the neighbourhood residents and/or law enforcement agencies (p. 76).

2.1.3.2. Protective factors

Research on protective factors is not as abundant as research on risk factors (Maree, 2006). Arthur *et al.* (2002) point to the existence of more universal protective factors, which concern characteristics of young people or their environment that may counter or limit the effects of risk factors when they are placed in a challenging environment. First, there exist several family

protective factors, such as opportunities for pro-social family involvement, rewards for pro-social family involvement and family attachment. Next, peer and individual protective factors include religiosity, belief in the moral order, social skills, pro-social peer attachment, resilient temperament, and sociability. There exist community protective factors, such as opportunities for pro-social community involvement and rewards for pro-social community involvement. Finally, protective factors in the school domain include opportunities for pro-social school involvement and rewards for pro-social school involvement. Leoschut and Burton (2009) discover a set of important protective factors in the South African context: gender, education, non-violent family environments, non-exposure to criminal role models, substance abstinence, interaction with non-delinquent peers, having never been the victim of any crime, non-availability of firearms in the neighbourhood, and attitudes intolerant of violence and anti-social behaviour.

Associated with the notion of protective factors is the construct of resilience. Resiliency theory has been developed, as researchers discovered that some adolescents were able to succeed despite extremely disadvantaging conditions (Terrisse, 2000). The concept has evolved as individuals use strategies to cope with environmental difficulties, such as difficulties at home, at school or in the community. The ability to survive difficult situations, based on the access to protective mechanisms that alter an individual's response to situations that encompass risk, defines the notion of resilience (Worley, 2007).

The incorporation of the existence of protective factors and the idea of resilience entails a clear plea for a more positive discourse, on resiliency, adaptability, and building strengths and competencies in young students.

2.1.3.3. Dimensions of risk and life chances

There are two main dimensions describing the consequences of disadvantage and risk on young people's attitudes and behaviour, and ultimately on their lives (Ward *et al.*, 2012). The first is the offending dimension. Children and adolescents who grow up in extremely disadvantaged situations and environments have a higher risk of possessing a blurred norm and value system, committing crime, engaging in behaviour that contributes to unintentional injuries and violence, misusing drugs and alcohol, and engaging in sexual behaviour that contributes to unintended pregnancy and STDs. The second is the victimisation dimension. As much as young people in extremely disadvantaged situations and environments can be perpetrators, they can easily be victims as well. They have a higher risk of becoming the victim of crime, violence, (sexual) abuse and exploitation, facing the consequences of being unskilled and unemployed, living in poverty,

running away and being homeless, having physical and mental health problems, being in danger of adolescent mortality, being socially alienated, being unsafe, and being unhappy.

Approaching the concept of life chances in Weberian terms of the opportunities an individual has to improve his or her quality of life makes it clear that many South African youngsters have poor life chances, and are at risk of having very poor life chances. Firstly, this obviously has to do with the extent to which they have access to tangible resources, such as food, clothing and shelter. But also, and equally important, it is influenced by factors, such as education, employment and health care. In general terms, life chances represent the chances that an individual has of gaining access to and sharing in scarce and valued, socially created economic or cultural 'goods' (Giddens, 1973). Weber addresses the concept of life chances as "not only the procurement of material goods but also the achievement of social recognition and inner satisfaction" (Seekings, 2009, p. 867), hereby pointing to the importance of not merely financial capital, but also of acquiring skills and qualifications and useful cultural and social capital for equal life chances. The problem faced by many young people in especially disadvantaged situations is the deprivation of needs and a lack of resources and opportunities.

2.1.4. Students at Learn to Live: children of the street and children at high risk

Students at Learn to Live are young people of the street, who have been there, who are close to being so or who reside in institutionalised care, and are, thus, living in highly disadvantaged and high-risk circumstances. The majority of them lives outside the safe social-educational institution of the family. Moreover, they are, and have been for a while, excluded from formal educational institutions. The learners may be former or current street children, rehabilitated drug addicts or they may come from abusive, neglectful homes. Some are simply in need of a nurturing, family-like environment in order to complete school successfully. Those who do live with their parents or in a community often still experience poverty and hunger on a daily basis. Most have experienced gang life or are escaping the pull of a local gang. As a result of all or some of these factors, these young people have missed a substantial amount of their education. Most face life in less than favourable, sometimes appalling living conditions that make homework and studying very challenging, not to mention having to cope with the stress of poverty, fear and hunger on a daily basis.

2.2. South African education at risk

2.2.1. Profiling the South African educational landscape

As argued in Bray *et al.* (2010), schooling under apartheid was characterised by deep inequalities in the allocation of public resources, the quality of education and educational outcomes (p. 170). The consequence was extensive inequality in the skills and qualifications acquired by South African youth. This unequal distribution of skills and qualifications formed the structure of South African society, since the educational domain plays such a critical role in many aspects of an individual's life (p. 170). At that time, obviously, this was part of the government's purpose of differential education.

South Africa today spends a bigger share of its gross domestic product on education than any other African country (UNICEF, 2012). Primary schooling is compulsory for children between the age of 7 and 15, while an integrated approach to early childhood development aims to give all children between birth and school-going age the best start in life. A No-Fee Schools policy has abolished school fees in the poorest primary schools across the country, helping to attract poor, orphaned, disabled and vulnerable children to school. As a consequence of this considerable public investment, South African schools have relatively high enrolment rates (Bray *et al.*, 2010).

Yet, academic performance and skill acquisition levels are lower than in many other countries in the region. High levels of school attendance, gender parity in both primary and secondary education and pro-poor school policies are achievements that contrast with the poor quality of education (UNICEF, 2012). Bray *et al.* (2010), among others, point to the substantial resource inequalities that persist in schools, despite a very much more even allocation than under apartheid. This, in turn, has implications for the material infrastructure in schools and the quality of teaching. Many children experience a broken journey through school, interrupted by irregular attendance, absent teachers, teenage pregnancy and school-related abuse and violence. Around 27% of public schools do not have running water, 78% are without libraries and 78% do not have computers (UNICEF, 2012). Therefore, it should not surprise that large numbers of students fail or drop out as a result of the inability of many schools to successfully engage young minds. But Bray *et al.* (2010) emphasise also that inequalities in education, and hence life chances, cannot be reduced to unequal resources in schools. Children bring disadvantages with them into the school, and act in ways that further reproduce disadvantages. Equal attention should be paid to the effects and contribution of other risk factors that draw students out of school.

2.2.2. Non-formal educational interventions for especially disadvantaged youth

According to the world view of the Millennium Development Goals agenda and the Education for All initiative, society should make sure that youths' basic learning needs are met through access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes (UN, 2003). For especially disadvantaged youth, these programmes are generally not found in the formal education system. Non-formal education is provided for children and adolescents who need educational services which function as a replacement of, complement or supplement formal education. It aims at developing learners' potential with an emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and functional skills, and the development of personality and professional attitudes. Non-formal education, as an alternative route to learning, is viewed as an increasingly important way to facilitate access to, participation in and completion of basic education. The UN *World Youth Report* (2003) defines non-formal education as "any organized educational activity outside the established formal system that is intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives, but that is not necessarily thought of as 'educational' in the classic sense of the word" (p. 27). It is not an alternative education system nor a short-cut, but fundamentally provides second chance or catch-up learning opportunities to those who missed formal schooling.

Although there seems to be no compelling evidence that specific interventions are effective for especially disadvantaged youth, owing to moderate study quality, the small number of intervention studies, and the heterogeneity of interventions, participants, methods and outcome measures (Altena *et al.*, 2010), looking at the efficacy of best practice approaches of these interventions, both internationally and in South Africa, reveals some general recurring ideas. Firstly, it seems to be crucial to communicate respect. These adolescents do not want to be viewed as victims, but rather want their strength and resiliency recognised (Dybiczy, 2005). One way of accomplishing this is through developing empowerment-based interventions. Another fundamental factor for successful interventions is voluntary participation. A review article of educational strategies for disadvantaged youth in six European countries (Nicaise *et al.*, 1999) further mentions the following important aspects to take into account: integrated services for disadvantaged youth, financial and material aid, early intervention and prevention programmes, curriculum reforms, pedagogical innovations, inclusive education, teacher training, and parent-school-community relationships. Additionally, they give several examples of good practice.

If proven to be effective in achieving desired outcomes, non-formal education programmes may be well suited for serving especially disadvantaged young people, because such programmes are generally characterised by a participatory, practical and flexible approach (Shephard, 2013). Furthermore, it seems that life skills and vocational training are more suited to

their needs. In South Africa particularly, however, it appears that more work can and needs to be done regarding research on and the provision of educational interventions for especially disadvantaged youth. Although unemployed and marginalised youth in South Africa enjoy a high priority in all policy documents, few significant steps have been taken since 1994 to address their position (Chisholm, Harrison & Motala, 1997).

2.2.3. The paradox of schooling in addressing disadvantage and risk

According to UNESCO, education is one of the most effective methods of reintegrating young people in especially disadvantaged and at-risk situations into society. Lacking the necessary socialising and nurturing environment of the family, these children and adolescents should be offered the educational space and opportunities to develop what is needed to succeed in life. Therefore, the institution of the school should possess a central task in helping youth at risk find a way out of their extremely disadvantaged situations.

Many children and adolescents in especially disadvantaged and at-risk situations, however, report school failure: low academic achievement, academic failure, demotivation and low academic aspirations, extreme punishment at school, absenteeism, suspension and school drop-out as characteristic of their educational paths (Fisher & Chalton, 1995; Worley, 2007; Ward & Seager, 2010). Most of them are, therefore, functionally illiterate and still lack the necessary educational qualifications, skills, useful social capital and useful cultural capital to succeed in life, which only exacerbates their being in an already extremely disadvantaged position.

While the school should and claims to address the unique situation of youth at risk, it often fails to do so. On the one hand, there arise many practical school-related issues, conducive to this failure, such as ineffective teachers, an inflexible curriculum, lack of counselling services for at-risk students, weak administrative support, the size of the school district, the size of the school, low participation in extracurricular activities, a negative school climate, and a lack of quality schooling (Fisher & Chalton, 1995; Worley, 2007). On the other hand, schools might have the tendency to reproduce existing societal problems and structures by following the rules of a 'legitimate', 'objective', mainstream and dominant culture, instead of specifically addressing and tackling the uniqueness of youths' at risk situation and circumstances. This puts them even more 'at risk', facing a high probability of failing to acquire the skills and credentials which society considers to be necessary for successful life transitions (DeNofa, 1993).

Smith (2000) asks why many young people at risk fail in school at disproportionately high rates. He admits that, although these adolescents are often confronted with a multitude of problems in their everyday lives, important educational questions remain. He attests that if we document, understand and interrogate the true schooling experiences of youths at risk, we will be

more likely to create schools that reduce the likelihood of these adolescents' academic failure, delinquent behaviour and continued marginalization (p. 294). He argues that "a renewed emphasis on field research, in combination with the incorporation of the social reproduction perspective, can further our understanding of schooling processes" (p. 294-295).

Middle-class success goals seem to permeate our society; no one is immune to them (Kelly & Bach, 1971). Unfortunately, not everyone is adequately equipped to compete for success in a middle-class world. In Cohen's (1955) words, the working-class person "is less likely to possess, to value or to cultivate the polish, the sophistication, the fluency, the 'good appearance' and the 'personality' so useful in 'selling oneself' and manipulating others in the middle-class world [what Bourdieu calls 'cultural capital']" (p. 413). These liabilities become painfully evident in the classroom. Schools are thoroughly middle-class institutions, and students are inevitably evaluated in terms of a "middle-class measuring rod" (p. 413). Kelly and Bach (1971) argue that it is widely assumed that working-class boys ultimately fail academically and socially, since they are so poorly equipped to compete against middle-class standards. There exist two ways in which these students can cope with their failure. On the one hand, through delinquency, on the other, by physically withdrawing from school, by either cutting classes or dropping out. Students' experiences in school is crucial to their sense of achievement or failure, and their answer to this feeling (Elliott, 1966). Elliott (1966) argues that students who are denied opportunities to achieve higher status positions because of their lower-class socialisation are consequently 'provoked' to engage in resistant and delinquent behaviour in an attempt to avail themselves of illegitimate means to reach legitimate goals or to express their rejection and disdain for middle-class goals which are not available to them (p. 307). Conflict, resistance and delinquency are, thus, associated with frustration and failure, particularly experienced in school. The importance of the institution of the school lies in the fact that it is in this milieu that youth from disparate cultural backgrounds are forced to compete for middle-class success goals (p. 313).

Pierre Bourdieu developed a theory which describes the way in which schools legitimise the dominant culture, by presenting as 'natural' a form of pedagogy which belongs, in fact, to only the dominant groups in society (Gordon, 1984). Bourdieu is perhaps the only theorist who has directly addressed the relationship between culture and social reproduction in the schooling system (Gordon, 1984). He established the idea of cultural capital (particular types of knowledge, skills and dispositions), considering the cultural as, at least partially, autonomous from the economic. Cultural capital refers to the cultural style of the ruling class. Because this cultural style is so pervasive, it is legitimised throughout the society as being the 'objective' culture (Gordon, 1984). It should be realised that it is all about the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power, but that the school system is ultimately the institution for the reproduction of 'legitimate' culture. In Bourdieu's (1992) view, education is the process through which a cultural arbitrary is

historically reproduced through the medium of the production of the habitus, productive of practices conforming to that cultural arbitrary (p. 32). The habitus, acquired within the family, forms the basis of the reception and assimilation of the classroom message (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1992). In her review article, Gordon (1984) argues that knowledge of the codes and practices of the dominant culture become increasingly presupposed as one moves up the educational ladder. It seems that lower class students have an inbuilt disadvantage of possessing the incorrect class culture and the inappropriate educational decoders. She further stipulates that the education system mystifies its relationship with the ruling-class culture through setting up 'objective' tests and processes which are seen to be value-free and, thus, equally accessible to all. Institutionalised knowledge and qualifications can, thus, be regarded as means to social exclusion. Gordon (1984) believes, however, that these theories emphasise an essentially passive and powerless view of non-dominant groups. Although Bourdieu (1992) contends that the school system contributes to reproducing the structure of the distribution of cultural capital and, through it, the social structure, at the same time, he states that this does not refer to some kind of mechanical reproduction, without transformation or deformation, and without resistance of the dominated group.

Young's early work (1973) examines the assumptions behind the organisation and transmission of knowledge in schools. He examines the ways in which knowledge is selected, organised and assessed in educational institutions and how knowledge is organised and transmitted in curricula. He concludes that there exist important relations between the pattern of dominant values and the distribution of rewards and power, and the organisation of knowledge. Academic curricula involve assumptions that some kinds and some areas of knowledge are more 'worthwhile' than others. This idea can be related to the notion of the academic 'canon'. The concept of the 'canon' encompasses the belief that knowledge, skills, attitudes, norms and values, considered as shared, fundamental and important in our culture, need to be put explicitly on the educational agenda, so that our younger generations learn what is important to function in society (van Oers, 2009). The institution of the school fulfils a central role in the teaching and learning of this canon, since it is this particular institution that is burdened with the task of transmitting these knowledge, skills, attitudes, norms and values to the next generation. The central problem with the concept of the canon, however, concerns the legitimisation and content of the term. Who defines it and what can be considered as 'shared fundamental and important knowledge, skills, attitudes, norms and values'? It should become clear that dominant groups in society will possess most of the power to partake in this definition process and that the disadvantage of the lower classes comes to the fore once more.

Following Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) in *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, Rist (1977) points to the emergence of labelling theory as an explanatory framework for the study of social resistance and deviance, applicable to the study of education. Deviance, in the context of labelling theory, is

approached as a social judgement imposed by a social audience. It is not understood as the quality of a person or as created by his actions, but as created by group definitions and reactions (p. 293). Rist (1977) argues that one of the outcomes of labelling is the self-fulfilling prophecy. The author defines the concept as “an expectation which defines a situation [that] comes to influence the actual behaviour within the situation so as to produce what was initially assumed to be there” (p. 299). This concept has been frequently used to understand differential academic performance. Although the educational process is characterised by interaction, it seems that the vulnerability of children to the dictates of adults in positions of power over them (i.e. the teacher and his or her authority) leaves the negotiations as to what evaluative definition will be tagged on the children more often than not in the hands of the powerful (Rist, 1977, p. 301).

A particular and noteworthy South African case is described by Carrim (2006). He argues that, using the reproduction theoretical framework, apartheid schooling was designed and motivated to ensure that white South Africans were schooled in order to take on managerial positions in society and to be dominant in economic, political and social domains of South African society, whilst black South Africans were being schooled explicitly to take on menial, unskilled or semi-skilled, inferior positions. Schooling under apartheid can, thus, be seen as a superstructural manipulation which promoted and consolidated white supremacy in South Africa (Carrim, 2006). Resistance theories, on the other hand, also take into account the aspects of human agency and cultural reproduction. Rather than being merely sites of reproduction of apartheid ideology, schools were also sites of resistance. Black students and teachers were not automatically reproducing apartheid in unthinking ways. They were actively and consciously making sense of what they were being subjected to, making meaning of these in their own terms and deciding on what strategies to use in their responses (Carrim, 2006).

Lastly, Mehan (1992) draws three important conclusions. Firstly, culture is not merely a reflection of structural forces; rather, it is a system of meaning that mediates social structure and human action. Secondly, social actors no longer function as passive role players, shaped exclusively by structural forces beyond their control, but they become active sense makers, choosing among alternatives in often contradictory circumstances. Finally, and more importantly in the context of this study, schools are not black boxes through which students pass on their way to predetermined slots in the capitalist order. They have a vibrant life, composed of processes and practices that respond to competing demands that often unwittingly contribute to inequality.

We have ignored not only attitudes and values but the internal life of schools. We have been preoccupied with the effects of schooling, especially those effects that might be expected to persist into adulthood. This has led us to adopt a “factory” metaphor, in which schools are seen primarily as places that alter the characteristics of their alumni. (Jencks *et al.*; in Mehan, 1992, p. 2)

It is this idea of opening up the black box of schooling linked to addressing the resistance and agency of students at risk that will form part of the central endeavour in my study.

Children and adolescents are to some extent victims of circumstances inside and outside the classroom, but they are not passive victims. Children and adolescents also make choices – about which school to attend, how much effort to put into their school work, and whether or not to attend school at all (Bray *et al.*, 2010, p. 205). When tackling this paradox, it is crucial to look at the importance young South Africans in disadvantaged situations attach to education. The extent to which they aspire to educational success partially determines the prospects and benefits of the existence and the work of educational institutions and, therefore, might play a fundamental role in these young people's move towards more optimal life chances. The literature points to three categories of South African youths' at risk educational aspirations. le Roux (2010) describes the extremely disadvantaged group of South African street children. This first category of aspirations involves a group with very low educational aspirations. Their educational goals are mainly directed at acquiring the skills that enable them to survive and gain the respect and recognition of their peer group (p. 108). Their achievements, competence and recognition are not measured in academic terms, but in survival and life skills. Consequently, the value they attach to school learning and their expectancy of successfully mastering academic endeavours, are low (Scott 1994, p. 28). This, however, does not mean that they have no aspirations at all. A second category of at-risk students attaches considerable importance to education (Beutel & Anderson, 2007), but do not always behave in ways that are conducive to educational success. This, in most of the cases, has to do with the influences of the home environment these adolescents face. Home is not only an economic base and nexus of interpersonal relationships that have both positive and negative impacts on children's schooling; it is also an arena in which culturally informed and historically influenced attitudes to schooling are played out (Bray *et al.*, p. 209). The high value these young people place on education stems from the realisation that this is a route – and often the only route – to material success and social status, in order to improve their own future and that of their family (Bray *et al.*, 2010). However, there often exists a gap between aspirations and realisations, due to negative home influences and their own behaviour, such as substance misuse and misbehaviour, that risks compromising their education. Ward and Seager (2010) also claim that, often, the extreme group of South African street children would like to return to school, however, they feel handicapped by being too old for the grade to which they need to return, or by learning or other disabilities. For young people in this predicament, traditional mainstream schooling is not the answer. Alternative education programmes that emphasise functional literacy and a marketable skill are, therefore, essential for this group. Associated with this category is the final, rather small, group of disadvantaged students with high educational expectations and aspirations and who

actually book academic success as well. In other words, where there is a narrowing or non-existing gap between aspirations and realisations in acquiring qualifications and skills (Moses, 1985; Beutel & Anderson, 2007).

In a society where many adolescents in mainstream schools are failing to acquire skills or qualifications and where many adolescents come from homes and neighbourhoods which intensify these risks, the adolescents at Learn to Live in this study are distinctive, because they are outside of even the formal mainstream school system and they often grow up outside of family environments. Without having been initiated in the necessary social and cultural value-systems of society and without having acquired educational qualifications and skills, they are still expected to some degree, by society and even this school, to be able to cope. Chapter 4 will look into the extent to which the students at Learn to Live felt or feel about this paradox of schooling in addressing their unique situation and what their schooling experiences, perspectives and agency are.

2.2.4. The Salesian Institute and Learn to Live

The Salesian Institute, situated in Greenpoint, Cape Town, was built in 1910 by the Salesians of Don Bosco. The building first served as an orphanage, then as a technical school. Now it accommodates four projects for youth at risk. The project of interest here, Learn to Live, is recognised by the Western Cape Education Department as an independent school and is not part of formal mainstream education. The institute is dependent on volunteers to teach and to provide life and job skills training, on donations and is always in need of equipment, material and funds.

Learn to Live, established in 1987, provides remedial education and supplements the work of residential care centres in Cape Town. It is a non-formal educational programme designed to prepare former and current street children for a better lifestyle. It remedies their lack of schooling, offers them a chance of rehabilitation into communities and enables them to earn an honest living. The programme offers basic literacy and numeracy education, life skills and technical skills to about 80 students – mostly boys – of school-going age, who attend school on a voluntary basis. Students are grouped into classes according to their educational ‘level’ and not according to their age. Afrikaans- as well as Xhosa- and English-speaking classes are operative. Some of the students do gain enough support and remediation to enable them to return to formal schools. Those who are not yet ready for school or those who are beyond formal schooling – because of age or because of the inability to achieve an acceptable literacy level – are stimulated in a variety of educational and recreational activities. When having reached the age of 16, students can choose to follow a technical skills training workshop in panel beating, leather craft, woodcraft or welding, which can provide them with a certificate.

3. 'Theories and practices of education' at Learn to Live

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will unfold and expose the school's internal workings and dynamics, based on the evidence gathered through interviewing and observing important actors in the teaching process at Learn to Live: school staff, interns and volunteers. These actors make up the most important part of the 'theories and practices of education' at Learn to Live on a daily basis, because of their explicit role as educators, and influence students' schooling experiences and perspectives. The chapter will, therefore, look into the endeavours of these actors and investigate what they believe that they are actually doing. The main attempt is to analyse the apparent intent of the school and its educators.

3.2. Characterising the educators

Peter is part of the permanent school staff of Learn to Live, more specifically, he is the principal of this section of the institution. He is 31 years old and has been at Learn to Live for two years, as the coordinator. He stays at the Salesian Institute in Cape Town with the boys in the hostel. Linda has been the teacher of the Afrikaans class at Learn to Live for six years now; before, she was a teacher in mainstream education. She is 58 years old and has two children. She is resident in Eerste Rivier. For five years, Susanna has been the life skills facilitator and teacher at Learn to Live. She is also involved in counselling at the school. She is currently 62 years old and lives in Rondebosch East. Brandon is a South African volunteer, teacher and aspiring Salesian at Learn to Live and focuses mainly on computer and sports issues. He has been helping out at the school since July 2012. He is currently 21 years old and stays in the Salesian Institute hostel. Robin is an intern at Learn to Live in the context of her studies in psychology, at-risk youth. She is 21 years old and had been working at the school for one month at the time of the interview. Robin is from the U.S. Ruth is a German volunteer in the Afrikaans class at Learn to Live. She is 26 years old and at the time of the interview she had been at the school for three months.

3.3. Personality of the school

3.3.1. Creating a sense of belonging

Offering students a 'home'-like environment at school is one of the most important characteristics and purposes of Learn to Live. According to most Learn to Live educators, this

'home'-like environment makes the children feel loved and cared for, gives them safe opportunities to develop, offers a respectful, trusting and supportive milieu, and provides positive role models. It seems to be especially important at this specific school, because of the responsibility educators feel of giving a response to unfavourable conditions in the students' actual home environment. A perceived lack of the previously mentioned positive and necessary influences and existence of disinterest, violence and abuse in the context of the family, makes the school invest even more in creating a substitute family inside the school walls.

I can describe my institution as a – first thing that comes to my mind is – a homely atmosphere, where people feel that they are loved and they feel that they belong in an institution where people are caring and loving and there's somebody that they can look up to as a role model. [...] There is love and kindness, where we love and support and we guide the kid. It's the sense of belonging and the feeling that he is part of a society, a family. (Peter)

A clear realisation of trying to create a 'home'-like environment at school and offering the students a sense of belonging is the existence of different teacher roles. Apart from being a teacher, educators explicitly describe themselves and each other as being a mother or father, a sister or brother, and/or friend figure as well.

Many of them have no father and just being there to guide them in the right direction, having friendly talks with them, chat with them. And also being who I am in my actions, in my way of doing things, not just by speaking. Just be there and make them understand that they need somebody like this that can guide them and lead them. (Peter)

From the beginning I start talking to them already, getting to know you. So they will feel 'ok, I have a friend that I can talk to'. [...] I'll just try to find a way to fit in and join and just start talking, play soccer with them. (Brandon)

This entails that Learn to Live is more than an academic institutions and that the school is doing, or at least attempts to do, more than merely teach academic knowledge and skills in a classroom setting. The school is a direct extension of the child's home environment or a substitute for it, since the majority of the students does not live in a safe and supportive social-educational family environment, but are on the street, have been there, are close to being so or reside in institutionalised care. The specific focus on the social-educational aspect of students' lives and their holistic development – in other words, learning how to live – will be discussed more elaborately in section 3.4.

3.3.2. Learn to Live as a stepping stone and a last resort

Another main characteristic of the institution is its creation as a temporary answer to youths' uncertain, and sometimes hopeless, situation. Learn to Live is a non-formal educational programme designed to prepare former and current street children for a better lifestyle. It is supposed to be a means and an aid on the students' path towards a different future.

Uhm, the objective is, I think, to take kids, who are from extremely harsh backgrounds, off the streets and try to integrate them into the mainstream schooling. (Robin)

The school, thus, wants to give adolescents in extremely disadvantaged situations the opportunities they won't get anywhere else, in order to improve their life chances and well-being.

I think that we do a lot for the children. It's a wonderful opportunity for them to come here, because a lot is being done for them. We're improving their life chances. These children can go out with a certificate, find work, improve their lives. (Susanna)

However, it seems that students do not always realise that this is a stepping stone. According to some of the educators, they often complain about not being in a 'normal' school and, as a consequence, still not having the opportunities and life chances of a 'normal' adolescent. This has implications for their attitudes towards and behaviour in school and will be discussed in more detail later.

It's a stepping stone for them to carry on. It's not permanent and that is what they sometimes don't realise. (Susanna)

The principal goes even further by stating that Learn to Live is actually a last resort for many adolescents attending the school. It is not merely a temporary solution, but often the very last chance for this group of extremely disadvantaged students. In contrast to other staff members, however, he has a more positive view on the students' understanding of this issue.

[...] knowing that this is the last opportunity because there is nothing else besides this, rather than going to the streets and doing what you want and also those negative things. So I think some of them, most of them have appreciation for what we are doing, 'cause we're giving them a skill, and we're providing them with an appropriate education level.

3.3.3. School climate and positivity

There is a clear divide between the views of the school staff at Learn to Live on the one hand and the volunteers and interns on the other, regarding the question whether the school reflects a positive atmosphere and the way this affects students' feelings towards the school. A school's atmosphere includes "the feelings people have about the school and whether it is a place where learning can occur. A positive climate makes a school a place where both staff and students want to spend a substantial portion of their time; it is a good place to be" (Howard, Howell & Brainard, 1987). Following what has been claimed in the previous subsections, the school staff defines the school atmosphere as positive

[...] in a sense that kids are coming back and they feel at home. (Peter)

They all seem to believe in their school project and they all seem to be convinced about the benefits. However, volunteers and interns reflect a slightly more negative view, as witnessed in the following statements.

I didn't see the children very happy, and you have to be happy in your environment. (Brandon)

I think they don't like the school. And I liked my school a lot. Maybe they have to create an atmosphere that they like school. (Ruth)

Maybe this could be because the school staff are the main actors of the project of Learn to Live and they *have to* believe in its benefits for the students, which might sometimes cloud what is actually happening on the students' side. The volunteers and interns are younger, more 'equal' to the students and spend considerably more time with them in different settings than the classroom. This could be the cause of different interpretations and perspectives.

3.3.4. Don Bosco as an inspiration

Since Learn to Live is part of the Salesian Institute, built up by the Salesians of Don Bosco, it is an institution penetrated by religious values and beliefs. These values are expressed in the daily workings of the school, during assembly on Mondays and during the specific life skills classes. The *Don Bosco ideals (Linda)* as applicable to this school are summarised by Robin.

[...] Don Bosco's pictures are everywhere and I see him everywhere, so... And I think his main goal is to help out the struggling youth. And I know the school is very religious. [...] So I think their main thing is, like, mainstream them back into the norms of society and get them off their bad habits, and try to use Don Bosco as an inspiration.

This mission is embedded in a true culture of respect, “*once you have that, you can't go wrong*” (Brandon) or “*if you have respect, then everything else will flow from there*” (Linda) and a context of “*understanding, listening and sharing*” (Peter). Furthermore, it is important to pay attention to the values of acceptance, tolerance, forgiveness and care – especially given the diverse landscape characterising South Africa and Cape Town. One volunteer, finally, explicitly points to the importance of discipline and rule-governance. It is argued that Learn to Live – on the basis of its student population – has a lot of rules, but that this might be necessary.

I think it's necessary for the children. I think it's necessary. I think it's good for them to be ruled so that they know what to do and what not to do. (Ruth)

3.4. Focus on the social-educational

3.4.1. Focus on education and learning

The obvious function of Learn to Live as an educational institution is the provision of education, meaning students' academic development and growth. Although the school deals with unique adolescents in unique situations, this does not mean that they should lose the main focus of education. They actively work towards their academic growth by teaching them the necessary literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills, however basic these may be.

Yeah, it's just the main focus, just to bring children, just to give them education. (Brandon)

Especially the foreign, Western, volunteers and interns put an emphasis on the academic side of education, and talk about “*culture shocks*”, “*eye-opening*” and the school being “*completely different from what I'm used to*” (Robin). This could be influenced by the especially high importance the West attaches to acquiring formal academic knowledge and skills to succeed in society and in life.

3.4.2. Focus on the child

This is actually a place where we need to focus on the child, 100%. Everything we do should be focusing on the person, the learner or trainee we are working with. (Linda)

The student is central to the schooling process. Every single educator mentions the importance of learning about the child and his or her background; “one of the things that we emphasise is getting to know the kid, in all atmospheres and environments” (Peter). Understanding where they come from should contribute to the ability to meet their needs in more effective ways. However, notice on the other hand the lack of this actually happening at school, from the eyes of an intern.

I would like to learn more about them and them to learn more about me. I know one of the other interns was bringing pictures of herself and her background and the kids will then tell her about their backgrounds. I would like to know more about them, because I get such limited interaction with them as it is. And I feel like if I got to know them better and teachers got to know them better and they got to know me better there would be more respect and more trust. (Robin)

Equally important in putting the child in the centre of the education process seems to be listening to what he or she has to say. More than being a victim of disadvantaged or disadvantaging circumstances, the students at Learn to Live can and should be able to contribute to the workings of the school. However, it is only the principal who mentions this when he states that “we should understand where they’re coming from and learn from them; their perspectives and their contribution is valued and respected”.

Again, there is another side of the coin.

Sometimes it is very hard to live that out, because these kids they push you sometimes so hard that you sometimes forget what it is all about. (Linda)

We have to respect it, although sometimes we become very impatient. (Susanna)

Notice the exaggerated use of the word ‘sometimes’ in both statements, possibly pointing to the fact that both teachers are slightly embarrassed by saying this and want to make sure that this happens only from time to time, not always. It is their task, as teachers at Learn to Live, to be able to cope with the specificity of the student population and children’s circumstances. However, now and then, even these professionals have a hard time handling the class. They realise that these feelings of frustration and defeat are not conducive to the students’ schooling process.

3.4.3. LEARN TO LIVE

A majority of the educators explicitly discusses the specific meaning of the name of the school, Learn to Live, to express the importance of a holistic social-educational approach. The principal summarises this type of approach as follows:

[...] it is a culture where we teach you to live. And how you are taught how to live is by getting you holistically developed – in all areas: academically, socially, physically, emotionally – and helping you to become better people in society, successful people in society, honest people in society, and be able to contribute to society in the most positive way. And I think that is our goal, giving the kids the skills to do that in a positive environment. So our main goal is to give them the ability to live, what was not given to them by people hurting them or destroying the futures and abilities that they could have.

Emphasising once more the absence of a nurturing and socialising family environment, the school feels responsible for compensating for what the children were and are denied in developing academic, social and cultural skills; “giving them the ability to live” (Peter). So, much more than merely focusing on the academic aspects of schooling, Learn to Live helps its students to fully develop and grow as a whole person. They are geared with the necessary ammunition to reintegrate and function in today’s society and to create better life chances for themselves. They are being *rebuilt* (Peter). The life skills classes are crucial to this end. Moreover, three of the educators mention the importance of offering the students extra-mural activities. That way, they can experience the world ‘out there’ and develop the necessary skills to cope.

Finally, many adolescents only realise after finishing high school how important their educational carrier thus far has been for acquiring the necessary skills and qualifications. Exactly the same goes for the students of Learn to Live. An important step for them – maybe more important than for adolescents in less disadvantaged situations – is to realise why they are, temporarily, there and what the school can give them. This is regarded as a crucial step towards success. Learn to Live can help to make them understand.

The moment they realise that education is all they need to be successful in life, then they will start learning, really. (Linda)

Actually, you really need to understand what education can give you and that you have to learn in order to achieve something in life. This thing, ‘Learn to Live’, learn to do something, learn to achieve something in life. (Brandon)

3.5. Student-educator relationships

3.5.1. Nature of the relationship and teacher roles

The general nature of student-educator relationships is one characterised by care, support, trust, friendliness and openness. The idea of being more than merely a teacher, the principal or a volunteer or intern, but also a more basic nurturer and socialiser creates the existence of different teacher roles. Firstly, there is of course the role of the typical teacher, where the educator has a very specific task at Learn to Live, namely to teach the children academic knowledge and skills and to help them achieve academic goals.

*I am a typical teacher. I feel I am a teacher that's coming to work to do one job, and that is to teach.
(Linda)*

Secondly, there is the role of mother or father, where the educator feels that it is his or her task to guide the child in the right direction, to create a space of openness and understanding, and to make the child feel special.

The children can always go towards them and speak to them. I've discovered that a lot of things that they do not even share with their parents or their guardians, they've shared with and sought advice from my teachers. [...] And many of the things are quite serious and very emotional; things that are not easy to share. But there's openness to share it with my teachers. (Peter)

I must show the child that he or she is special. And this is one of the things, I think, that helps with the relationship. So when you come into my classroom that is what you get. You get a book that is covered and that looks good, because that will make you feel good. (Susanna)

For the younger educators, which are basically the volunteers and interns, the role shifts slightly into a more 'equal' sister, brother or friend relationship. An emphasis is put on talking, playing, fitting in, and being there for the child whenever he or she has problems.

I think if you got to know them really well and they told you about some problems they had or they just wanted to vent, or tell you about their day. If it was something bad I would love to help or just be there or just listen to them, because it's all they sometimes need. (Robin)

There seem to be many differences in the way students and specific educators interact. Most of the time, this is positive, since it portrays the uniqueness of each person and of each

interaction. Sometimes, however, it can create inconsistencies, whereby children experience confusion and difficulties figuring out how to behave in this relationship and how to behave in the next. Also, there don't only seem to be inconsistencies between educators, but also in what educators say about their own behaviour. As much emphasis they put on being more than an educator in the academic sense of the word, they often still keep children *at arm's length* (Linda).

Sometimes I feel I am maybe too strict. I don't bring them closer. (Linda)

This teacher admits that this could be the reason why students sometimes don't listen to her. According to all volunteers and interns, there is way more personal interaction needed at Learn to Live, because very often children have fear of opening up.

What I have witnessed, it's not very personable from her to them. She talks to them and yells at them. And, you know, at times I will see her laugh or smile at something they say, but they just fear her, so I think they're just scared to open up sometimes. (Robin)

It feels as if educators are frequently confronted with difficulties in finding a balance between being a school teacher in the narrow sense of the word and keeping children at a professional distance on the one hand, and getting close to and open with them on the other. Especially in the case of Learn to Live, a very specific school with a very specific student population, finding this balance is not always an easy endeavour. Moreover because in a way, these students also need structure and discipline, next to open and close relationships.

3.5.2. Educator authority

The same balance issue arises when educators try to define the concept of teacher authority. Staff members often use phrases like "*gentle, but firm*" (Peter), "*strict enough*" (Linda) or "*strict, but reasonable*" (Susanna). Interns and volunteers, however, looking at it from a distance, sometimes see other things happening.

I think the kids know she's the boss and, like, she uses, her tone of voice gets through to these kids. She almost instils fear in them. (Robin)

Their own authority, interns and volunteers experience and define as follows.

[...] you know, we're white girls; and we're younger and not real teachers, and I feel like they don't want to listen to us as much or they won't treat us with as much respect. (Robin)

I think they often try to do things which are not allowed. For example, they ask me nearly every day if they can go to the toilet, but they know that they are not allowed to go. But they ask only me. They try. (Ruth)

3.5.3. Educator expectations

Every educator admits having different expectations of different students in and outside the classroom. This mainly has to do with past experiences they had with the students, their background, their behaviour, their degree of growth and improvement, their interaction skills, their abilities and potential, and their academic skills. Notice the strong emphasis on factors lying outside the realm of schooling and academics. Other factors characterising the student seem to be more important in expecting more or less.

Although some educators claim that these different expectations don't imply treating students differently and that the end goal is still the same, there are clear practical consequences to these different expectations, mainly on an academic level.

It depends on the students. You get some of them that are fast and some that are slow in the class. But I don't push the ones that are slow. If one is finished and I can see he is strong on the computer, I will just tell him to go and help someone else. Teamwork. (Brandon)

She also tried to separate them into two groups, a weaker group and a better group, academically. She's very fair. (Ruth)

One teacher explicitly states that she does not see these children as coming from the street and cannot have different expectation of the students at Learn to Live.

I have to prepare them for going back into the world, where the expectations for them are no different to what they are for other children. (Susanna)

3.6. Conflict and resistance

3.6.1. Different norms

Many of them come from abusive backgrounds; they think that that is the norm. [...] For example, the violence. That is for them a norm. To touch a girl, it's the norm for them. [...] They think that is ok, because that is the environment that they are in. (Susanna)

One of the main reasons why educators feel that children are often conflicted and, as a consequence, resistant at school is the fact that they have internalised different norms in their home environment than the ones of the school – and according to the educators, the ones of society. Implicitly, it is stated that the children did not internalise the ‘right’ or ‘normal’ norms growing up to function in society and that the school is there to compensate for that lack. The conflict between what children are taught and see outside school and what the school tells them, often leads to confusion and resistance.

For example, a lot of our kids are living in communities with their parents or are on the street, with people not really respecting them and where they are taught and see swearing, smacking, forcing you, burning you, and hurting you. And that is something that they're used to, so they think that is the right way of doing things. That's why being gentle to them, speaking to them, it really clashes in the sense of... the best way for them is not to speak softly or not to treat them in a respectful manner. You shout at them and that's how they understand. [...] Especially if somebody has been doing something that way and it's not right, it's difficult for that person to change, so he becomes resistant to what we are trying to teach him. Because he's so used to it and there is kind of continuous influence when he goes back. So now he's struggling and that becomes a big resistance for him to leave school or failing in school. Because things are clashing. (Peter)

In the educators' view, it is the struggle to adjust to these new norms and not being used to standing under authority that causes students at Learn to Live to become actively resistant, in terms of being unmanageable in the classroom, being rude to teachers, not obeying the rules, committing school vandalism and being violent towards other students.

Furthermore, Linda points to the fact that “most of them come here because they don't want to be there or can't cope there” (meaning mainstream schools) and because “these kids are lazy; they are running away from mainstream school with a lot of excuses and then they come here thinking they can just come and sit here, and do nothing”. With this, she is the only one referring to personal characteristics of the child instead of environmental – home and school – factors, being contributing to students' feeling of conflict and resistance.

3.6.2. Change, failure and rejection

According to the educators, most of the students' resistance is derived from the fact that they are used to a norm and value system that is not aligned with the school's system. The feeling of having to change who they are and what they always believed in and the failure of trying to change, creates resistance. It is a *challenge* (Brandon).

Especially if somebody has been doing something that way and it's not right, it's difficult for that person to change, so he becomes resistant to what we are trying to teach him. (Peter)

I can see it setting up for, like, failure or just kids being unhappy because it's so different. (Robin)

They can feel now 'you don't accept me; you want me to be somebody else'. And they don't always understand. They can also see it as disrespectful, towards what they have and towards what they believe. (Susanna)

According to the school staff, this can help create school failure and resistance in the sense that *"they feel that they are again being rejected"* (Susanna).

To tackle this issue, all educators suggest to pay more attention to students' backgrounds and to look closer at where they come from. Susanna proposes that more can be done on a school-level as well.

I think we can do more about that. We can raise more awareness about the differences and why there are differences. And why are we doing this and why do we expect that. I think as a school we can do more.

But Brandon also points to the importance of the attitude of the students themselves: *"If you yourself want to change, and I believe you can, then you will achieve something"*. This also fits in with the view of one of the volunteers that *"they don't have fear of failure"* (Robin). According to her, this can create conflict and resistance as well, be it in a more passive way.

*They're like 'whatever; what are you gonna do about it when we don't finish this worksheet?'. [...]
I think there's bigger problems in their life, or they just don't care. (Robin)*

3.7. Normalisation

The concept of normalisation in the sense of making something more 'normal', meaning conforming it to a rule or a norm or bringing it back from a deviant state, has been discussed in the previous section. There seems to be a discrepancy between the norms that children have internalised in their home environment and the norms, values and rules of the school. As mentioned earlier, implicitly this means that the children did not internalise the 'right' or 'normal' norms growing up to function in society and that the school is there to compensate for that lack.

In this section, the concept of normalisation will be approached in the context of the perceived tension between the school's focus on the uniqueness of the situation of its student population – and the fact that they will probably always be unique in a way – and their goal of 'mainstreaming' the school and its students. It becomes clear that this can be conducive to their struggle, conflict, confusion and resistance as well.

3.7.1. Different from mainstream schools

On the one hand, Learn to Live admits being different from mainstream education and defines itself as an institution that educates a very specific student population, in a very specific situation and with specific needs. It is important to look at the reasons why these particular students are here and what it is they need to move on.

And of course it's totally different from a demand for academics and the intellectual, but forgetting about the human growth, and that is also what we are emphasising. That's why they are not coping in a mainstream school, because that's something that was not provided. That's something that we need to get them to understand. It's about understanding that they need it and we've seen that a lot of these kids need that extra that they're not getting there. (Peter)

Because of the students' disadvantaged situations, they need the holistic and individual approach Learn to Live can offer them.

3.7.2. 'Mainstreaming'

On the other hand, according to one volunteer, the purpose of Learn to Live's endeavour is to "*mainstream them back into everyday schooling*" (Robin). Notice the introduced tension in this single sentence: the combination of the words 'mainstream' and 'everyday' schooling, referring to the fact that Learn to Live doesn't supply what is considered 'normal' schooling. She continues with "*introducing them to a different lifestyle, which is a healthier lifestyle*", so basically mainstreaming them.

Brandon, as well, contributes to the idea of mainstreaming when he talks about the material infrastructure of the school.

[...] like a normal school; just put it like a normal classroom.

Finally, Susanna explicitly states that she does not see these children as coming from the street.

I have to prepare them for going back into the world, where the expectations for them are no different to what they are for other children.

3.7.3. Students' attitudes

This tension will obviously have its effects on the students, their attitudes towards the school and their behaviour in school, as is confirmed by the educators. The principal is the only person reflecting a rather positive view on students' attitudes towards the school.

A big majority of the kids that come to our institution is due to somehow not having been in school for many years or having been kicked out of mainstream schools and learning on the streets and not performing or have learning barriers. So I think kids' attitudes towards our education is positive; a last opportunity that they're getting and that they would not have received otherwise. [...] So I think some of them, most of them, have appreciation for what we are doing. (Peter)

He continues by stating that only a small percentage might feel that what the school does, is not effective for them. Moreover, he gives other explanations for a lack of interest and motivation than the nature of the school, such as peer pressure, drugs or rather being on the street and begging for money.

All interns and volunteers, however, reflect a more negative view, coming from the students, on the school not being a 'normal' school. As witnessed by their statements, it seems that many children already explicitly mentioned this to them. Although the students at Learn to Live need this type of education,

[...] they have a negative idea about the school. They often say 'I don't like it here'. They don't have their friends here, or the school is not like a normal school. (Brandon)

Maybe they're not trying as hard because they know this isn't a real school. Or maybe it's not actually counting. (Robin)

Sometimes they say 'this is not a normal school'. Maybe they see it as if it puts them in a lower position. I'm not sure. But yeah, I think they are less valued than other schools. (Ruth)

The tension between the school's focus on the uniqueness of the situation of its student population and their goal of 'mainstreaming' the school and the students, as mirrored in the interviews, affects the students at Learn to Live. This tension within the school dynamics has its

consequences for the students. The idea of being in a *special* school because of *special* problems, which they seem to acknowledge to need and appreciate to some extent according to the educators, is not always in line with their want and need of being 'normal' adolescents.

3.8. Educational success

If I have to put a percentage on people that are succeeding academically, maybe about 45%; in skills maybe a bit more; and the rest, a small percentage is not really progressing due to a lot of issues. But there's quite a good majority that is – if you take into account the skills that they learn while maybe not being that strong academically – succeeding and performing well and can go to other schools and continue their studies. (Peter)

Some will just drop out and continue doing what they did, their own thing. They don't have a purpose. Some have their past backgrounds, like drugs or gangsterism. Something that's the easy way out. Robbing, stealing, or just doing nothing at home. (Brandon)

3.8.1. Inhibiting risk factors

In line with the academic literature, the educators at Learn to Live point to the important effects of risk factors on the educational success of its students. As discussed in the previous chapter, these risk factors can be divided into five broad categories: individual, family, peer-related, neighbourhood and school factors. The only individual risk factors the school staff mentions is the students' negative attitude and mind-set, and low self-esteem. No other individual inhibiting factors were mentioned, except for one teacher who mentioned language, and the volunteers and interns did not mention any individual risk factor. Getting no support from parents is a family risk factor, discussed by all educators. The main inhibiting influence seems to come from friends. They are mainly responsible for a bad influence and peer pressure regarding the use of drugs and alcohol, getting involved in gangs and skipping school. A dangerous and non-supportive community and the bigger societal problems of poverty, violence and homelessness were mentioned as neighbourhood risk factors. The school staff does not really see inhibiting school factors, however, volunteers and interns mention too many boys with the same type of problems together in one place and poor communication among teachers.

3.8.2. Contributing protective factors

Important individual protective factors for educational success are the students' own determination and internal drive to make something out of their lives, the acceptance of the

situation they're in, and a culture of wanting to learn. Educators did not explicitly mention any contributing factors in the realm of the family, peers or the neighbourhood, except for one volunteer who mentioned 'good friends', "*friends who say 'go to school, make it right, be well-behaved'*" (Ruth). They did, however, mention a long list of things the school can offer to contribute to the educational success of the students: creating a sense of belonging and a loving and safe environment, implementing a holistic social-educational approach, providing them with academic knowledge and life skills, offering challenging coursework appropriate to the students' level, doing more creative work and learning, maintaining positive interactions and relationships, being positive role models, getting to know the children, talking more about personal things, staff development, creating smaller classes and separate level groups, offering longer school days, letting them experience success and pride, motivating them, making them know why they come here and changing their mind-set, and making them see the opportunity.

3.8.3. Attribution

The way in which people explain their own and others' behaviour in terms of causes and effects and how this influences their motivation is part of attribution theory. Educational success and failure of students at Learn to Live, according to the educators, is mainly influenced by external factors. Both inhibiting and contributing factors of educational success find their origins in contexts and conditions outside the power of the student. Moreover, educators emphasise the crucial role the school and the schooling process at Learn to Live can play on the way to success. This probably stems from one of the main principles and reasons for existing of the school, namely that the students come from especially disadvantaged backgrounds and that it is these circumstances which have the most crucial influence on the state of their lives. Also, the educators are the major actors in the schooling process and have to try to compensate for the situation these students are in, which means that Learn to Live is supposed to contribute a lot to these students' success and life chances, hence the emphasis on school factors.

3.9. Hope

3.9.1. Values as means to inspire hope

Since teachers serve as role models to their students, it is important that they are aware of the educational and personal values they support, which enables them to consciously adopt behaviours and attitudes that are constructive for solving problems and creating the best opportunities.

Two of the most important values, contributing to hope, is acceptance and self-determination. It is all about accepting the situation the students are in to be able to deal with it. From there, students have to realise that they can create their own destiny. They need that “internal drive to make something out of their lives” (Peter).

If you want to succeed, then you will go forward. If you don't succeed, then it's obvious that you don't want to accept. (Brandon)

Furthermore, and following from this self-determination, it is important for the students to have a purpose, “so they should feel that they are doing things for a reason” (Brandon). Only one volunteer talks about this. It seems that other educators don't really feel that many students have a clear purpose at school or maybe even in their lives.

Finally, hope is embodied by the school if it addresses the specific needs of the students successfully and if a strong relationship is established between teachers and students. One teacher puts an emphasis on collaboration as a fundamental value in creating hope and achieving success. She also refers to the importance of good student-teacher relationships, as discussed earlier.

What can help is, I think, if they start to see this opportunity and also is the cooperation between us and the children, the relationship between us and the children is good. (Susanna)

3.9.2. The role of the school and its teachers

Teachers are agents who can send out a message of hope; they are determined to do a proper job and willing to go the extra mile. An important task of the school and its teachers is to identify and nurture strengths in individuals and groups to enable them to take responsibility for improving their situation; creating opportunities for resilience. Rather than focusing on the deficiencies, they also highlight the importance of experiencing feelings of success and pride. The school is in a good position to identify talents and skills that could be harnessed to address the social and educational needs of the students.

We should broaden our programme, where it becomes more other things where the child can achieve success. They see themselves as failures all the time. If we had more sports, more culture clubs, more other things where they can experience success, it will – I believe – have an impact on the academic as well. Because that will change their mind-set. (Susanna)

If you do those things, it gives you a good feeling about yourself, you feel proud. (Brandon)

Educators feel that it is demotivating for the students to continuously have feelings of not succeeding. That is why educators point to the importance of motivating the students. This can already happen on a very small scale, *“just to see their face light up when you give them a compliment” (Robin). “Good job! Well done!” (Robin)*

Motivation brings you success. I think motivation is important. (Brandon)

Our main focus is on the young people and their futures. And what’s best for them, which can be defined as knowing what they have experienced and where they come from. And to give them opportunities to have goals, dreams, hope and a vision. (Peter)

However, this is not always an easy endeavour. Nevertheless, from the more distal perspective of the volunteers, *“they are doing an awesome job, under the circumstances; I appreciate what they are doing” (Robin).*

As a teacher I should continue with trying to take care of the child in different ways. I sometimes become impatient, I sometimes just lose hope. (Susanna)

3.9.3. Educational aspirations

The three categories of educational aspirations students in especially disadvantaged situations might have, discussed in the previous chapter, are described by the educators. One volunteer summarises it well.

Half the time there are like 9 students in my classroom. And there’s supposed to be 15 or 16. I don’t even know what my classroom is. I think there’s bigger problems in their life than a stupid homework assignment or just they don’t care. I try asking them ‘what are your goals in life? What do you wanna be when you get older?’. And some will say ‘a carpenter’, but some will be like ‘I don’t know; I don’t care’. Someone told me ‘a gangster, the leader of a group; probably because the gang works for the leader and I think the leader gets money and they look up to him, he is something’. And I was like ‘no, you need to have goals, realistic ones’. But maybe some of them really do want to get back into mainstream schooling and have a good job one day. (Robin)

3.10. Perspectives on the role of the individual: agency

As mentioned earlier, educators put a lot of emphasis on getting to know the child and his or her background, in order to be able to meet their specific individual needs. To be able to reach

and help the child, attention should be paid to individual differences and the uniqueness of their situation, both individually and as a group of especially disadvantaged students.

However, in doing this, educators – and especially the school staff – seem to be victimising the students: students are at risk because of their horrible backgrounds, they have few opportunities left, this is their last resort, they are the victim of unfavourable family and community environments and they are the victim of having bad friends and getting involved with drugs. They apparently cannot help it, since they grew up in and learned from these circumstances. This idea of victimisation gets extra credit by literally taking many responsibilities and ownership at school away from the students, both materially and academically. For example, they don't have their own pencils and rulers, but always have to return them to the teacher's desk. This is a clear realisation of the mother- or father-like perspective, discussed in the beginning of this chapter. Although many teachers might say that they listen to the students and their perspectives, the adolescent students of Learn to Live are often treated like children who are perceived as being rather helpless and powerless and who still need to be taught everything about respect, discipline and responsibility. In this sense, these students are not attributed a lot of agency, but should rather be 'saved' by Learn to Live's project.

Volunteers and interns, who are younger and are in some ways closer to the situation of the adolescent student, approach this in a slightly different manner. They want to get to know the students and understand their backgrounds, but they don't necessarily see them as powerless beings. This is a realisation of the friend-like perspective, mentioned earlier.

I think every child has to have their own pencil, their own rubber, their own books and their own ruler. Everyone should have responsibilities and tasks in the class. [...] They have to learn more that they are responsible for their own future. (Ruth)

They should spend more time with the children. Just play with them, it doesn't matter how old you are. If you play with them and just talk to them, I feel that they will open up. [...] Also listen to what they have to say and what they can contribute. [...] Teacher should interact more. (Brandon)

3.11. Conclusion

Close analysis of the data revealed some central themes, characterising the 'theories and practices of education' at Learn to Live. Exposing the internal dynamics of schooling brought into light the present tension between putting an emphasis on the uniqueness and specificity of students' situation and "mainstreaming them back into the norms of society". On the one hand, Learn to Live, as a non-formal educational intervention for especially disadvantaged youth, feels that one of its most important tasks is to compensate for what the adolescents were and are

denied in developing academic, social and cultural skills by creating a sense of belonging and by acting as a substitute family. The school acknowledges the particularity of its student population and explicitly tries to meet the students' specific individual needs through numerous practices in the realm of an individual and holistic teaching and learning approach. On the other hand, this implies a fundamental societal norm thinking, for which Learn to Live should prepare its students, since *"the expectations for them are no different to what they are for other children"*. Unfortunately, there seems to be a discrepancy between the norms that these students have internalised in their home environment and the norms, values and rules of the school. Implicitly this means that the children did not internalise the 'right' or 'normal' norms growing up to function in society. As a consequence, many adolescents become resistant and ultimately fail in school because of not being used and able to comply with society's, and hence, the school's middle-class norm system. Furthermore, adolescents are approached as rather passive, powerless victims in this process. They do not know better because of their circumstances and need to be 'saved' by the project of Learn to Live. The most crucial task of giving a response to unfavourable conditions in the students' actual home environment and to a perceived lack of necessary knowledge and skills, is reserved for the institution of the school. In line with this, teachers, not putting too much trust in students' own educational aspirations and hope for the future, find it paramount to create and stimulate opportunities for hope and resilience. The school should identify and nurture strengths and talents and establish spaces where students can experience success and pride, which will enable them to move out of the hazardous situation in which they find themselves.

4. Adolescents' schooling experiences and perspectives

4.1. Introduction

The interview was quite interesting. It really took me back. I didn't really think about Learn to Live in the ways that you asked me. It actually gives me a view now of how I experienced the school and how I really want Learn to Live to be, at a later stage. (Simpfiwe)

This chapter focuses on the ways in which different students experience or experienced their school. As mentioned earlier, this study puts an explicit emphasis on the encounters and views of young people at risk and, most importantly, takes them seriously. Giving them a chance to talk about and express their schooling experiences at Learn to Live, gives insight in the ways they experience the link between their disadvantaged or at-risk position and the school, and in the ways Learn to Live can offer a successful educational intervention on their path towards a happy and successful future.

4.2. Characterising the students

My seven informants were boys aged between 14 and 20 years. Two of them had left the school several years ago and are currently living on the streets; three of them had left Learn to Live to move on to another school or a job; two were still attending the school at the time of the interview.

Two years ago, Logan left Learn to Live to go back to the streets of Cape Town, where he mostly begs for money. He had been at the school for about ten years, without any specific schooling experiences prior to that. He left Learn to Live because he was officially too old for the basic education class and did not want to leave for the workshops. He is now 19 years old. His family environment in Elsies River is one characterised by a big family without a father and he has a history of child abuse. He left home because of these conditions and because the neighbourhood was too dangerous. Logan was interviewed at KFC. Clayton is currently one of the 'best' students at Learn to Live in the junior Afrikaans class. He is 14 years old and has been at the school for two years. He stays in a boy's shelter in Macassar and sees his parents every weekend. At the time of the interview, he was very aspirational and was working very hard in class. But he hasn't been in school for several days now, is apparently using drugs again with a friend, and he also left the shelter. Roderick has been a regular visitor of Learn to Live, for two months in 2010 and for two months in 2013. Before that, he went to a mainstream school. Friends and drugs made him drop out. He is 16 years old and stays in a shelter in Woodstock. Three years ago, his mother was

murdered and he does not see his father anymore. At the time of the interview he was still at Learn to Live, however, two weeks later he decided not to come anymore. Apparently, he left the shelter and goes to school somewhere else now. The two current students of Learn to Live were interviewed at school during school hours. Victor is an ex-student of the Afrikaans class at Learn to Live, where he went for one remedial year, after having been out of the formal school system for two years. At the end of last year, he was promoted to go to B.E.S.T. Centre in Salt River, a school offering basic education and skills training following the Adult Basic Education and Training (A.B.E.T.) curriculum, where he is still going to school now. He is 17 years old and lives with his aunt in Eerste Rivier. Victor was interviewed at his current school after school hours. Hendrick has been a student in the Afrikaans class at Learn to Live for two years in 2008 and 2009, after he left home in Namibia to pursue a better future in Cape Town. He never knew his father, his mother “did not care” and his brother was involved in gang life. Back home, he only reached Grade 3. Hendrick used to live on the streets in Cape Town, but was then taken in by a shelter in Woodstock. He currently goes to school in Athlone, School of Hope. He is 20 years old and stays in a shelter for older boys in Salt River. Simphiwe is also an ex-student of Learn to Live. He was in the Xhosa class for two years in 2009 and 2010. He grew up in Port Elizabeth with his mother and twin brother. He is currently 19 years old and resides in another home for older boys in Salt River. Last year, he worked as a trainee for the fire department. He is currently looking for a job. The other two boys in the category of ex-students who are succeeding were interviewed at the home where they are staying during the weekend.

4.3. Personality of the school

4.3.1. Sense of belonging

The sense of belonging which Learn to Live tries to create and provide through offering a ‘home’-like environment, does not seem to be experienced and reflected as strongly by the students. Only three of them use words like “friendly”, “kind” and “respectful”, which could still merely mean ‘a nice school environment with nice teachers’, and not necessarily a substitute family environment. One of them goes a little bit further.

*When I think about the school, it's all cosy. It's a school where you can feel safe. [...] It's not just there because it's there to make money. It's there to actually help street children.
(Simphiwe)*

Things look slightly different when they move into the classroom. They don't necessarily feel the ‘home’-like environment on a school level, but most of them do feel it on a class level,

especially when it comes to the teacher. It is clear, however, that the students who do or did not have a very good or close relationship with their teacher, do not see it like this. For the others, their teacher is – apart from being a teacher in the narrow academic sense of the word – also a mother; *“it’s like we’re her own children” (Victor)*.

She’s not like other teachers. I could see it in her. She’s a nice teacher. When she talks to you, it’s like... a mother. She talks to you, listens to you, wants to help you. She also never stopped trying. I didn’t want to let her down and I will always respect her. (Logan)

Simphiwe recalls a nice memory to support the idea of teachers being more than just teachers, going further than the academic level, and also being a mother figure.

To me, she was more like a mother. Because, you know, there’s not a lot of teachers who come to school prepared. Like, for example, bring bread and stuff, because she knows that some guys don’t eat at home or some live on the street. So then she brought maybe four sandwiches or something to give to somebody in class.

The main characteristic all students attribute to Learn to Live, however, is education and learning; a focus on the academic environment. It is still a school in the narrow sense of the word.

4.3.2. School climate and positivity: “I feel” vs. “it is”

There is a difference between two groups of students in the way in which they describe and talk about the school atmosphere and the specific wording of their statements. Students who feel or felt attached, who feel or felt good at school and who think about Learn to Live as necessary for and helpful to them, often use phrases like *“I felt good” (Logan)* and *“I feel nice, outside and inside class” (Clayton)*. They explain and describe the school atmosphere very subjectively: how they feel or felt. The others use objective and neutral descriptions and talk about their school from a distance: *“I think this is a very nice school, but it’s not for me” (Roderick)* and *“for me, it’s not positive” (Hendrick)*. The use of specific wordings does not necessarily have to do with the fact that they are current or ex-students of the school. It has more to do with students’ general attitude towards this specific school, and maybe even schooling in general.

4.3.3. Values and rules

None of the students refers to the person of Don Bosco when it comes to school values and beliefs. They do refer to God and religion; but they mainly refer to the values of discipline and

respect. One of the students even mentions this up to six times in the course of his interview. He approaches this fundamentally and explicitly in the context of rules and not necessarily in the context of the school climate. Other important values students mention are teamwork, interaction and communication, care, responsibility, self-control, and “*for all of us to be in mainstream school*” (Simpfiwe).

They just want to give us the best and they want us to be successful. That is one of the main things of the school. They like to help you, to grow, to go further. They will always give you courage, man.
(Victor)

4.3.4. Learn to Live as a stepping stone and a second chance

As mentioned earlier, one of the main characteristics of the institution is its creation as a temporary answer to youths’ uncertain, and sometimes hopeless, situation. Learn to Live is a non-formal educational programme designed to prepare former and current street children and other youth at risk for a better lifestyle. It is supposed to be a means and an aid on the students’ path towards a different future. The school, thus, wants to give adolescents in extremely disadvantaged situations the opportunities they won’t get anywhere else, in order to improve their life chances and well-being. Although many educators assume that students do not always realise this, the students themselves seem to be acknowledging the fact that Learn to Live is there to give them a second chance.

The school tries to teach you discipline and respect. They give you a second chance here. They also try to find work for you. (Clayton)

Sometimes children came from a mainstream school. Maybe the teachers or the principal they couldn’t cope with the behaviour of the children. Now the child is just sitting around. He just drops out of school, the mainstream school. So now they came there by Learn to Live. So that school, they just want to bring you on a balance. (Victor)

Learn to Live, thus, offers a second chance in the sense that students who dropped out of other schools for whatever reason can come to the institution to find the balance they need to move on, “*to refresh their mind; to get themselves going*” (Hendrick). It is, further, a stepping stone, because the school invests in providing students with technical skills in the workshops, helps with finding a job and “*phones colleges*” (Victor), and promotes students (back) to other, formal educational institutions.

4.4. Focus on the social-educational

4.4.1. Focus on education and learning

All students perceive Learn to Live as an institution of education and learning. In the eyes of many students every school is a school in the typical sense of the word. They are all there for the main purpose of acquiring academic skills or technical skills in the workshops.

I couldn't read or write properly when I came there. But Miss. Linda, she was giving me the courage. She will always say 'look here, do this, do that'. Like, reading or try your maths. And she would teach and teach and teach us until we understand. And when I came there, at Learn to Live, last year I told myself 'look here, you are here for a purpose', so that means everything must be right, you must be respectable, you must be educated and you must be focused. (Victor)

Still focusing on education and learning, however, from a different point of view, some students do not think the (level of) education was right or useful for them or for a certain group of students. On the other hand, *"it's better than not going to school"* (Roderick).

It's confusing for learners coming from normal schools. Because, what you do there, what the teachers do, is something that you were doing maybe five years ago, that you're gonna redo. [...] When I was there I didn't learn what I was supposed to be learning. What I needed to learn, you know, that can help me to work when I'm in the outside world. I couldn't learn to get a degree and go outside, you know, apply for a job. So I think it's not positive. (Hendrick)

The work that they get is, like, lower education. So I know all the work and I tell my teacher 'this is from two years back; I know all of this work'. (Roderick)

Where the learning comes in, I mean, the education, it wasn't really helping me at all. [...] It's not really that challenging to be there. (Simphiwe)

4.4.2. Focus on the future

In every interview, a strong sense of looking forward and a sense of optimism is reflected. None of the students talks a lot about the actual situation they are in or explains why they are there. Many students define the social-educational project of Learn to Live and what they themselves are doing there as changing their lives in the direction of success and more optimal life chances. Some testimonies:

They change your life, the way you live. They don't want you to go to the streets. They try to change you. (Logan)

If I do my work, I will also go to B.E.S.T. Centre. (Clayton)

I am here for a purpose. I am here to succeed. (Victor)

Play and interact with people. It made me feel like, I'm gonna be successful one day. And now I can help the learners in a way. (Hendrick)

I used to play soccer a lot at school, and that made me feel, like, I can achieve something. That's the time I realised that I was actually good at soccer. And I can actually take it to a next level. That helped me. [...] I found this out at school. (Simphiwe)

4.5. Student-educator relationships

4.5.1. Nature of the relationship

The nature of the relationship between students and educators, by which they generally mean the class teacher, can be characterised by a continuum ranging from no relationship at all to a very close relationship. Every student seems to be experiencing quite different types of relationships with their class teacher, depending on both the teacher and themselves. Roderick portrays one end of the continuum: *"We don't have a relationship. You see, sometimes, when she speaks I listen, but when I speak... And then when she speaks I'm also like... Ups and downs, you see. And then I take a bad attitude."* Some students do feel that there is a relationship, but they sometimes fear the teacher and are scared, for example, to ask questions in class. Hendrick describes a neutral relationship that can be placed somewhere in the middle of the continuum: *"I didn't have difficulties with my teacher. I didn't interact with her so much. [...] Everyone was kinda distant."* He goes a little bit further towards the other end of the continuum when he states that *"respect comes from both ways"*, although the relationship stays quite neutral. Finally, the other extreme of the continuum can be exemplified by Logan, who had a very close relationship with his teacher and who actually stopped going to Learn to Live to go back to the street, partially *"because they were gonna take me away from my teacher and I didn't want to lose my teacher"*. Simphiwe as well describes a good and close relationship: *"Our teacher, she was really emotional, because the love that she had for us. [...] I could be open to her. Whatever problems I had, I could come to her. I actually feel that I could actually speak to her."*

One student raises an interesting point regarding the students' own share in shaping these relationships.

Some of the children in class, they like to communicate in class with teachers. And some of the children they don't want to communicate. Some of the teachers they are very kind and they treat us with respect and they like to share with us. But from the children's side, some of them don't like to do their school work and then they don't want to communicate with the teachers. (Victor)

Simphiwe also refers to the important role of volunteers and interns at the school and to the specific and special relationships he used to have with them. The difference between a relationship with a teacher and a relationship with a volunteer lies in the fact that teachers are teachers, they are there every day and *have to* maintain a good relationship; it is evident. This is apparently how some students feel about and what they expect from the role of school teachers. Volunteers and interns, on the other hand, are there voluntarily, which apparently immediately shows that they care. They are often way younger than the teachers as well, which gives rise to more 'equal' friend-like relationships. Often, they also don't know about the students' backgrounds, because of which they perceive the students in a different light and a more objective way. Students might feel that it is nice, for once, not to be treated as a person with all the baggage he or she is carrying.

You know, besides teachers, because you see them every day. They don't hug you, they just have to put up with you every day, because you're at school. But then you get volunteers who really like you and actually want to be around you, so that actually made me feel like 'oh, I'm at school, I'm not coming here for the teacher, I'm coming here for myself; this is for my own benefit'. And it's so easy to go up to a volunteer and talk to them. For me, it felt like they understand, whatever thing I say. I wasn't really open with other teachers. Teachers just say things. Volunteers they would always be around me and speak to me and show that they care. (Simphiwe)

4.5.2. Educator authority

According to the students, the way in which teachers exercise authority depends fully on the students' behaviour. The teacher will either "talk to you" or "be friendly" or – if necessary – she will "shout", "be aggressive" or "take you to the office". In one case, the behaviour of the students got even worse.

In July last year, this other guy said that the teacher looked not beautiful. We say 'she looks like a tomboy', with her hair. I did laugh, but I did say nothing. It was my friend. She heard what she said and she started crying. (Clayton)

4.5.3. Educator expectations

Completely contradictory to what the educators themselves have to say about their own expectations, students all believe that teachers “*want more from everyone*” (Logan).

No, not more or less from me. She wanted more from everyone. Everyone in the class. If you say to the teacher 'no, I can't do that', she would say 'you can't tell me you can't do that; you can!'.

They want all of us on the same level. (Victor)

If students realise that sometimes teachers have different expectations of some students compared to other students, then they usually blame themselves and their behaviour for that.

Yes. Because I was rude in class and I didn't do my work. These other guys they did. If I would have done my work, I would have gone to B.E.S.T. Centre. It's not the teacher, it's myself. (Clayton)

So the reasons for them to actually have different expectations is because of us not being serious compared to others. (Simphiwe)

4.6. Conflict and resistance

4.6.1. Active and passive resistance

There exist two groups of students at Learn to Live who are confronted with clear feelings of conflict at school and who act out these feelings by exhibiting a certain type of behaviour. One group, exemplified by Logan, is resistant in a particularly active way.

That's why I got mad. [...] I'm alone now. So then I got out of school, myself. Didn't go to the Homestead, I stroll, straight. I was rude at people. Didn't want to listen to them anymore.

He felt conflict between life inside and life outside school and decided to quit school completely and return to the streets. Another group of students is resistant in a rather passive way. This group consists of the three students who explicitly argue that Learn to Live is not a 'normal' school and

that it is not actually the ideal school for them. They only go or went to Learn to Live “because they have to” (Hendrick) and are or were kind of just there. These students are or were all sent to Learn to Live by the shelter where they were staying. This creates their passive behaviour and specific attitude towards the school. It is more an attitude of ‘je m’en fou’.

I think this is a very nice school, but it's not for me, you see. There's nothing new I can learn. I'm here because the Homestead sent me. [...] When, sometimes I get angry, I leave it, you see. I just make me smile. It's an act, it's all an act. (Roderick)

Because I knew for a fact that this is not mainstream school, so I don't have to give it my all. I always had that attitude towards the school. This is not mainstream school, so I don't have to take it seriously. (Simphiwe)

Roderick also mentions the fact that he feels that Learn to Live does not and will not pay much attention to students' interests. For example, he – like many other students at the school – is very much into rap music and hip hop dancing and would like to have things like singing and dancing at school, activities that the school does not offer at the moment. Regarding the conflict that he feels being inside compared to being outside the school walls, he even goes further by stating:

Because outside, my life is about gangsters, you see. Maybe talk about how it is, open up, how you feel out there.

This reflects the idea that students would like the school to incorporate their interests and perspectives in the daily workings of the institution, maybe to narrow the gap they experience between life inside and life outside school and to reduce the degree of conflict they feel.

4.6.2. Coping with conflict and resistance

Two students found a way to cope with the feelings of conflict and resistance they have or had. These are the students who explicitly describe Learn to Live as a stepping stone and a second chance and who appreciate this opportunity.

Last year, I didn't feel part of my school. I didn't play during break. I smoked. I didn't want to do my work. I wanted to be in the crew, you see, feel like a big boy. I was really rude and they suspended me. [...] But this year I am a new person. And I leave things in Boys Town, things like rudeness and swearing. You must leave those things at home when you come here. (Clayton)

Sometimes things is not nice at home. But I tell myself, before I come to school, 'leave those things at home'. And then I told myself 'look here, you are here for a purpose; you want to be successful'. So whatever you are going through at home, leave that at home. [...] Sometimes I am angry at home, but when I come to school I can't sit in class angry. Don't let the problems from outside school affect you at school. (Victor)

Both students conclude that “*it all depends on you*”. There is a difference between students who come to school with a negative versus a positive mind-set. Just wanting to please your parents, thinking that Learn to Live is not a ‘normal’ school, or letting the circumstances outside school affect you, contribute to a negative mind-set. A positive mind-set starts by thinking “*I am going to school for a reason; I am here with a purpose; I want to be successful*” (Victor). Clayton and Victor obviously experience conflict and moments of resistance as well, however, they have learnt how to cope with these feelings and are able to see the bigger picture, and the future.

4.6.3. Change is a challenge

One student agrees that many students feel some kind of conflict when it comes to being one person outside of school and being another inside school, and that coping with this is a challenge. He talks about a “*clash*” between two worlds.

There will be a clash, because learners know, like, 'this is the way I am'. [...] Obviously it's a challenge. You can't just change the person you are overnight. It takes time. And it depends on you if you want to change it. (Simphiwe)

He, thus, also agrees with Clayton and Victor about the fact that the attitude of the students themselves is of major importance for coping with this challenge.

4.7. Normalisation

As was the case in chapter 3, in this section the concept of normalisation will be approached in the context of the perceived tension between the uniqueness of the students’ situation and the idea of ‘wanting to be(come) normal’, and the way in which Learn to Live plays its role. In many students’ eyes, normalisation is about the idea of not wanting to be stigmatised as being ‘not normal’ – being in a *special* school because of *special* problems. It becomes clear that this tension can be conducive to the students’ struggle, conflict and resistance as well.

4.7.1. More mainstream

As mentioned earlier, there exists a group of students at Learn to Live who explicitly argue that this school is not a 'normal' school and that it is not the ideal school for them. Although they might argue and agree that *"this is a very nice school"* (Roderick), *"they just want to bring you on a balance"* (Victor), or *"learners are there to refresh their minds, to get themselves going"* (Hendrick), they would like the school to be more like mainstream schools or are going to Learn to Live clearly with the intention to move on towards mainstream education. In their stories it becomes obvious that, although they sometimes admit that they need or needed this opportunity, they do not want to be regarded as being in a special school because of special problems, implying that they do not want to be stigmatised as being 'not normal', not like 'normal' adolescents.

The school day was a little bit short for me. Maybe they can just change the hours and make it longer. Also, they must give more work in class. And maybe swap classes, different subjects. I want to change the learning. It should be more like mainstream education, yeah. (Victor)

This is not mainstream school, so I don't have to take it seriously. Like, I have to be early in school, I have to be in class. Sometimes I actually ditched classes, chilled in the toilet, played around. So that's my attitude towards it sometimes. (Simphiwe)

4.7.2. Uniqueness

On the other hand, there are evident moments in some students' stories that portray their actual need for Learn to Live's temporary answer to their unique situation and problems. It is not merely about 'having to be there' or 'having been sent there', but about the fundamental opportunity students get at Learn to Live to find balance in their lives, to learn how to cope with their situation and to move on on their path towards a better and more successful future.

The school tries to teach you discipline and respect. They give you a second chance here. (Clayton)

It was a nice school. I've enjoyed my time being with Learn to Live. I think, some of the things that I needed in mainstream school I've learnt at Learn to Live. I don't have problems now. I use the things I learned there. Because Learn to Live has also given me a part of their good side and I've also given them something. (Hendrick)

4.7.3. Mainstream, normal, real, right

Finally, it is remarkable to hear the terminology students use to describe the nature of Learn to Live. The word 'mainstream' was usually employed by the interviewer to refer to the standard, formal South African education system. I never used the word 'normal' or any other term to refer to mainstream education. The students, however, often avoided the concept of mainstream education, but used words like 'normal', 'real', and even 'right' to describe what Learn to Live is not. The extensive use of the term 'normal' to refer to other schools means that Learn to Live, to most of the students, is 'not normal'. The word 'real' implies that Learn to Live is actually 'not real', possibly referring to its nature of temporality. Especially the term 'right' is striking here, since it implies that Learn to Live is almost regarded as being a 'wrong' school, not just for the student personally, but in general societal terms.

You see, at a right school, the teacher only explains things once or twice. (Roderick)

4.8. Educational success

I don't know who did succeed in Learn to Live. But I can say I made progress. (Hendrick)

From what I've seen, the guys that I lived with, most of them haven't made the best out of their lives. Because I see them, every single day when I go into town, I see them do the exact same thing. [...] They're back on the street. That's the way I experience it. (Simphiwe)

4.8.1. Inhibiting risk factors

In line with the academic literature, the students at Learn to Live also point to five broad categories of risk factors: individual, family, peer-related, neighbourhood and school factors. The most important inhibiting factor of educational success, according to all students, is having 'bad friends'. The negative influence these friends can have on the students and their academic performance usually refers to smoking, drinking, doing drugs, fighting, staying away from school and getting involved in gangs. Roderick even makes an explicit distinction between "friends" and "buddies". The latter refer to 'bad friends', who are not actually friends, having a negative influence. Although students realise that this could be a problem, they have difficulties giving up on these so-called friends, since they feel the need "to impress and to belong to a crew" (Clayton). Only one student mentions the negative influence of the community and home environment on his focus at school. The other students did not really mention any of the two, possibly because they left their neighbourhood years ago and most of them no longer have their parents close to

them. This entails that these environments do not really have that big of an influence in their lives at this point. One student who is staying in a shelter mentions the negative influence of other boys at the shelter as an inhibiting factor. Some students also introduce important school factors, such as the negative influence of other learners at school (smoking, stealing, fighting), too basic and not really challenging education, and not talking to teachers when you have a problem. One student mentions that he used to get bullied at Learn to Live. Finally, students all refer to the importance of individual risk factors, meaning their personal (negative) attitude towards going to school in general and towards Learn to Live specifically.

4.8.2. Contributing protective factors

Again, very few students mention the influence the family and community environment can have on students' educational success. The same student as in the previous section mentions the importance of support and encouragement from parents and family, living in a safe home environment and having positive role models at home. Peer-related factors rather referred to inhibiting risk factors than to contributing protective factors, unless friends "*tell you to go to school and not to smoke*" (Victor). All students propose many school factors that could help them to succeed: respect, love, care, support from teachers, life skills, talking about God in class, showing interest in what keeps students busy, and offering more sports at school. Two students also explicitly mention the crucial role the school played in offering them the opportunity to play sports and to develop their – mainly soccer – talent. Another student puts an emphasis on the ability to move on to the workshops and thinks that looking forward to going there helps him make success. The largest group of contributing factors, however, is to be found in the individual domain. Every single student refers to the following factors: having the ability to improve their chances of educational success: listening to the teachers, doing your school work, participating in class, giving your best, behaving in the classroom, not hanging out with wrong friends, not smoking, being able to say 'no', having goals, having a vision and changing your personal attitude.

4.8.3. Attribution

The way in which people explain their own and others' behaviour in terms of causes and effects and how this influences their motivation is part of attribution theory. Educational success and failure of students at Learn to Live, according to the students, is mainly influenced by internal factors, in contrast to the educators' views. Both inhibiting and contributing factors of educational success find their origins in contexts and conditions within the power of the students.

The teacher can't help me. She can't force me to do something. You have to do it yourself. You must make your own choices, and right choices. (Clayton)

There's nothing that can help me to succeed, because it all depends on you. (Hendrick)

4.9. Hope

4.9.1. The role of the individual

The considerable importance students attach to their own role in the schooling process and the path to success has been discussed earlier and will return in the next section. Their idea is in contrast to the perspective of the educators.

One of the students explicitly talks about giving hope to future learners at Learn to Live.

It made me feel like, I'm gonna be successful one day. And now I can help the learners in a way. I can go back when I'm done with school and talk to the class. I was there last year. I encouraged them and they couldn't believe that I had been there, because of the way I looked. I was looking nice. I thought they needed me. And they really need the kind of people like me, who have experienced where they are. And I'm proud of myself, you know. (Hendrick)

4.9.2. Educational aspirations

All students have aspirations. The ones who do not immediately have educational aspirations at Learn to Live are usually too old for school, which is their main reason for a lack of educational aspirations. These are also the adolescents who are back on the street. This does not imply, however, that they don't have any aspirations whatsoever. The others all have educational aspirations, whether at Learn to Live or at another school. They might also have other than educational aspirations. These findings conflict with the findings from the literature and with the thoughts of educators, which describe three categories of educational aspirations of youth at risk. During the course of my field work I never met a student of Learn to Live who does not have aspirations of some kind. However, months after the interviews, I learned that Clayton – one of the 'best' students in the junior Afrikaans class and who seemed very aspirational at the time of the interview – stopped behaving in this way: he stayed away from school, started using drugs again with a friend, and left the shelter where he was staying.

If I do my work, I will also go to B.E.S.T. Centre. (Clayton)

Most of the children are very eager children, who are very committed in class. [...] They are able to tell themselves 'I'm going to school for a reason; I want to be successful'. (Victor)

If I don't want to do my school work and I don't look up to people who are in higher places and make them my role models, and, like, have a vision of myself of whoever I want to become and setting goals for myself, then I won't be successful. I need a vision to know where I'm going. (Hendrick)

I used to play soccer a lot at school, and that made me feel, like, I can achieve something. That's the time I realised that I was actually good at soccer. And I can actually take it to a next level. That helped me. [...] I found this out at school. (Simphiwe)

4.10. Perspectives on the role of the individual: agency

As mentioned earlier, educators put a lot of emphasis on getting to know the child and his or her background, in order to be able to meet their specific individual needs. To be able to reach and help the child, educators pay specific attention to individual differences and the uniqueness of the students' situation, both individually and as a group of especially disadvantaged students. In chapter 3 it has been argued that, in doing this, educators – and especially the school staff – seem to be victimising the students by taking many responsibilities and ownership at school away from the students. It was concluded that the adolescent students of Learn to Live are treated like children who are perceived as being rather helpless and powerless and who still need to be taught everything about respect, discipline and responsibility. In this sense, these students are not attributed a lot of agency, but should rather be 'saved' by Learn to Live's project. This perspective was not shared by the volunteers and interns and is especially not shared by the students themselves. From their own point of view, everything is up to them and the school cannot really do anything fundamentally. According to all students, it is their own attitude towards going to school, learning and Learn to Live that has the most crucial effect on their future success. Apart from the fact that they do not talk a lot about their backgrounds in the interviews and sometimes explicitly state that they do not want to talk about this, they also exhibit a sense of empowerment. Students do not consider themselves victims of their own disadvantaged situation and do not see themselves as hopeless and powerless; they rather experience the opposite, as was witnessed by their aspirations, for example.

There's nothing that can help me to succeed, because it all depends on you. (Hendrick)

4.11. Ideas of school improvement

When asked about whether they have ideas on how to improve the institution in order to increase their chances of (educational) success, the students raised four interesting points. Firstly, they would like to have more activities at school, like sports, singing, extra-mural activities and other activities that are related to their interests and in which they can exercise their talents. This is possibly related to the importance of experiencing success and pride, as was mentioned by the educators earlier. In the same vein, Roderick wishes “*they would make the school more cool*”, meaning ‘adjusted to the world of today’s adolescents’. Secondly, some students explicitly mention that they would like to have more opportunities to get counselling at school, “*like, talking about feelings, because, you see, sometimes they don’t understand you*” (Roderick). Another school improvement concerns removing negative influences, mainly coming from other learners (smoking, fighting, talking in class), and adding more academic pressure. This might contribute to students behaving in a better way and taking school more seriously. Finally, students refer to the importance of ex-students’ testimonies, through which they could encourage other learners and give them hope for the future.

It made me feel like, I’m gonna be successful one day. And now I can help the learners in a way. I can go back when I’m done with school and talk to the class. I was there last year. I encouraged them and they couldn’t believe that I had been there, because of the way I looked. I was looking nice. And I’m proud of myself, you know. I just went and encouraged them. I thought they needed me. And they really need the kind of people like me, who have experienced where they are. [...] I would not mind going back to Learn to Live and just throw a speech one day, when all learners are there, just to let them know what it takes to progress in life. And if they see and hear it from me, they will start believe it. (Hendrick)

4.12. Conclusion

Talking to students about their time at Learn to Live gave insight in the individual ways they experienced or experience their schooling. First, most of them perceive Learn to Live as an institution of schooling in the typical sense of the word. They do not emphasise Learn to Live being an extension of their home environment as much as the educators did, while highlighting the school’s fundamental academic purpose. Further, the stories of the students point to a perceived tension between the uniqueness of their situation and the idea of ‘wanting to be(come) normal’. Most of the students admit that they need or needed this opportunity as a stepping stone. They acknowledge their particular situation and their lack of desired societal and cultural knowledge and skills, and agree that this non-formal educational intervention is their best way out. However,

none of the students wants to be stigmatised as being 'not normal' – being in a special school because of special problems and not being in a 'real' or even 'right' school. This feeling of stigmatisation is enhanced by the mere fact of going to Learn to Live and being seen while walking in and out the school building, because of the label students get by the school and by society. Like the educators, students feel the presence of certain middle-class norms and goals, which are difficult to achieve. It became clear that this tension could be conducive to the students' struggle, conflict and resistance at school. Finally, there exists a fundamental difference between the educators' and students' views of the role of the individual students and their agency on their paths towards success. Whereas many educators victimise the students who come to Learn to Live, students themselves exhibit a clear sense of empowerment. In contrast to the thoughts of many educators, they do not consider themselves victims of their own disadvantaged situation and do not see themselves as hopeless and powerless on their educational journey. They rather experience the opposite, as can be witnessed by their aspirations, feelings of hope and focus on the future. This is in line with the international and South African literature, which state that disadvantaged students who have strong initiative and motivation, are goal orientated, have high expectations and aspirations, and experience the self as having agency are more likely to book (educational) success (Moses, 1985; Dass-Brailsford, 2005).

5. Discussion and conclusion

This paper started off by addressing the theme of youth at risk and the particular case of street children as one of the most important social-educational issues in South Africa in the last decades. Youth at risk or disadvantaged youth was defined as ‘children and adolescents having a future with less than optimal life opportunities and outcomes’. The first section of chapter 2 discussed the concept and characteristics of these young people in more detail. The adolescents studied in this research have an especially disadvantaged position in society due to a range of individual, cultural and environmental factors and are at higher risk of having less than favourable life chances. Two important domains of young people’s lives generally act as both social and educational arenas, which are crucial for their growth, their well-being and their life chances: the primary socialising environment of the family and the secondary socialising domain of the school. This study looked into a group of especially disadvantaged adolescents, not having the luxury of living in a safe and nurturing social-educational family environment, but being on the street, having been there, being close to being so or residing in institutionalised care. Moreover, they have been excluded from the formal educational system for a while. Given the importance of the home and school contexts and the struggles of many South African youth within these contexts, this specific group of youngsters can be regarded as an especially disadvantaged group. It was argued that, for them, there does not really seem to exist a sound social-educational basis from where they are able to acquire society’s desired and necessary educational qualifications, skills and useful social and cultural capital, necessary to develop, grow and dream. The non-formal and public educational institution of Learn to Live in Cape Town has the main purpose of counteracting the disadvantages these young people might encounter in the private sphere of the home and elsewhere. The basic education programme remedies their lack of schooling, offers them a chance of rehabilitation into local communities and enables them to earn an honest living. The second section of chapter 2 reviewed aspects of the South African educational landscape, with particular attention to non-formal educational interventions for especially disadvantaged youth and Learn to Live.

This study focused on the institution of the school, without underestimating the influence of diverse other risk factors on the life chances of youth at risk. I would like to recall here what Rist (1977) argues about the importance of the school for young people: the school is the primary institution in the adolescent experience – one that promises not only the future status available to the adolescent, but also that gives or denies status in adolescence itself, meaning that this institution is of particular significance for the actions of youth. It was hypothesised here that schools, however, might be worsening the problem by reproducing inequalities, rather than solving the problem by reducing or eliminating them. Therefore, I examined the particular case of Learn

to Live in an attempt to discover whether the internal dynamics of schooling, or the 'theories and practices of education', have an impact on the reproduction of disadvantage and risk among its students. Chapters 3 and 4 made up the empirical section of the paper and analysed the 'theories and practices of education' at Learn to Live by discussing the apparent intent of the school and important actors in the teaching process, and the experiences and perspectives of the students themselves, respectively.

The paradox of schooling in addressing risk and disadvantage entails that, while the school should be addressing the unique situation of youth at risk, it often fails to do so. Experiencing school failure to a high degree, many students are, therefore, functionally illiterate and still lack the necessary educational qualifications, skills and useful social and cultural capital, which only exacerbates their being in an already extremely disadvantaged position. They should be offered the educational space and opportunities in a non-formal educational institution like Learn to Live to develop what is needed to reintegrate in society and to succeed in life. This study examined the prospects for this possibly successful school among an especially disadvantaged group of adolescents in Cape Town, South Africa. By offering them a chance to articulate their schooling experiences and perspectives, an understanding of the ways in which they experience the connection between their disadvantaged or at-risk position and the school grew and deepened. Further, it gave insight in the way Learn to Live could offer them a successful educational intervention on their path towards a happy and successful future. Based on the proposed perspective on research in/and education of youth at risk, understanding and interrogating the true schooling experiences of youths at risk will enable us to be more likely to create schools that reduce the likelihood of these adolescents' academic failure, delinquent behaviour and continued marginalisation. In Smith's (2000) words: "a renewed emphasis on field research, in combination with the incorporation of the social reproduction perspective, can further our understanding of schooling processes" (p. 294-295).

Culturalist theories of the reproduction of (dis)advantage argue that middle-class success norms and goals seem to permeate our society and that no one is immune to them. The idea of cultural capital – particular types of knowledge, skills and dispositions – referring to the cultural style of the ruling class, is so pervasive that it is legitimised throughout society as being the 'objective' culture. Unfortunately, not everyone is adequately equipped to compete for success in a middle-class world. Bourdieu discussed the way in which schools legitimise the dominant culture, by presenting as 'natural' a form of pedagogy which belongs, in fact, to only the dominant groups in society. Being embedded in society, the institution of the school is, thus, in turn permeated by middle-class success norms and goals. Moreover, the school – as a micro-society – is burdened with the important task of preparing students for a successful life in society, according to a specific

order and structure. "The task of the teaching profession is [...] to maintain and promote this order in people's thinking, which is just as necessary as order in the streets and in the provinces" (Gusdorf; in Bourdieu & Passeron, 1992, p. 70). However particular the mission of Learn to Live might be, the school still admits that it should prepare its students for this societal order and structure. This, as was analysed in the empirical chapters, creates a specific tension on the side of the school as well as on the side of the students. Findings exposed that both educators and students are constantly trying to find a balance between emphasising the uniqueness of the students' extremely disadvantaged situation and their need for a specific school and specific education to counterbalance those disadvantages, and wanting to conform to mainstream ideas and mainstream adolescent life. The dilemma of the school concerns finding a balance between compensating for students' lack of the production of the desired 'habitus', acquired within the family, which should form the basis of the reception and assimilation of society's and the classroom message and preparing them for a life in society by 'mainstreaming' them on the one hand, and specifically focusing on the uniqueness of these students' status in an attempt to meet individual rather than society's needs on the other. The students are equally confronted with a dilemma. They have internalised society's norms and goals and they are aware of the fact that they will have to comply to be able to function in today's world. This should be approached in the light of students' educational aspirations and expectations and high hopes in education as a route to material success and social status, in order to improve their own future and that of their family. Also, they do not want to be stigmatised as being 'not normal' and attending a 'special school' for students with 'special problems'. However, because of the hazardous situation they are in, they are often confronted with the realisation of being unable to achieve this. The label they receive by the school, by friends and by society because of attending Learn to Live only intensifies this feeling. Consequently, students become frustrated and resistant. Nevertheless, in their attempts to find this balance, nearly all participants acknowledge that Learn to Live is a necessary stepping stone in students' lives towards success and happiness. The school is, thus, regarded as a temporary answer to their situation. Finally, the success of the existence and the work of educational institutions like Learn to Live is for a large part determined by the extent to which students aspire to educational success. Findings suggested that while educators believe that it is mainly the school's task to contribute to the students' situation by 'saving' them, and emphasise their role of victims of their circumstances, students state that Learn to Live is merely there to give them a second chance, but that their own role in the schooling process and the path to success is paramount. There exists a view of the individual as a victim and a clear distrust in students' hopes and aspirations by the educators. In contrast, it was concluded that the perspective of the students was not in line with the educators' view. All students in this study reflected (educational) aspirations, obvious feelings of hope and a strong sense of looking to the future.

Important implications for Learn to Live, derived from these findings and in line with the academic literature, include building on students' strengths, talents and resiliency by offering them an empowerment-based intervention. These adolescents do not want to be viewed as victims, but want their strength and resiliency recognised. Furthermore, and in line with the previous, it seems to be of particular relevance – from the point of view of both the educators and the students at Learn to Live – to create more opportunities where students can experience feelings of success, achievement and pride. The majority of participants refers to sports, cultural activities, life skills and extra-mural activities as possible contributors to the creation of these opportunities. Equally important is the use of testimonies of successful former and current students. Both educators and current and ex-students acknowledge the benefits they could experience from receiving and giving hope, through hearing and talking about their shared position. These implications could be extended to other non-formal educational interventions for especially disadvantaged youth in South Africa or even elsewhere.

The added value of this study lies in the fact that an explicit voice was given to the students themselves. It was my intention, as stated in chapter 1, to follow a critical-interpretive perspective, to look at a particular school, and to take the schooling experiences and views of adolescents seriously. Accordingly, I chose to study the case of Learn to Live from a qualitative research perspective. However, choosing this path might have limitations as well. Because of the examination of the very specific case of Learn to Live, questions could be raised about the generalizability of the findings for schools and students in similar situations and in different contexts. Firstly, it was not necessarily my attempt to end up with a general theory of or a 'gold standard' for non-formal educational interventions. Interventions of this kind are fundamentally dynamic and need to be contextualised. Nevertheless, it is my opinion that my analysis has the potential to give insight in more universal and important aspects of 'best (or at least good) practices' of non-formal educational interventions for especially disadvantaged youth. Another noteworthy limitation of this study is the language barrier. Although all interviews were conducted in English, there existed a wide variety of native languages of interview partners: my native language as the interviewer was Dutch; the native language of the educators were Afrikaans, English and German; the native language of the students were Afrikaans, English, Xhosa and Kwangali. This diversity might have created difficulties in understanding and interpreting questions and answers. Furthermore, the degree of social desirability in the answers, provided by the participants, is unclear as well.

I feel that it is necessary to increasingly listen to what young people have to say about their disadvantaged position, their schooling experiences and their educational aspirations. More and thorough qualitative research of this kind is required in order to be able to truly grasp how education in general and the institution of the school in particular could be of benefit for these children and adolescents. It would also be interesting to list and compare the different existing non-formal educational interventions for especially disadvantaged youth in Cape Town and South Africa, and to learn from each other as well as from the students themselves.

University of Cape Town

6. References

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University of Cape Town

7. Appendices

7.1. Informed consent sheet and interview format school staff

Introduction

I am a postgraduate student in Sociology at the University of Cape Town. For my dissertation I am conducting research on the theories and practices of education at Learn to Live, and how these are experienced by students. Through the analysis of school documents, participant observation and semi-structured interviews I shall investigate how the 'cultures' of the school staff, of the interns and volunteers, and of the students interact and how and why specific educational outcomes are achieved.

This interview will probably take about an hour. I would like to tape record the interview so that I can transcribe the interview. All the information will be handled confidentially and will only be used in the context of this research. I shall not divulge your identity to anyone else.

I appreciate your participation and co-operation in this study. You are free to decline and to end your participation at any point.

If you have any questions, please ask them, or contact me by phone (0735557827) or email (saarkebuelens@hotmail.com).

Agreement for participation

Date

Signature

Questionnaire

A) BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Current function at Learn to Live:

Age:

Time at Learn to Live:

Gender:

Residence:

B) THE INSTITUTION

- In very general and broad terms, how would you describe the school atmosphere (think of the personality of the school) at Learn to Live? What are the first things that come into mind when you think about the institution, inside as well as outside the classroom?

[variables: respect, trust, morale, opportunity for input, academic & social growth, cohesiveness, collaboration, caring, safety, resource support]

- What are the official rules and objectives of the school?
- Is there a lot of surveillance and control? Can you think of an example to illustrate that?
- Do you think a positive learning and living climate is being reflected at Learn to Live? Can you think of an example to illustrate that?

- What do you think about the material infrastructure at the school? Does it sufficiently support the learning and living processes? What is positive; what could be improved?

The next set of questions will tap into the role of one of the most important actors when it comes to teaching and learning processes, namely the teachers.

- Which teaching styles and strategies are being used at Learn to Live? Can you tell me a bit more about your own strategies? What are the reasons for using these? Do you feel that they are successful?

- Do you sometimes feel that you have certain expectations of some students and other expectations of others? What could be the reason(s) for this?

[variables: social class, physical appearance, contrived test scores, gender, race, language patterns, school records]

- How do you think other teachers perceive you as a teacher? How do you think students perceive you?

- How would you define teacher authority inside and outside the classroom? How do you think students handle your authority? Can you think of an example to illustrate this?

- What do you think about the quantity and quality of student-teacher relationships at Learn to Live? How do these interactions take place?

- What curriculum do you use? Which textbooks do you use? What are the main reasons for using these?

- Is there flexibility in the curriculum that is being used in the classroom?

- Do you think that the fact that students come to Learn to Live for very specific reasons (e.g. when they have been suspended in their previous school) and the fact that the curriculum is being adapted to these situations, influences students' attitudes towards this school and their academic performance? In your opinion, why would or wouldn't it be the case?

- Are students being assessed in some specific way? How do you assess them? Do you think this is the most adequate assessment strategy?

- What language(s) is (are) used in the classroom?
- Do you experience that some students struggle with this? Can you think of an example to illustrate this?

- How would you describe the dominant cultural values and ideologies at Learn to Live? What is the school's vision and what is thought to be the most important values?
- How do the school structure and objectives reflect these dominant cultural values and ideologies?
- Are students' perspectives and local identities respected? Can you give an example to illustrate this?
- How do the operation and rules of the school correspond with youths' everyday lives? Does students' local cultural capital (e.g. street knowledge, gang membership, neighbourhood identity) conflict with school objectives and messages? Does the school, for example, disparage gang identities through rules and interactions?
- Is there conflict which helps create school failure and resistance? Is this conflict functioning to reproduce students' marginalization?

C) THE INDIVIDUAL

How would you describe the academic performance of students at Learn to Live? Do most of them make progress? Do most of them succeed? What usually happens when they don't succeed? What are inhibiting and contributing factors of academic success?

Where do parents, neighbourhoods and friends come in, according to your experience? Do they have an influence on the students' academic performance and delinquent behaviour? How important is this influence (compared to school influences)?

How do you perceive the quantity and quality of student interpersonal relationships? How do they interact inside as well as outside the classroom?

What can you tell me about students' school involvement and commitment? Do you feel like most of the students are committed to school? Do you perceive big differences between students' school commitment? Do you perceive a difference between students who are more committed compared to students who are less committed? Can you think of an example to illustrate this?

D) SUCCESS FACTORS

What do you think are the main success factors for academically succeeding at Learn to Live?
Which factors contribute to success?

Do students have ideas on how to improve their school, in order to increase chances of success?

What do you think could be your personal contribution to the schooling process at Learn to Live as a staff member (teacher, coordinator, social worker)?

University of Cape Town

7.2. Informed consent sheet and interview format volunteers/interns

Introduction

I am a postgraduate student in Sociology at the University of Cape Town. For my dissertation I am conducting research on the theories and practices of education at Learn to Live, and how these are experienced by students. Through the analysis of school documents, participant observation and semi-structured interviews I shall investigate how the 'cultures' of the school staff, of the interns and volunteers, and of the students interact and how and why specific educational outcomes are achieved.

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[variables: respect, trust, morale, opportunity for input, academic & social growth, cohesiveness, collaboration, caring, safety, resource support]

- What are the official rules and objectives of the school?
- Is there a lot of surveillance and control? Can you think of an example to illustrate that?
- Do you think a positive learning and living climate is being reflected at Learn to Live? Can you think of an example to illustrate that?

- What do you think about the material infrastructure at the school? Does it sufficiently support the learning and living processes? What is positive; what could be improved?

The next set of questions will tap into the role of one of the most important actors when it comes to teaching and learning processes, namely the teachers.

- Which teaching styles and strategies are being used at Learn to Live? Can you tell me a bit more about your own strategies when you assist in the classroom? What are the reasons for using these? Do you feel that they are successful?
- Do you sometimes feel that you have certain expectations of some students and other expectations of others? Do you sometimes feel that the teacher you are assisting has certain expectations of some students and other expectations of others? What could be the reason(s) for this?

[variables: social class, physical appearance, contrived test scores, gender, race, language patterns, school records]

- How do you think other teachers perceive you as an assisting teacher? How do you think students perceive you?
- How would you define teacher authority inside and outside the classroom? How do you think students handle your authority? Can you think of an example to illustrate this?
- What do you think about the quantity and quality of student-teacher relationships at Learn to Live? How do these interactions take place?

- What curriculum do you use? Which textbooks do you use? What are the main reasons for using these?
- Is there flexibility in the curriculum that is being used in the classroom?
- Do you think that the fact that students come to Learn to Live for very specific reasons (e.g. when they have been suspended in their previous school) and the fact that the curriculum is being adapted to these situations, influences students' attitudes towards this school and their academic performance? In your opinion, why would or wouldn't it be the case?

- Are students being assessed in some specific way? How do you assess them? Do you think this is the most adequate assessment strategy?
- What language(s) is (are) used in the classroom?
- Do you experience that some students struggle with this? Can you think of an example to illustrate this?
- How would you describe the dominant cultural values and ideologies at Learn to Live? What is the school's vision and what is thought to be the most important values?
- How do the school structure and objectives reflect these dominant cultural values and ideologies?
- Are students' perspectives and local identities respected? Can you give an example to illustrate this?
- How do the operation and rules of the school correspond with youths' everyday lives? Does students' local cultural capital (e.g. street knowledge, gang membership, neighbourhood identity) conflict with school objectives and messages? Does the school, for example, disparage gang identities through rules and interactions?
- Is there conflict which helps create school failure and resistance? Is this conflict functioning to reproduce students' marginalization?

C) THE INDIVIDUAL

How would you describe the academic performance of students at Learn to Live? Do most of them make progress? Do most of them succeed? What usually happens when they don't succeed? What are inhibiting and contributing factors of academic success?

Where do parents, neighbourhoods and friends come in, according to your experience? Do they have an influence on the students' academic performance and delinquent behaviour? How important is this influence (compared to school influences)?

How do you perceive the quantity and quality of student interpersonal relationships? How do they interact inside as well as outside the classroom?

What can you tell me about students' school involvement and commitment? Do you feel like most of the students are committed to school? Do you perceive big differences between students' school commitment? Do you perceive a difference between students who are more committed compared to students who are less committed? Can you think of an example to illustrate this?

D) SUCCESS FACTORS

What do you think are the main success factors for academically succeeding at Learn to Live?
Which factors contribute to success?

Do students have ideas on how to improve their school, in order to increase chances of success?

What do you think could be your personal contribution to the schooling process at Learn to Live
as a volunteer/intern?

University of Cape Town

7.3. Informed consent sheet and interview format students

Introduction

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- Do you think a positive learning and living climate is being reflected at Learn to Live? Can you think of an example to illustrate that?

- What do you think about the material infrastructure at the school? Does it sufficiently support the learning and living processes? What is positive; what could be improved?

The next set of questions will tap into the role of one of the most important actors when it comes to teaching and learning processes, namely the teachers.

- Which teaching styles and strategies are being used in your classroom? What does the teacher actually do in the classroom? Do you feel that they are successful?
- Do you sometimes feel that teachers have certain expectations of some students and other expectations of others? Do you sometimes feel that your teacher has different expectations of you compared to other learners? What could be the reason(s) for this?

[variables: social class, physical appearance, contrived test scores, gender, race, language patterns, school records]

- How would you define teacher authority inside and outside the classroom? How do you handle your teacher's authority? Can you think of an example to illustrate this?
- What do you think about the quantity and quality of student-teacher relationships at Learn to Live? How do these interactions take place?

- What curriculum is being used in your classroom? Which textbooks are used? Do you like this?
- Is there flexibility in the curriculum that is being used in the classroom?
- Do you think that the fact that students come to Learn to Live for very specific reasons (e.g. when they have been suspended in their previous school) and the fact that the curriculum is being adapted to these situations, influences students' attitudes towards this school and their academic performance? In your opinion, why would or wouldn't it be the case?

- Are you being assessed in some specific way? Do you think this is the most adequate assessment strategy?

- What language(s) is (are) used in the classroom?

- Do you experience that some students struggle with this? How do you cope with this? Can you think of an example to illustrate this?
- How would you describe the dominant cultural values and ideologies at Learn to Live? What is the school's vision and what is thought to be the most important values?
- How do the school structure and objectives reflect these dominant cultural values and ideologies?
- Are students' perspectives and local identities respected? Can you give an example to illustrate this?
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Where do parents, neighbourhoods and friends come in, according to your experience? Do they have an influence on the students' academic performance and delinquent behaviour? How important is this influence (compared to school influences)? How do you experience this in your personal situation?

How do you perceive the quantity and quality of student interpersonal relationships? How do learners interact inside as well as outside the classroom? Do you have a lot of friends here?

What can you tell me about students' school involvement and commitment? Do you feel like most of the students are committed to school? Do you perceive a difference between students who are more committed compared to students who are less committed? How committed are you? Can you think of an example to illustrate this?

D) SUCCESS FACTORS

What do you think are the main success factors for academically succeeding at Learn to Live?
Which factors contribute to success?

Do you have ideas on how to improve your school, in order to increase chances of success? If you could choose anything, what would you want to see changed or improved?

What do you think could be your personal contribution to the schooling process at Learn to Live as a student?

University of Cape Town