



**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

**PROJECT TITLE: An Exploration Of High School Learners' Educational Journey  
And How It Shapes Their Aspirations**

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**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award  
of the Degree of Master of Social Science in Social Development**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	7
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	8
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1 Introduction	9
1.2 Statement of the Problem	9
1.3 Rationale and significance of the Study	12
1.4 Research Topic	13
1.5 Main Research Questions	13
1.6 Research Objectives	13
1.7 Main Assumptions	14
1.8 Clarification of Terms	14
1.9 Conclusion	15
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	
2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 Review of Literature	16
2.2.1 Aspiration Building	16
2.2.2 Educational and Occupational Aspirations	18
2.2.3 Linking Aspirations, Expectations and Achievements	19
2.2.4 Effects of Household Structure, Family Resources and School Quality on Education	20
2.2.5 Educational Journey and Factors that Influence Learners' Aspirations	21
2.2.5.1 Educational Journey	21
2.2.5.2 Family Background	22
2.2.5.3 Socio-economic Status (SES)	23
2.2.5.4 Neighborhood Characteristics	24
2.2.6 Key Elements in School That Help Boost Aspirations	25

2.3 Theoretical Framework	26
2.3.1 Social Capital Theory	26
2.3.1.1 Family Social Capital	27
2.3.1.2 School Social Capital	28
2.3.2 Ecological Systems Theory	30
2.3.3 Achievement Motivation Theory	32
2.3.4 Interplay Between The Theories in the Study	34
2.4 Policy and Legislation	35
2.4.1 National Youth Policy (NYP) 2015 - 2020	36
2.4.2 Life Skills Curriculum	38
2.5 Conclusion	39

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

3.1 Introduction	40
3.2 Research Design	40
3.3 Population and Sampling	41
3.3.1 Study Population and Sample	41
3.3.2 Sampling Technique, Characteristics and Procedures	42
3.4 Data Collection	44
3.4.1 Data Collection Approach	44
3.4.2 Data Collection Instrument	45
3.4.3 Data Collection Procedure	45
3.5 Data Analysis	45
3.6 Ethical Considerations	46
3.6.1 Voluntary Participation	46
3.6.2 Informed Consent	46
3.6.3 Protection from Harm	47
3.6.4 Right to Privacy	47
3.6.5 No Deception	48

3.7 Limitations of the Study	48
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## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

4.1 Introduction	49
4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents	49
4.3 Educational and Occupational Aspirations of Respondents	51
4.4 Parental Background	56
4.5. Discussion of Findings	57
4.5.1 School Journey and Educational Experience	59
4.5.1.1 Change in Academic Interest	60
4.5.1.2. Change in Performance Level	62
4.5.1.3. Educational or Career Guidance by Teachers	66
4.5.2 Plans After Matriculation	69
4.5.2.1 Discovery of Aspirations	69
4.5.2.2 Plans other than Studying	72
4.5.3 Educational experience based on family background and neighborhood	74
4.5.3.1 Parents' Expectations	74
4.5.3.2 Parents' Contribution to Learning Experience	77
4.5.3.3 Effect of Neighborhood or Community on Studies	80
4.5.4 Role of educational journey in shaping aspirations	84
4.5.4.1 Aspirations born out of learnings at school	85
4.5.4.2 Aspirations born out of other key elements	87
4.5.4.3 Aspirations born Due to Factors Outside of School	89
4.5.5 Role of SA Education System in Building Aspirations	91
4.5.5.1 Subjects that Help Discover Aspirations	92
4.5.5.2 Missing elements that can help better	94

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 Introduction	97
5.2 Key Findings and Conclusions	97
5.2.1 Objective 1: To Examine the Educational Experience of Learners at School	97
5.2.2 Objective 2: To Investigate the Effects of the Parental Education, Neighborhood and Family Background of Learners on their Educational Experience	100
5.2.3 Objective 3: To Explore the Learners' Plans After Matriculation	104
5.2.4 Objective 4: To Understand the Role of the Educational Journey of Learners in Informing Their Aspirations	106
5.2.5 Objective 5: To Study the Role of the South African (SA) Education System in Building Aspirations of the Learners	110
5.3 Contributions of the Study	112
5.3.1 Introduction	112
5.3.1.1 Deeper insight into learner aspirations informed by their educational journey	113
5.3.1.2 Understanding the relevance of student interactions with key field experts	113
5.3.1.3 Comparative analysis of two schools	113
5.4 Recommendations	114
5.4.1 Introduction	114
5.4.1.1 Gap Year Programs	114
5.4.1.2 Offer Better Subject Choices	114
5.4.1.3 Increased Exposure to Career Fairs and Interactive Sessions with Field Experts	115
5.5 Conclusion	115
<b>6. REFERENCES</b>	<b>117</b>

## APPENDICES

<b>APPENDIX 1:</b> Semi-structured Interview Guide for Experiencing Participants	128
<b>APPENDIX 2:</b> Parental Consent Form for Participation of Child in Research Study	131

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents	49
Table 2: Educational and Occupational Aspirations of Respondents	51
Table 3: Education Level or profession of Parents	56
Table 4: Framework of Analysis	58
Table 5: Comparative Indicators of School Journey and Educational Experience	99
Table 6: Comparative Indicators of Educational Experience Based on Family Background and Neighborhood	102
Table 7: Comparative Indicators of Plans After Matriculation	105
Table 8: Comparative Indicators of Role of Educational Journey in Shaping Aspirations	108
Table 9: Comparative Indicators the Role of SA Education System in Building Aspirations	111

## ABSTRACT

As a consequence of Apartheid, schools today are still grappling with the process of de-segregation of an unequal education system in South Africa. The inequality of skills acquired by children and the poor quality of education received undermines their ability to understand or develop aspirations. This qualitative study aimed to explore the educational journey of high school learners and how the journey shapes their aspirations. Drawing upon the background of high school learners, particularly their family background, socio-economic status and neighborhood, this study examined the aspirations informed by the educational journey of learners.

First, the findings revealed that academic interests of learners were not steered by the stature of the school they attended. The reasons that were understood to be positively affecting the change in academic interests were more self-driven than influenced by factors that are outside of the personal journey of the learners. Second, parents who were educated themselves valued the importance of quality education, which meant not only improving marks, but also building and working towards an aspiration. Third, learners who came from decent and peaceful neighborhoods mostly reported a supportive community and one that is always striving for a better future through education. This community dynamic also had a positive effect on the learners' focus and ability to study after school hours.

The results of the study also mention the shortcomings of the current South African education system in the way that it only allows for limited real-world exposure and restricts learners from making informed subject choices. Recommendations for corrective measures in the form of introduction of gap year programs, better subject choices and exposure to career fairs and interaction with field experts were made by the researcher.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who believed in me and supported me throughout this journey. Despite the challenges and hurdles, it has been nothing short of an exhilarating experience.

My deepest gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr. Kubeka, who has always shown faith in me and my capabilities. Her support and guidance has been the driving force behind my study. I have been fortunate enough to have worked with a kind and accomplished woman such as herself.

I sincerely thank all those who helped me at various points in time, including the respondents, teachers, principals, colleagues and friends, especially Karnika. Last, but not the least, I thank my husband and family for being my pillars of strength and always encouraging me to do better. This would not have been possible without their support.

In loving memory of my father, Kamal Malhotra.

Vidushi Malhotra

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

This section of the report begins with a presentation of the problem statement and the problem context. It then discusses the significance of and rationale for the study. Thereafter, the aim of the study is specified. This section also outlines the research questions and research objectives and then clarifies significant concepts.

### **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Formal and informal education practices among the Khoi, the San and the Bantu-speaking people of South Africa existed before the European settlers arrived in the Cape Colony in 1652. It involved the dissemination of indigenous knowledge from adult to child and the child was brought up by the community and educated on culture and traditions of the community. The curriculum of the indigenous education system in the pre-colonial era focused on including traditions, culture, religion and arts (Seroto 2011). According to Robin McGregor, as cited in Verwoerd (1948), when colonisation took place, schools in South Africa were restructured with the motive of fostering and promoting western culture and re-socialising the enslaved native people, physically and psychologically, into their masters' (at the time, the Dutch) world. Young learners in 1960's were made to dismiss the knowledge and perspectives they had been taught in their communities and, instead, take hold of Dutch views and the teachings of Christianity. The Dutch were also concerned and tried to control the cultural literacy provided to slaves in order to make sure they had imbibed enough, but not acquired the illusion of living as equals with the Dutch. By 1680, there was a clear demarcation between black and white education. Children of colonists, who were primarily white, were groomed for control, whereas black children were prepared for servitude and docility (Soudien 2012:99).

During the Mission Era, the white settlement expanded into southern African wilderness and in 1799, the first school specifically for Africans was established. The opening of many other such schools in 1823, 1835 and 1842 marked the second phase of educa-

tion in the country. For many years during this period, educational provisions were lacking pace and schooling remained thinly dispersed, not including the majority of the colonial economy (Soudien 2012:102). In the late 19th and 20th centuries, a number of efforts were made to break the African people away from their culture with the intension of creating an elite group of people who would create alternative authority and follow the structures laid out by the white chiefs. It was post the World War II, that the racist structures of exploitation should not be maintained. Nationalist parties such as the African National Congress were determined to put in place, policies of containment of black aspirations (Soudien 2012:103).

The rise of militancy among the black people increased with the establishment of African National Congress in 1994. It became a great concern for the white nationalist parties and hence they saw the urgency to kill the hopes and desires of black people; the hopes of eventual integration and equality in the conventional white society (Soudien 2012:105). The introduction of the Bantu Education Act, Act No. 47 of 1953 did just that; it further divided South Africa's education system in a way that African pupils were separated from other communities. Under one of apartheid's most racist laws, it brought African education under the control of the government and that spread apartheid to black schools. Bantu education forced black schools to teach a different, racially discriminative curriculum and be separated from other communities, and if the schools failed to do so, their funding was withdrawn. After the successful fundamental remaking of the education system in South Africa, Colored education and Indian education was introduced in schools in 1964 and 1966, respectively (Soudien 2012:106).

Post-apartheid, between 1994 and 1997, was when bureaucracy was put in place to establish a single, unified, democratic and accountable educational system. In an attempt to integrate the previously fragmented, and racially and ethnically divided education system (Soudien 2012:109). In a study conducted by Soudien and Sayed (2004), it was discovered that the previously excluded groups of African, Indian and colored children had started moving into schools that were earlier forbidden to them. However, the process of integration remained 'classed' (Soudien 2012:118) in the sense that the poor

schools from poor communities were unable to grab opportunities and upgrade themselves as compared to their financially stable counterparts, thereby leaving the children in those communities with poor quality education and grades. Even today, most white children attend well-resourced schools with trained and motivated teachers. Meanwhile, most African children attend poorly-resourced schools with inadequately qualified teachers, thereby causing many children to even drop out before matriculation (Bray et al 2010:170).

As a consequence of such an unequal educational system there has been considerable inequality in the skills and qualifications acquired by South African children (Bray et al 2010:170). The poor quality of education that African learners receive further drives an intergenerational cycle of poverty, where children inherit the social standing of their parents or caregivers, irrespective of their own abilities or efforts and therefore develop low or no aspirations (Spaull 2015:34). Research reveals that youth from low socio-economic backgrounds or living in deprived communities have low aspirations, low attainment levels, and low future expectations (Wilson 1987, Wilson and Wilson 1992, Stewart et al. 2007, Cabinet Office 2008, Crowder and Smith 2003, Quaglia and Cobb 1996, Kintrea 2009, Kintrea et al 2011, Cuthbert and Hatch 2009). This means that there is a direct link between poverty and low aspirations.

There are considerable number of studies conducted on educational and occupational aspirations (Patmaliece 2011). Of these include 'Aspirations of Rural Youth' by Bajema, Miller and Williams 2002 where the objective was to determine the aspirations of rural youth and to identify perceived support required for achieving their goals and the barriers in the process; 'The Role of Social Capital in Educational Aspirations of Rural Youth' by Byun, Meece, Irwin and Hutchins 2012 that focused on finding out how different levels of social capital relate to rural youth's educational aspirations; and 'Educational Aspirations of Students in Developing World: Evidence from Ethiopia' by Tafere 2015 which determined that poverty did not have any effect on lowering the aspirations of children from poor communities. While these and many other studies focus on micro-level predictors of educational aspirations, there are none that look at the overall educational

journey of learners, in terms of their assimilation in class, relationship with teachers, culture, beliefs etc, as determinants of their aspirations. Therefore, this study aimed to fill the gap by exploring the educational journey of high school learners and how that journey informs their aspirations. Considering the history of South Africa and its post-apartheid consequences of inequality in education and employment, it is important to expand research and knowledge on the aspirations of young people in the country.

### **1.3 RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Like most education systems around the world, South Africa, too, covers subjects in the field of science, mathematics, history, arts and more, as part of the R-12 curriculum. However, there is only one element/subject in the current system that exposes children/learners to the basic concepts in life, i.e. Life Skills.

The Department of Education in South Africa has made Life Skills programs necessary by introducing the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12. The aim of the life skills study is to guide and prepare learners for life and its possibilities. In the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), the subject, Life Skills, in Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) has been organised into four study areas: Beginning Knowledge, Personal and Social Well-being, Creative Arts and Physical Education (National Curriculum Statement, 2011). In doing so, it touches upon the social science concepts like cause and effect, relationships; natural science concepts such as energy and change, matter and materials; scientific process skills such as measuring, communicating; and technological process skills like investigating, evaluating et al. Life Skills study also emphasizes learners to learn about emotional health, physical health, well-being of the society, performing arts, positive attitude, physical and motor development etc.

The curriculum of the Life Skills subject entails elements that directly affect or help in shaping dreams and aspirations among the youth. It is the only subject that allows scope for building and delivering curriculum that could directly address diverse learning, be it science, arts, philosophy or even nature. Further strengthening of this subject

could lead to benefits for learners who otherwise may not be able to learn holistically from their family, classroom or neighborhood.

The current study assisted the schools and teachers in developing curriculum that encourages learners to develop higher aspirations, both educational and occupational.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH TOPIC**

An Exploration of Grade 11 Learners' Educational Journey and How it Shapes Their Aspirations

#### **1.5 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- a. How does the background of high school learners, particularly their socio-economic status and neighborhood, inform their educational journey?
- b. b. How does their educational journey inform their aspirations?

#### **1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of this study was 'to explore high school learners' educational journey and how it shaped their aspirations'.

The following sub-objectives underpinned the main objective of this study:

- a. To examine the educational experience of learners at school
- b. To investigate the effects of the socio-economic status, neighborhood and family background of learners on their educational experience
- c. To explore the learners' plans after matriculation
- d. To understand the role of the educational journey of learners in informing their aspirations
- e. To study the role of the South African (SA) education system in building aspirations of the learners

## 1.7 MAIN ASSUMPTIONS

The main assumptions of this study were as follows:

- a. Grade 11 learners are at a juncture where they have either already formed their educational aspirations, if not occupational, or are about to
- b. There is a unique way in which educational journey of learners is key in aspiration building
- c. Colored and Black communities continue to remain the poorest neighborhoods and families
- d. As a result of Apartheid, inequalities in school resources persist

## 1.8 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

The following terms were operationally defined to facilitate better understanding of the study:

**Aspirations** - According to Kao and Thompson, 2003; MacBrayne, 1987 (as cited by Quaglia Institute 2015) “aspirations are an individual’s desire to obtain a status objective or goals such as particular occupation or level of education”.

**Education** - According to the Oxford school dictionary 2015, the term “education” refers to the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university.

**Learners** - The term “learner” means any person receiving education or obliged to receive education in terms of the South African Schools Act No. 84 (1996). In this study, learners refer to students at two different high schools in Cape Town.

**Grade** - According to the South African Schools’ Act No. 84 (1996), the term “grade” means that part of an educational programme which a learner may complete in one school year, or any other education programme which the Member of the Executive Council may deem to be equivalent thereto.

**Colored** - Brown (2000:198) defines “colored” as any person of “mixed-blood” and includes children as well as descendants from Black-White, Black-Asian, White-Asian, and Black-Coloured unions.

**Black** - Biko (1971) defines “blacks” as those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realization of their aspirations.

**Indian** - Indians in South Africa are descendants of migrants from colonial India (South Asia) during late 19th-century through early 20th-century and are citizens and residents of South Africa (Noble 1994).

**White** - According to Posel (2001), Whites are South Africans of European descent who regard themselves, or are not regarded as, not being part of another racial group (for example, as Coloured)

## **1.9 CONCLUSION**

The relevant history of South Africa that explains the the downfall of the education system in the country and its after-effects align with the purpose of this study. The researcher aimed to further improve the existing state of education by going to the roots and exploring learner experiences and their state of aspirations that are being born out of the current education system and their environment. For the purpose of better understanding, the researcher has laid out a set of research questions and objectives, supported by valid assumptions and clarification of terms.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents a review of literature that attempts to discover how the educational journey of high school learners shape their education and career aspirations. In doing so, it discusses the key thematic areas pertinent to the study; (a) aspiration building and (b) factors affecting learner aspirations. This is followed by a presentation of the (a) theoretical frameworks and (b) policy and legislation that drive the study.

### **2.2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **2.2.1 Aspiration Building**

Building a culture of aspirations is what constitutes aspiration building (Douglass 2008). The core of aspiration building lies in the belief in one's own capabilities, and this applies to parents and children alike (Bandura 1997). Parents who hold higher aspirations for their children tend to be those who believe in their own ability and capacity to encourage their children and be more involved in their children's learning and education process. Similarly, children who are academically inclined tend to hold higher aspirations for themselves. They believe that they can work hard and achieve success by aiming high. Parents of such children are more inclined towards raising their own aspirations for their children as compared to parents of low academic achievers. Aspirations are 'built' on mutual dependencies. In other words, there is a strong connect between the thinking and behavior of children and their parents. Innate abilities of a child, of their parents' and of the child's own beliefs in those abilities, along with their educational and occupational ambitions reinforce and influence one another throughout the school years (Gutman and Ackerman 2008).

The role of parental influence on academic aspirations could be linked to the Wisconsin Model of Socioeconomic Attainment produced by Sewell et al. (1969). The model hypothesizes that SOI (Significant Others' Influence) is of central importance to the educational and occupational attainment, where the significant other denotes parent(s). They

begin with the previously established assumption by Sewell et al. (1957), that a low positive correlation may exist between a young learner's measured mental ability (MA) and their parents' socioeconomic status (SES) but the model anticipates a substantial effect of MA on academic performance (AP). Their theory states that AP and SES along with other exogenous factors govern SOI that in turn exert a significant influence on a learner's aspirations and that AP may then even influence later attainments.

According to Bandura (1997), aspirations are not built or formed only based on one's belief to succeed, but also on the belief about the causes of success: whether it is attributed to hard work or to fate. Young people who believe in their own capabilities to achieve and who believe that hard work pays, usually have higher aspirations than their peers. These characteristics in such people are also likely to encourage persistence and perseverance: if one succeeds on the basis of effort, one can succeed repeatedly and if one fails due to lack of efforts, one can try harder. The more the effort, the higher the chances of achieving success, and this process can then become reinforcing. Thus, attitudes and beliefs can act as a spur or an obstacle to aspiration building.

Claude Steele's study on stereotype threats reveals the intricate relationship between stereotype vulnerability and their performance, as well as, intellectual ability. In one of the four studies conducted, the results showed that mere salience of the stereotype could impair Black's performance even when the test was not ability diagnostic. Whenever African Americans perform an explicitly scholastic or intellectual task they face the threat of being judged by a negative societal stereotype, a suspicion about their group's intellectual ability or competence. Similarly, this threat is borne by other people stereotyped in this manner, where self threat, caused by a variety of mechanisms may interfere with the intellectual functioning of students (Steele et al. 1995).

Matthew et al's (2011) study on effort optimism, which is that students' belief in their hard work and effort in school will pay off academic/school success, reveals the difference between black and white students in the United States. The oppositional culture theory forwarded by Fordham and Ogbu (1986), claims that African-Americans perceive

differential payoff for asserting effort in the classroom and consider that academic achievement does not open doors to the same options for them as for white students. As a result of reduced effort optimism (belief that effort in the classroom will lead to desirable rewards as a result of academic achievement), these students devalue education, withhold effort, and subsequently perform less well than their white counterparts (Ogbu 1983).

### **2.2.2 Educational and Occupational Aspirations**

In the past, scholars such as MacBrayne (1987); Andres et al (2007), and Kao and Thompson (2003) have defined 'aspirations' by opposing it to 'expectations'. Aspirations are an individual's desire to obtain certain objectives or goals such as particular occupation or level of education (Kao and Thompson, 2003; MacBrayne, 1987). Expectations are an individual's estimation of the likelihood of achieving those goals, objectives or dreams (MacBrayne 1987:135). Aspirations have two dimensions, namely Educational Aspirations and Occupational Aspirations. Rojewski (2005) defined occupational aspirations as "an individual's expressed career related goals or choices". It also denotes occupations that the individual assumes might be practical (Armstrong and Crombie, 2000; Davey and Stoppard, 1993). Many different scholars have studied educational aspirations based on educational disparities, including psychological, socio-psychological, sociological and economic perspectives (Domina et al. 2011; Rojewski 2005). According to Sirin, Diemer, Jackson and Howell (2004), "Aspirations have been defined as the educational and vocational dreams that students have for the future." According to Hurlock (1973), "Aspiration means a longing for what one has achieved with advancement on it's as its end". Even though the term 'educational aspirations' is used frequently in research, and is commonly referred to as the educational goals students set for themselves, there is no universally accepted definition or common consensus on what the term means (Lent et al. 1994; Quaglia and Cobb 1996; Rojewski 2005). A variety of terms like plans, decisions or preferences are commonly used, sometimes interchangeably, as they are all essentially viewed as goal terms that primarily differ along dimensions such as the degree of specificity and proximity to the choice implementation (Lent

et al. 1994; Rojewski 2005).

This particular study is focused on both, occupational aspirations and educational aspirations, for the purpose of exploring the educational journey of grade 11 learners in two schools of Cape Town and how it shapes their aspirations.

### **2.2.3 Linking Aspirations, Expectations and Achievements**

Aspirations, in previous studies, have been defined as hopes and dreams, which are usually disengaged from the socio-economic and school reality of the student. Expectations, on the other hand, more than often have a strong connect with socio-economic circumstances and are also better indicators of school achievement (Beal & Crockett, 2010).

Student aspirations are often marked by the student's ability to set goals and then to pursue these goals. Aspirations can play a vital role in helping learners to push for better achievements in their classroom and in their lives (Yisak Tafere 2010).

In a comparative study conducted by Khattab (2015) on student aspirations, expectations and school achievements, students with low and high aspirations were studied and comparisons were made. The results showed the intricate correlation between high aspirations, high expectations and high achievements being the primary predictor of future educational attainment by students. Compared to students with low aspirations, low expectations and low achievements, those with high achievements who had expressed high aspirations but low expectations were more likely to apply for a university course. The latter group of students also had better chances than students with high aspirations, high expectations but low achievements. The argument posed by Khattab in this study pin-points on the relationship between high aspiration and high achievement, but that it is only possible if it is accompanied by high expectations.

Another study conducted by Kao and Thompson (2003) on the ethnic and socio-economic status of children in the United States of America shows that educational aspirations are important predictors of eventual educational achievements. The study provides

a detailed overview of empirical research on racial, ethnic, and immigrant differences in educational achievement and attainment, and examines related theories to explain these differences. The findings of this study revealed that educational aspirations are universally high for all racial and ethnic groups as most adolescents expect to go to college. However, substantial gaps remain, especially between less advantaged groups such as African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans and more advantaged groups such as whites and Asian Americans. The racial and ethnic hierarchy in educational achievement is apparent across varying measures of the academic experience.

Research conducted by Young (1998) to investigate the relationship between student aspirations, student self-concept and student achievement included data drawn from 3,397 students from 28 urban and rural schools in Western Australia. The hypothesis tested in this study resulted in discovering that the self concept of rural students was similar to that of students from urban schools, although urban students had higher aspirations and achievements. It also found no significant differences between urban and rural students in their paths for aspirations, self-concept and achievements.

With regards to learning in the school environment, the above conducted studies explain the relationship between aspirations and eventual achievements by young learners.

#### **2.2.4 Effects of Household Structure, Family Resources and School Quality on Education**

Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies on affluent families suggest that children's educational outcomes are affected by the number of parents available to them while growing up (Heaton et al, 2014). Sun and Li 2011; Fomby and Cherlin 2007; Cavanagh, Schiller and Riegle-Crumb 2006; Hofferth 2006; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994, confirm that children who are raised by both biological, married parents tend to score higher in mathematics and english reading than other family types. Subsequently, the scores of other subjects are also affected. Children who grow up with grandparents or in large

family structures have high levels of heterogeneity and mixed educational outcomes (Hayslip and Kaminski 2005).

Household structures have a strong influence on educational outcomes of children because of the way in which the structures affect the acquisition and distribution of key resources that encourage academic growth and excellence. For instance, single-parent families usually have a single source of income, thus lower socio-economic status than two-parent families (McLanahan and Percheski 2008; Avellar and Smock 2005; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

The following section will attempt to put all these conclusions together on the basis of which, this study is based on.

## **2.2.5 Educational Journey and Factors that Influence Learners' Aspirations**

### ***2.2.5.1 Educational Journey***

The educational journey may be different for the children of educated parents (Marjoribanks, 2005). Okantey (2008) argues that parental education level leads to good income which can empower parents to give children solid foundation for schooling and life success. Those with a better economic status (MacBrayne, 1987), those who live in urban areas (Haller and Virkler, 1993; Akande, 1987), and those holding relatively higher aspirations than their counterparts, all experience education differently. "Schooling under apartheid was characterized by deep inequalities in the allocation of public resources, the quality of education and educational outcomes" (Bray et al 2010:170). This meant that children in South Africa classified as 'white' attended well-resourced schools with good teachers and good learning experiences, whereas the children classified as 'African' barely even attended school. Although the education system did change post 1970, it left a wide gap between the 'whites' and the 'Africans' in terms of educational journey. As a result of poor education, many native Africans failed to acquire skills and qualifications and entered the labor market or faced long periods of unemployment. Their children today face similar inequalities, live in inferior neighborhoods and attend inferior schools, thereby experiencing education that is different as compared to the

'white South Africans' (Bray et al 2010). Soudien (2012) points out that schools in South Africa have been making efforts to become integrated, by placing systems that give more chance to 'African' students by increasing their quota. Although, it is also crucial to gauge the in-depth experiences of these children with their integration into previously 'white' schools in terms of race, belief, culture, learning and more.

"It is only in the last 20 years or so that scholars have taken an interest in how school influences and shapes the identities and self-perceptions of those who inhabit it" (Soudien 2012:96). However, in order for a learner to develop educational aspirations, factors such as family backgrounds, socioeconomic status and neighborhoods require consideration (Stewart et al., 2007).

#### **2.2.5.2 Family Background**

Family social capital and community social capital act as crucial resources for raising educational aspirations (Schneider and Stevenson 1999). The relationship between a parent and child is the key in shaping a learner's aspirations. However, the relationship alone does not account for building aspirations. The difference in resources and human capital determine the difference in values and parenting styles of parents from different communities. In order to fulfill and support their children's aspirations, parents must be able to provide the necessary time, resources and environment. Unfortunately, many working class and disadvantaged parents do not always have the knowledge, skills and resources to help their children to pursue and translate their aspirations into achievements. In a study conducted by Mortimer et al (2014), it was found that in some cases low household income diminished educational aspirations of children, especially when parents experienced unemployment. Parental achievement orientations, as adolescents, were also found to influence the impacts of changes in the family's economic circumstances. This implies that only affluent families and better educated parents are most likely to support their children's aspirations and provide them with the social capital needed for them to grow and achieve better (Majoribanks 2002).

Parents play a key role in helping adolescents develop aspirations, plan, prepare and succeed throughout high school (Eccles, 2007; Helwig, 2008; Hill et al., 2004). Parents remain the most important source of inspiration and information in the development of youth academic and career goals (Helwig, 2008). The role of parents is to encourage sound development of the adolescent's goals and identities and help them conduct themselves in line with their identities (Chao & Hill, 2009).

In a study conducted by Qian and Blair (1999) in the United States, it was discovered that social capital in the form of parent-child discussions about schooling and other matters was more important than parental human capital and financial capital for the educational expectations of Black and Hispanic groups as compared to Whites. The study suggested that holding regular interactions with their children fostered higher educational expectations and aspirations among them. Moller (1995) found high educational expectations among urban black high school students in two South African provinces, and Cherian's (1992, 1994) descriptive analyses of blacks in the Transkei (Eastern Cape province) of South Africa found positive associations between parents' educational expectations and children's academic achievement.

#### **2.2.5.3 Socio-economic Status (SES)**

Education is said to play a big role in moving out of poverty and hence, raising the educational aspirations of students remains a priority (Wrench et al. 2012; Quaglia and Cobb 1996). Some hold the view that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds lack the capability to aspire and "to contest and alter the conditions of their own poverty" (Appadurai 2004:59). Generally, "disadvantaged groups" have lower aspirations (St Clair and Benjamin 2011) and this holds true for young and poor people. Qualitative studies have been conducted in Ethiopia on what affects educational aspirations. Adebe, in his study in 2008, discovered that children are withheld from achieving their life aspirations due to the limitations of needing to earn a livelihood. During his seven-month research between 2005 and 2006, he studied 46 children who were either in or out of school, aged between 11 and 17 and from a locality in Southern Ethiopia. He argues that children's future dreams and aspirations are caught between the war of 'ne-

cessities to earn money and fulfill everyday life expectations' and 'modernisation', including schooling for 'modern jobs' (Adebe 2008:21). Some of the children's dream jobs included those from the field of nursing, teaching, minibus/truck driving, farming, animal husbandry, poultry, trade, restaurant business or flour mills. Some aspired to be housewives or artists or jobs that are mainly based on individual merit.

In a study conducted by Argys et al. (1998) on 'The Impact of Child Support on Cognitive Outcomes of Young Children', it was discovered that disadvantages experienced by children from single-parent families can be attributed to lower socio-economic status. National longitudinal survey of youth-child data were used to gather evidence that receipt of child support had a positive impact on children's cognitive test scores over and above its contribution to total income, varied by the absence of a father. The findings of a study conducted by Moschis et al in 2013 suggest that family disruptions often result in depletion of tangible and intangible parental resources, which further affect the parent-child interactions. Other studies also show that single-parent families, to compensate for the deficiency of another parent, become more involved in their children's education and that if parents handle it carefully, the effect of divorce on adolescent problem behavior is significantly reduced (McLanahan and Booth, 1989).

In their review of the literature, Bradley and Corwyn (2002) pointed to several international studies that found an association between low SES and poorer educational attainment as measured by several indicators.

#### ***2.2.5.4 Neighborhood Characteristics***

Neighborhoods may serve as a venue or platform in which parents meet and interact with other parents and discuss and influence each other's parenting practices (Greenman et al 2011). Furthermore, neighborhood segregation by race and class serve to strengthen the association between socio-economic statuses and family backgrounds, thereby disadvantaging children from poor and working class families. Bray et al (2010) states that in South Africa particularly, the quality of schooling varies from one neighborhood to another, especially between affluent and disadvantaged neighborhoods. This

uneven quality of education leads to highly unequal aspirations and outcomes achieved by learners at schools. Children tend to reflect the nature of the neighborhood they come from in terms of their language, behavior, values and even though some children attend school outside their neighborhood, they may reflect their own neighborhood influences. Growing up in violent neighborhoods exposes children to a myriad of influences that undermine their day-to-day educational experience outside of school. These influences could be in the form of substance abuse, gun violence, gangsterism and theft. Whereas, growing up in peaceful and middle-class neighborhoods often provides an encouraging environment to study (Bray et al 2010). In the Fishhook area of Cape Town, children and adolescents from disadvantaged communities step out of their homes either to complete a household chore or to baby-sit and earn money. The middle-class adolescents in the surrounding neighborhood use their middle-class networks to get middle-class jobs and the children solely focus on studying (Bray et al 2010:142). Educational success is an outcome of educational aspirations and neighborhoods are one of the most influential factors in determining the aspirations of young people.

### **2.2.6 Key Elements in School That Help Boost Aspirations**

Students with a more privileged background do benefit from extra-curricular activities that allow them to increase their skill-sets, widen their interests, and develop networks that will offer support in the future.

It has been suggested by Eccles (2003), that voluntary participation in school-based, extracurricular activities increases school belongingness and achievement (cited in Mahoney et al., in press). This happens because it facilitates: a) the acquisition of interpersonal skills and positive social norms, b) membership in pro-social peer groups, and c) stronger emotional and social connections to one's school. It then stands to reason that participation may contribute to an increase of wellness in mental health, improved students' engagement in school and achievement, strengthen their long-term educational outcomes and find that participation may decrease problem behaviors.

Participation in activities such as music, sports and even being part of clubs offer opportunities for students to learn the values of teamwork, individual and group responsibility, physical strength and endurance, competition, diversity, and a sense of culture and community. Extracurricular activities provide a platform for reinforcing the lessons learned in the classroom, offering students the opportunity to apply their academic skills in a real-world context, and are thus considered part of a well-rounded education. Past research suggests that participation in extracurricular activities may increase students' sense of engagement or attachment to their school, and thereby decrease the likelihood of school failure and dropping out (Lamborn et al, 1992; Finn, 1993).

## **2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The section below will present the existing theories used as a framework of analysis for the study, namely: (a) The Social Capital Theory, (b) The Ecological Systems Theory and (c) The Achievement Motivation Theory. A description of the components of each of the theories is presented below and followed by a discussion of the interplay between the theories. Ultimately, the theoretical models will act as a framework for understanding and analysing the educational journey of school learners and the factors that influence influencing their aspirations.

### **2.3.1 Social Capital Theory**

The initial contribution to the theoretical development of social capital was made by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and American sociologists James Coleman (1988) in the way that it emphasised the relationship between individuals or families and their social ties. Coleman interpreted social capital as a positive social control that is capable of transforming lives of children for the better (Portes 1998). Further to Coleman's view, Robert Putnam (1993) added communities, cities and nations to the concept of social theory (Portes 1998; Dika and Singh 2002).

As defined empirically by Coleman (1988:S100), social capital is a form of capital that is deep-rooted in people-to-people relationships and is independent of other resources such as financial capital, human capital etc. In earlier studies, the emphasis was mainly

on social capital available in the family, but subsequent studies started including educational attainment and school environment under social capital. Later on, structural and process components within the dimensions of social capital were added as explained in the following sub-sections (Israel and Beaulieu : 2004; Israel et al. 2001; Smith et al. 1995).

### **2.3.1.1 Family Social Capital**

In a family structure, social capital refers to the relationship amongst family members, especially between children and parents (Coleman 1998). Structural elements of the family shape and constrain social interactions within the family. In this regard, Coleman (1998) proposed several indicators to measure family social capital, including family structure, number of siblings, mother's expectation of the child's going to college, and frequency of discussions with parents about academic issues. In an investigation based on data from High School and Beyond (HS&B), Coleman (1998) found that children from two-parent families and children of mothers with high expectations of education were less likely to drop out of high school. The findings of this research resonate with the conclusions of this theory where the high performing parents of some respondents have had similar expectations from their pupil hence checking the respondent's attendance of school. Subsequently, numerous other studies show how the measure of family social capital positively shapes various educational outcomes, including academic achievement (Crosnoe 2004; Israel et al. 2001) and college enrollment (Kim and Schneider 2005). Some of the findings of this research are in tune with these theories where the parents of some respondents have been observed to create an enabling environment for their child to focus on their studies either by setting an example themselves or by maintaining a no pressure environment for grades.

Further refinements to the concept of social capital were made by Smith et al. (1995) by highlighting its two important features, structure and process. Smith et al. (1995) specified two structural characteristics under family social capital: (a) the presence of one or both parents and (b) the number of siblings. Both of these features are determinants of opportunity, frequency and duration of parent-child interactions. Israel et al (2001) made

another addition to the structure of family social capital by including drop out rate of siblings. Whereas, process includes specific forms of interactions such as parent-child discussion, parental involvement in their adolescent schooling, and parental educational expectations. Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), Israel et al. (2001) revealed that these structural and process attributes of family social capital mattered to children's academic achievement. The findings of this study narrate a complementing observation where the learners from a single parent low economic group household explain the lack of guidance from their parent due to the limited time that the parent can spare for their child. On the other hand, some learners explain how immensely supported they feel with their parent/s's interest in the day-to-day schoolwork with exceptions where some learners also felt nagged at times.

### **2.3.1.2 School Social Capital**

Several researchers have drawn out parallels between school and home and have extended the concept of family social capital to the school context (Crosnoe 2004; Parcel and Dufur 2001, 2009). These researchers also emphasised on the relations between parents and schools that could combine to facilitate educational outcomes. Under this, they considered (a) private school, (b) teacher-student and counselor-student ratios, (c) various dimensions of school environment, communication and teachers' care), and (d) parental involvement in school activities as measures of school social capital (Parcel and Duffer : 2001). Further data from National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, used by Parcel and Dufur (2001) discovered a significant positive effect of parental involvement at school and school environment on math achievement. This research deals with the each of these aspects around family social and school social capital in great detail by breaking it down in various sub-sections and discusses them separately before making cross-sectional remarks. The rich narratives provided by the learners build good cases to conclude how the strength or fall of each aspect individually and collectively affect the fragile nature of a young learner's aspirational journey.

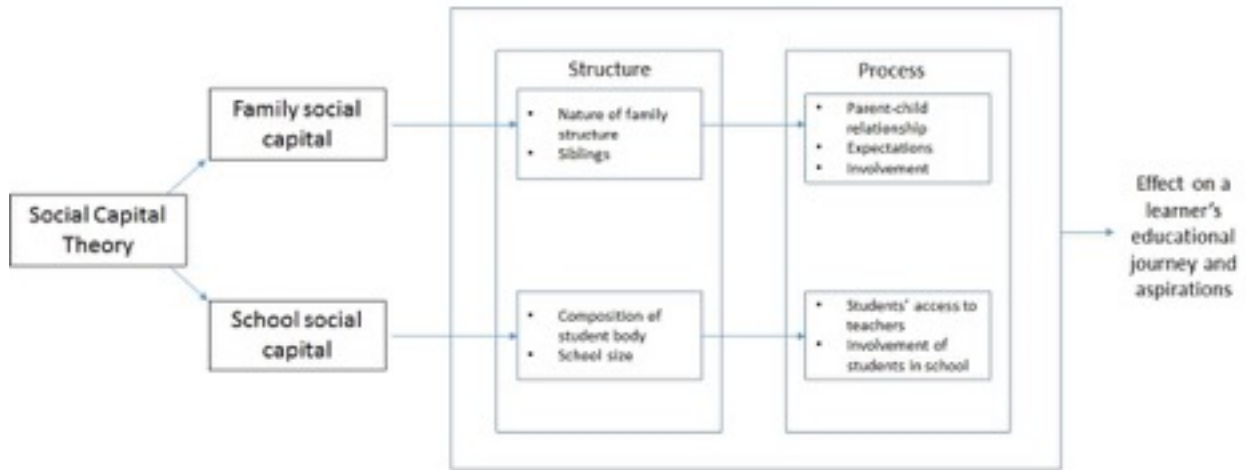
The concept of school social capital was further refined by Israel and Beaulieu (2004) by pointing to its key structural attributes in terms of the composition of the student body

(e.g.: minority enrollment) and school size (e.g.: number of enrolled students). For the process features of school social capital, they included (a) parental involvement in school organisations (eg: PTA), (b) students' access to teachers outside class, and (c) the number of organisations in which student is involved. Some of the major takeaways from this research are drawn from these aspects and it is hoped that these comprehensive research results will add strength to the understanding of how social capital as a whole affects a learner's educational and aspirational journey.

This particular theoretical framework can draw on the recent refinements of social capital, while focusing on the structural and process features of two forms of social capital, i.e. family social capital and school social capital. In this study, the social capital theory was used to devise themes for the interview schedule (data collection) to examine how family background and educational experience affect a learner's educational journey and eventually aspirations. The theory heavily also informed and determined the data analysis and interpretation process.

**Figure 1** is a diagrammatic representation of the Social Capital Theory, its structure and process feeding directly into learner educational journey and aspirations. Structure and Process are understood as two major building blocks in this representation, though independent in their nature but interdependent in their functioning as part of the overall system. The various facets within the family social capital and school social capital feed as inputs to the structure and process. The interplay between the aspects within the structure as well as within in the process is one part of the functioning of the system. The other part of it is how the structure then guides the process. The few aspects listed in the structure and process are for representative purpose of the diagram. The actual number of aspects make a much longer and comprehensive list. The effect of this system guides our understanding of the learner's educational and aspirational journey.

Figure 1. Diagrammatic representation of Social Capital Theory



Source: Research done as part of this study

### 2.3.2 Ecological Systems Theory

The Ecological Systems Theory, also known as the Human Ecology Theory states that human development is influenced by different kinds of environmental systems. According to Sigelman and Rider (2008), the individual and the physical and social contexts with which humans interact are inseparable parts of a larger system. Renamed as Bioecological Systems Theory, it points out that a child's own biology is a primary environment for fueling his or her development. The interaction between a child's maturing biology, his or her own family and the surrounding landscape steers the child's development. Variations or conflict in one layer will have a ripple effect on other layers (Paquette and Ryan 2001).

According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, a person's environment can be divided into five different levels (Paquette and Ryan 2001):

- a. **Microsystem:** A system that is closest to the person or has direct contact with the person. For instance, home, school, office, family, friends, colleagues etc. It is the most influential level of ecological systems theory.
- b. **Mesosystem:** A system that comprises interactions between the various parts of a person's microsystem. In mesosystem, a person's microsystem does not func-

tion independently, but is rather connected with one another and have an influence on each other.

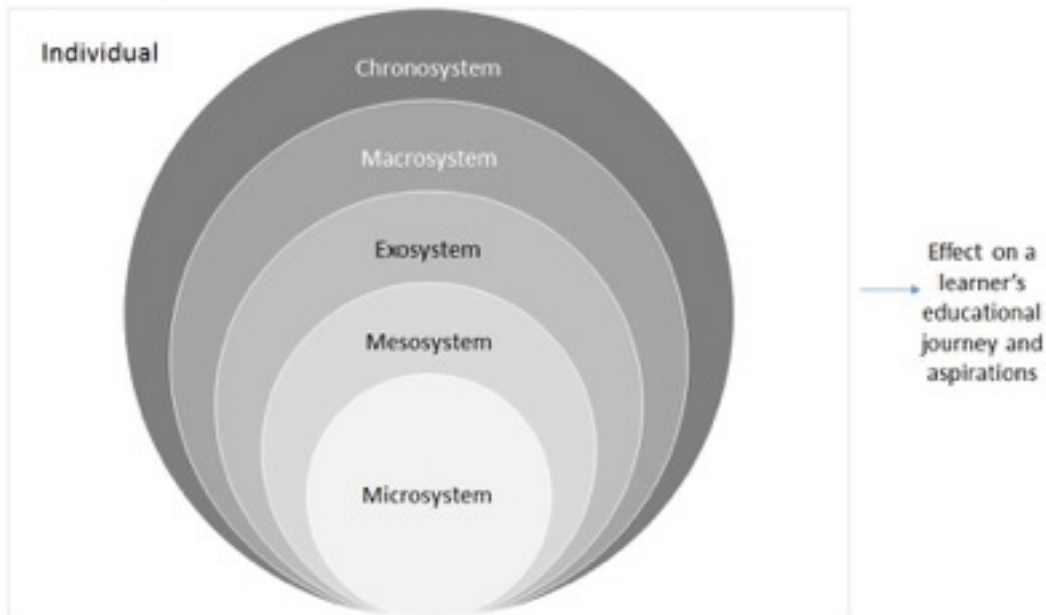
- c. Exosystem: It refers to an external space or setting that does not involve active participation by the person, but still has an effect on them. Persons do not actively participate in the decision-making processes, but the decisions have a bearing on them. For example, a child being affected by their parents' divorce.
- d. Macrosystem: Being the fourth level of ecological systems theory, it encompasses the cultural environment in which the person lives and all other systems affect them. Examples could include economic systems, political systems etc.
- e. Chronosystem: This system consists of all experiences that a person goes through during his or her lifetime, including historical events, major life transitions and environmental events.

Ultimately, the Ecological Systems Theory hypothesizes that the entire world is interlinked and that individual changing entities affect the larger system. This theoretical framework helps the current study to take a closer look at the Learners' environmental factors, in this case, their socio-economic status, neighborhood, family, friends and the larger context in which they operate. All the five levels of the theory have been applied in order to understand the significant ways in which the environmental systems inform and shape the educational journey and aspirations of the learners. The findings of this research that involve the effect of constructive and destructive neighborhood environments strongly advocate theories of the Exosystem level whereas the findings involving the learner's school and home environment comply with theories of the Microsystem level. Throughout the findings of the research, a strong linkage can be observed to each of the levels of the ecological systems theory and how one aspects from one level interact and effect those on the other.

**Figure 2** is a diagrammatic representation of the Ecological Systems theory and its effects on learner educational journey and aspirations. The onion diagram is chosen to depict the interdependencies of five layers of the system while the individual is understood to be interacting with each layer in an overarching manner. The outcomes of the

interaction and interdependency affect the learner's educational journey and aspirations.

Figure 2. Diagrammatic representation of Ecological Systems Theory



Source: Research done as part of this study

### 2.3.3 Achievement Motivation Theory

Achievement Motivation can be defined as behaviors committed to developing and demonstrating higher abilities towards accomplishing challenging goals (McClelland 1961). In other words, it is the conscious or unconscious drive to do well in an achievement-oriented activity. As one of the three components of McClelland's Human Motivation Theory, achievement motivation consists of three types of motivations that is said to drive people: (1) achievement, (2) affiliation, (3) power. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will only focus on achievement, since it is directly linked to aspirations.

Persons who are motivated in life usually have three common traits, the first being that they choose their battles wisely. It means that they chose to set achievable goals over far-fetched ones. The second common trait is that they show least interest in the rewards of success. In other words, motivated persons are least bothered about winning

awards, but are rather more interested in tracing their reasons of success and how they could work better in the future. The third characteristic of motivated persons is that they always prefer taking the middle-ground when it comes to taking risks. With minimum risk and maximum effort, they anticipate fruitful outcomes.

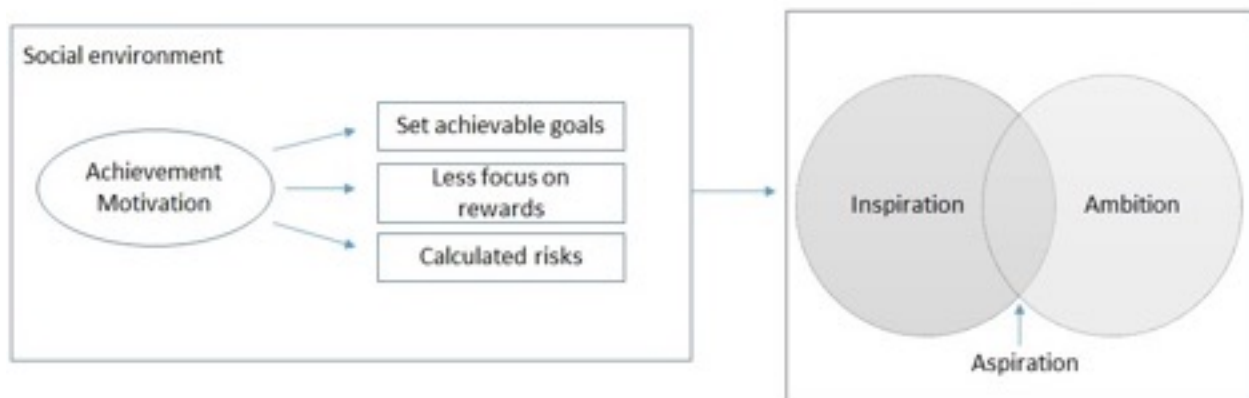
In a study conducted by McClelland in 1978 in India, he found that achievement motivation is a result of the social environment of humans and is an acquired trait that is formed at an early stage and remains constant over time. The results of this study's findings are in tandem with this. Learners living in peaceful or scenic neighborhoods exhibited high levels of confidence and motivation in their learning journey whereas learners coming from unsafe or violent neighborhoods expressed their fear and disturbance.

Quaglia and Cobb (1996:130) describe aspirations as “a student’s ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work towards those goals.” The two major underpinnings of aspiration as stated by Quaglia and Cobb are ‘inspiration’ and ‘ambitions’. Inspiration is the feeling or outcome of finding an activity that is exciting and individuals with high levels of aspirations tend to reflect this feeling. Ambitions are goal-oriented activities that are perceived to be important to be able to make a living. Having ambitions comes from having the feeling or the desire to achieve something.

The inspiration/ambition conceptual design of aspirations, designed by Quaglia and Cobb, has implications on school learners in the way that it takes into account the environment of students in order to understand their aspirations. The framework is drawn to question the influence of school climate on student aspirations and the conditions under which students set goals for the future. Therefore, the use of this conceptual framework in this study directly helped the researcher to test the hypothesis. Findings of this study go on to validate this design by concluding how crucially the social environment, family and school, affected the learner’s perceptions of the life around them and what they imagined for their future.

**Figure 3** is the diagrammatic representation of the process of achievement motivation theory and how achievement motivation takes forward in a social environment to then affect a learner’s aspirations. The three common traits in most motivated individuals are understood to bolster achievement motivation which is overall governed by the health of the learner’s social environment and thus the achievement motivation functioning is limited within the social environment. The strength of aspiration depends on this input, which is itself an amalgamation of inspiration and ambition.

**Figure 3. Diagrammatic representation of Achievement Motivation Theory**



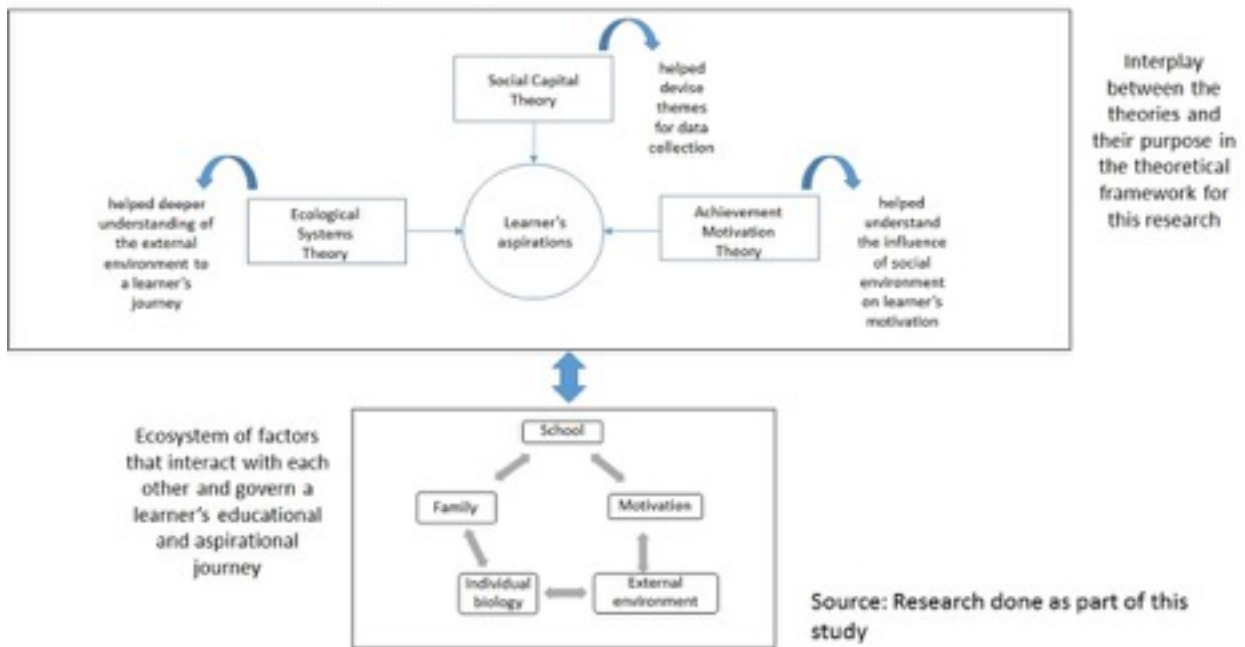
Source: Research done as part of this study

### 2.3.4 Interplay Between The Theories in the Study

A comprehensive representation of the three theories interacting with one another and with their governing factors that influence the learner’s educational and aspirational journey, is presented in Figure 4. The learner’s aspirations are understood to be at the center for the three theories. This system is observed to interact closely with the ecosystem of governing factors like school, family, motivation, individual biology and external environment, but are not limited to factors mentioned in the representative diagram. All the governing factors share an intense working relationship with each other. In the context of this research, the social capital theory has been used to devise the five themes that has systematically arranged the learners’ narratives in categories and sub-categories. This arrangement has helped break down the complex collective of individual

narratives into corresponding categories and sub-categories. The ecological systems theory has helped the study to build a profound understanding into the effects of external environment on the learner's journey. The achievement motivation theory has primarily been instrumental to sensitively build a perspective around the factors that affect a learner's motivation level. The governing factors are related directly or indirectly to each of the components of the theories transforming the overall interplay of the system put together into an interactive web.

Figure 4. Comprehensive display of the relationship between the theories and that shared with the governing factors



## 2.4 POLICY AND LEGISLATION

In an attempt to understand the educational journey of young learners and how it informs their aspirations, it is imperative that the policy arrangement directing this journey be reviewed. The current study speaks to the National Youth Policy (NYP) 2009 - 2014, 2015 - 2020 and The Life Skills Curriculum 2011 (National Curriculum Statement).

#### **2.4.1 National Youth Policy (NYP) 2015 - 2020**

The policy, built on the basis of extensive engagement with various government and public bodies, serves as a planning tool and guide for overall youth development in South Africa. Education, health, economic participation and social cohesion form the four underlying pillars of the NYP and targets young women, disabled youth, unemployed youth, school-aged-out-of-school youth, youth in rural areas and youth at risk (National Youth Policy 2009:1).

The NYP 2020 builds on South Africa's first NYP (2009–2014) and improves upon and updates the previous policy by speaking to the new challenges that South Africa's youth face, while acknowledging that there is more to be done to address the challenges identified in the previous NYP. One of the key aspects of the NYP is its focus on identified imperatives and proposed interventions on education, contributing to development of youth. The policy identifies education as a key to unlocking the future of South African youth, but at the same time acknowledges the need to rectify the prevailing imbalances in the education system therein stating the nature of some problems to be systemic and others to be caused by youth themselves (National Youth Policy 2009:21). In doing so, the NYP recommends the following policy interventions related to educational aspirations of young people.

The policy states that schools should provide knowledge and skills in a manner that helps youth build identity and self esteem through personal discovery and social interaction. In doing so, it must design school curriculum to ensure smooth transition from school to working world and prepare youth for post-school learning, as in the long run it will help remove poverty. However, the policy fails to account the need to build curriculum that will also help young learners identify their interests and aspirations both, within and outside the taught subjects. Nowhere in the policy is anything mentioned about building and shaping aspirations of youth. The NYP also persists to ensure that youth obtain their National Senior Certificate or equivalent qualification with practical and economically viable skills by reintroducing career guidance to promote scarce skills and begin early to enable youth to make correct choices for themselves. It also stresses on the

need to increase learner success rates by raising quality of teaching by teachers and the requirement for guidance and soft skills training to be provided to children out of school. Moreover, the policy encourages government to reduce dropout rates by reducing the number of youth at risk and vocational training should be provided to out-of-school youth to enable completion of secondary education and enable them to partake in labor markets. Instead of focussing on designing curriculum that will ensure smooth transition from school to work world, with the intention of removing poverty, the policy could look at creating curriculum that helps in inculcating and honing student aspirations from a young age. So by the time they are about to transition from school to work, they are confident about their goals and skills.

Another imperative of the NYP is to provide second chances to out-of-school youth to participate in labor markets and to improve Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) to ensure response to skills that attract youth. Out-of-school pathways are to be ensured for youth who leave school prematurely to complete secondary education and obtain their National Senior Certificate. Introduction of practical subjects such as entrepreneurship, technical skills and arts to help those not inclined to study further also find mention in the policy. However, it does not focus on removing the problem at the source, i.e. a strategy to raise standards of teaching at the school and ensure hundred percent pass-out rate.

Lastly, the policy focuses on providing aid to youth in transition to adulthood by offering more flexible learning pathways and increasing diversity of colleges offering different career opportunities. It also aims to tap on business skills of students and work on building entrepreneurs at college level. And although every qualification at university level is now required to include soft skills development through internships, the internship experiences are not properly regulated and assessed in most cases. In a few instances, the usual 6-8 weeks of internship duration turns out to be too short for students to understand and learn the necessary skills.

### **2.4.2 Life Skills Curriculum**

The national curriculum of South Africa, designed and regulated by the Department of Education (DoE), includes Life Skills as a compulsory curriculum in all schools from grade R-12. The primary aim of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grades R-12 is to ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge in a way that is meaningful to their lives. Other than just providing access to higher education, the purpose of NCS is to impart knowledge and skills to all children, regardless of their race, gender, socio-economic status, physical and mental ability.

As described in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (2011:8), “Life skills deals with the holistic development of the learner throughout childhood. It equips learners with knowledge, skills and values that assist them to achieve their full physical, intellectual, personal, emotional and social potential.” In other words, these are skills that push learners from a young age to become independent and fully aware of their surroundings, making them active young citizens of the society.

Personal and Social Well-being, Physical Education and Creative Arts are the three different subjects taught under the Life Skills curriculum at schools. The first subject teaches learners to make informed choices about their health, personal lifestyle and social well-being. Physical Education aims to develop learners physically by teaching them movement and motor skills. Creative arts exposes learners to a range of art forms such as music, dance, drama and visual arts and helps them build imaginative thinking and skills (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement 2011:8).

While the specific aims of the policy include guiding, teaching and developing learners in different ways, it does not provide for a space where learners can discover and grow their aspirations. The formerly mentioned subjects do not include provisions for learners to learn entrepreneurial or business skills. It also does not allow learners with high educational aspirations to further explore their subjects of interest outside of class. And last but not the least, by focusing only on personal, social, physical and creative educations,

the life skills curriculum fails to offer a forum, especially designed for learners who are inclined towards learning vocational and technical skills.

## **2.5 CONCLUSION**

The relevant review of literature on learner aspirations and the critiques on education policies provides useful guidance as to how to best interpret the educational journey of high school learners within the context of the study. The assessment of legislation and policies and conceptual frameworks, linked to the objectives of the study, offers valuable insights into the prevailing education system of South Africa, which further helps to frame this particular study. The insights included discussions on aspiration building and the linkages between aspirations, expectations and achievements. This chapter also discussed the key factors influencing learner aspirations. The importance of social capital, achievement motivation and interplay between ecological systems are uncovered as the theoretical framework that inform this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Babbie and Mouton (2001) define methodology as the methods or techniques, as well as the procedures that are used in the process of implementing the research design, the underlying principles and the assumptions guiding their use. Social research has four main purposes and these can be characterised as description, exploration, explanation and evaluation (York, 1998). The main purpose of the study was that of exploration. This chapter discusses the methodology used for the study including the chosen research design, population and sampling, data collection approach, and data analysis.

### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Burns and Grove (2003:195) define a research design as “a blueprint for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings”. In other words, it is a set of guidelines that a researcher follows to address the research problem. The proposed study is exploratory in nature and will use qualitative research design method.

Qualitative research design is a systematic, subjective approach used to describe life experiences and give them meaning (Burns & Grove 2003:356; Morse & Field 1996:1999). It can refer to research about persons' lives, lived experiences, social movements, emotions, feelings etc and is subjective in the way that it studies the subject in its actual setting and hence can have different implications. Qualitative research is mostly associated with words, language and experiences rather than measurements, statistics and numerical figures. It seeks to capture the subjective meaning of people's words and behavior in their natural setting (Tutty et al. 1996, cited in De Vos et al. 2005). There are three main components that a qualitative research comprises, namely (1) Data: which is collected using various sources such as interviews, focus group discussions, documents, films, records etc; (2) Procedures: through which the researcher in-

interprets and organises the data, such as conceptualising, elaborating, coding etc; and (3) Written and Verbal Reports make the third component, which may be presented in the form of articles, talks, reports, books etc.

This study used qualitative research design for the reason that discussion around aspirations is a subjective study and it differs for people from different backgrounds and walks of life. The qualitative design helped to capture the nuances and dynamics around the study, unlike quantitative design. Each individual in the study was judged on a uniform framework, but the results for each one were different; they were personal and sensitive to an individual's life. Qualitative research design allows for adaptation, whereas quantitative leads to various blockages. In this study, qualitative design gave the researcher liberty to capture the intricacies of individual journeys and those journeys, further put together, allowed for sound argument. Furthermore, this study is qualitative since the research questions surrounding this study are best answered by the way of attitudinal data and the researcher wishes for the members of the sample to be able to present their own interpretations of their situations rather than having the researcher assume the meaning from quantitative information.

An exploratory study is useful for the researcher when the objective is to study a more persistent phenomena (Babbie 2008). The focus here was on gaining insights and familiarity on problems that are still in the preliminary stage of investigation. Since the researcher of this study sought to understand the experiences of high school learners, qualitative research design was well suited to capture the same.

### **3.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

#### **3.3.1 Study Population and Sample**

Polit and Hungler (1999:37) refer to the population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. The population for this particular study comprised high school learners in Western Cape, South Africa, who came from two different backgrounds and contexts:

- a. **Former Model C Schools** - Established in the 1980s and early 1990s, these schools receive a hefty state subsidy including some staff salaries paid on the State Scales, but charge parents fees in addition to amount received by the State. Such schools are usually multicultural and highly diverse, and many offer high quality education at very reasonable fees. In this study, the former Model C school will be referred to as *School A*.
- b. **Public Schools** - These schools depend entirely on government support and funding and each province is responsible for making sure the schools are run properly. Hence, standards of schools may vary according to the wealth and efficiency of the province. Public schools face the issue of lack of monitoring and financing, which results in dearth of qualified teachers teaching at the schools. For this reason, parents who can afford, send their children to private schools. In this study, the under-resourced school will be referred to as *School B*.

### **3.3.2 Sampling Technique, Characteristics and Procedures**

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used a non-probability sampling technique. Babbie (2008:203) explains non-probability sampling technique as “any technique in which samples are selected in some way not suggested by the probability theory.” In other words, it is often conducted in situations that do not permit the kinds of probability samples used in large-scale social surveys. The three types of non-probability sampling include purposive or judgmental sampling, snowball sampling and quota sampling. In the current study, purposive sampling technique will be used to select the high school learners.

“Purposive or judgmental sampling is a type of non probability sampling which the units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researcher’s judgment about which ones will be the most useful or representative” (Babbie 2008:204). It means that such selection of a sample is conducted on the basis of the researcher having knowledge on the populations, its elements and purpose of the study.

To participate in this study, grade 11 high school learners were chosen from one public school and one former Model C school in Cape Town as population. The reason behind choosing these two schools was to draw a contrast in the educational journey of the learners, stemming from their background and schooling. School A is a former Model C school, situated in a beach-side suburb of Cape Peninsula, administered and largely funded by a governing body of parents and alumni. Some of the country's best schools fall under this category. School B is a public school located in District Six of Cape Town and was one of the first schools built for colored and blacks. The school took a leading role in protesting against apartheid policies. Although school standards have improved in the last few years, it remains to be a less-resourced school.

Most of School A learners came from the neighboring areas of the Cape Peninsula and belonged to nuclear families of mostly color and some expatriate. Upon brief interaction with the learners, the researcher learned that most of their families were earning more than the average household income to be able to afford living in such suburbs and sending their children to this school, i.e. School A. Whereas, in School B it was very evident that most learners came from backgrounds where the parents (and in most cases, single parents) were struggling to meet ends. Learners at this school mostly came from colored families and some black.

To begin with, the researcher acquired an ethics clearance from the Department of Ethics at the University of Cape Town. Once the clearance was granted, the researcher requested for a permit from the Department of Education in Western Cape to access the two schools. When the researcher made initial contact with the principals of the schools, clearance and permit forms along with the research proposal were also submitted for their consideration. When the principals offered their acceptance, the researcher requested the principals to assign a teacher(s) to assist in selecting the right sample for the study. Learners who were chosen to participate in the study were first provided with informed consent forms which needed to be signed either by their parents or their guardians to confirm their child's participation in the study. Only when the learners returned signed forms were they allowed to participate in the study. In doing so, the pur-

pose of the study was made clear to learners and anonymity/confidentiality was promised to them by the researcher.

After careful selection by the principals and school teachers, based on the researcher's need, 15 learners were chosen from each school as sample for the study. The researcher required these learners to be outspoken, interactive (despite being average or good academic achievers), willing to participate, share and narrative personal experiences related to school, neighborhood and their family. Out of the 30 grade 11 learners, 18 were girls and 12 were boys between ages 16 and 18. Each of the learners were able to communicate in English and had at least one or more educational or occupational interests in mind. This sample was a result of careful selection of cases that are typical to the population being studied (Terreblanche & Volks 2008). According to York (1998, as cited in De Vos et al., 2005), when the use of purposive sampling occurs, the sample is mostly selected on ease of access and is based on the judgment of the researcher and the availability of the participants.

### **3.4 DATA COLLECTION**

#### **3.4.1 Data Collection Approach**

Babbie and Mouton (2011) describe data collection as the manner or process in which data is collected by the researcher to answer the research question. For the purpose of this study, the researcher collected data over a period of one month at *School A* and *School B* in October 2016. In-depth individual interviews were used to collect the data. An in-depth individual interview is a method of qualitative research in which the researcher asks open-ended questions orally and records the respondent's' answers. These can be done face-to-face or via the phone. For this study, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews. One of the advantages of conducting this type of interview is that, with the interviewer on site, it is easier for the respondent to be able to ask questions and clarify some of the terms they might not have understood on their own (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). The presence of the interviewer also decreases the number of "I don't know" answers, as the interviewer will be able to probe for the answers

and, in this way, rich data can be collected. The presence of the researcher proved to be beneficial as the researcher was available to clarify any confusion that the respondents had about the questions. Furthermore, in-depth interviews are less structured, which makes them different from survey interviews (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). The interviewer must be fully familiar with the subject and potential questions, and plan so that things proceed smoothly and naturally. The researcher understood the subject and studied the interview schedule to ensure that the interviews ran smoothly, which they did.

### **3.4.2 Data Collection Instrument**

To collect data for this study, the predominant mode of data collection was qualitative and the method of interviewing was used (De Vos et al 2005). The researcher designed a structured interview schedule, which was first approved by her research supervisor. The schedule had open-ended questions organised under significant themes of the study. The objective was to understand the family background, academic performance, aspirations, experiences, feelings and challenges faced by the learners in their educational journey.

### **3.4.3 Data Collection Procedure**

Face-to-face interviews were then conducted with the selected participants in a private space on the school premises. Each respondent was made to feel comfortable before answering questions. The interviews in each school lasted three hours per day, with two visits per school. The interviews were conducted in English and were recorded on a mobile phone, as well as a laptop, just in case of emergency.

## **3.5 DATA ANALYSIS**

De Vos et al (2005:333) defines the process of data analysis as “reducing volumes of raw information, sifting significance from trivia, identifying emerging patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveals”. The process used comprised the following steps.

- Step 1: The researcher transcribed all the thirty interviews from the digital recorder verbatim. The researcher then read through each of the transcriptions

twice.

- Step 2: The researcher picked one of the interviews. It was, for example, the most interesting one or the shortest one. The researcher herself what it is about and what could be de underlying meaning. She began to make notes and thoughts in margin.
- Step 3: The researcher repeated step two for several respondents and made a list of all topics that came up. Similar topics were clustered together. The topics were organised into columns with headings that represented major topics, unique topics and leftovers.
- Step 4: The researcher took the list back to the data in the fourth step. The topics were abbreviated as codes and were written next to narratives. This was helpful in organising the scheme and see the new categories that emerged.
- Step 5: The researcher found the most descriptive words for her topics and turned them into categories. It was helpful to reduce the list of categories by grouping them together to see if they related to each other or not.

## **3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **3.6.1 Voluntary Participation**

All the respondents participated willingly in the study. The researcher or the school teacher did not coerce or manipulate them into participation or compliance.

### **3.6.2 Informed Consent**

According to Babbie (2008:74, as cited by McKinney), the criteria of informed consent emphasizes on the importance of meticulously notifying the subject or respondent about the nature and use of the study. It also stresses on the attainment of written or verbal consent by the respondent in order to eliminate any chances of forced participation.

A week prior to the commencement of interviews, the researcher handed over *Parental Informed Consent* forms to the selected respondents to be taken home, read and

signed by their parents. The forms were given to all participating respondents, whether they were 17 years old or 20. A copy of the signed forms was also given back to the parents for the record. On the day of the interview, after the respondents returned the signed forms, they were explained about the study and interview schedule and permission to participate was sought. At that point or any point in the future, a respondent was free to opt out of the process and not participate in the study.

### **3.6.3 Protection from Harm**

Babbie (2008:75) argues that “harm may include emotional or psychological distress, as well as physical harm”. In a Social Sciences study, harm to respondents is likely to be mainly of an emotional nature (De Vos et al., 2005). In this study, the researcher refrained from causing harm in any way to the respondents. Considering the nature of the study and the fact that it focuses on aspirations (feelings) of young learners, the researcher avoided displaying any sort of judgement or bias towards the respondents’ emotions and answers. Respondents were also given a choice to not answer questions which may be perceived as sensitive by them.

### **3.6.4 Right to Privacy**

According to De Vos (2001:61, as cited in Terreblanche & Volks, 2008), privacy is defined as “normally that which is not intended for others to observe or analyse and each individual is entitled to the right of privacy in aspects of their lives”. In other words, it is the controlled or restricted access that respondents have over the information provided by them. At the beginning of the study, the respondents were informed about the confidentiality of the information provided by them during the course of the research. The researcher promised to use the information strictly for the purpose of the study and not disclose any personal information about the respondents. The learners and teachers were also informed about the right to withdraw from the study at any given point of time.

### **3.6.5 No Deception**

The respondents were given adequate information on the purpose of the research, the researcher's background, location and the objectives of the research.

### **3.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The schools in the study had over a hundred high school learners in grade 11 and 12. However, for the purpose of coherence of this study, only a handful of grade 11 learners were chosen to participate. Grade 12 learners were not approached considering their time limitations in preparing for matriculation examinations. The sample size for the study was relatively low since the researcher and the school wanted to be conscious of the time being asked by the learners to participate in the study. Each learner who participated engaged with the interview for over 30 minutes. This study does not include educational experiences of learners from other schools in Cape Town and is hence a limitation of the study. Most learners who came forward to participate in the study belonged to colored families and were not chosen by the teacher or researcher. Although, more than limiting the study, having such a sample helped the study produce stories of students of color interacting with the education system.

Limitations are necessary and acceptable tradeoffs in exchange for data that are accessible (viable) and the reporting results of the study will account for the fact that the study is limited in these ways.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

This section presents responses of 30 high school learners to questions pertaining to the key educational journey and aspiration themes of the study, namely a) school journey and educational experience, b) plans after matriculation, c) educational experience based on family background and neighborhood, d) role of educational journey in shaping aspirations and, e) role of SA education system in building aspirations. Themes were derived from the research questions that guided the study and categories and sub-categories were derived from the narratives provided by respondents.

### 4.2. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

*Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

VARIABLE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	12	40%
Female	18	60%
<b>Average Age</b>	17	
<b>Race</b>		
African	3	10%
Colored	22	73.3%
White	1	3.3%
Indian	1	3.3%
Other	3	10%
<b>Family Structure</b>		
Nuclear	22	73.3%
Single Parent	7	23.3%
Other	1	3.3%
<b>Community</b>		
Bay	3	10%

VARIABLE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Net	1	3.3%
Gus	1	3.3%
Stan	5	16.7%
Win	2	6.7%
Poll	1	3.3%
May	3	10%
Lan	1	3.3%
Het	3	10%
Cap	1	3.3%
Sten	1	3.3%
Kay	2	6.7%
Bon	1	3.3%
Gill	1	3.3%
Sal	2	6.7%
Nang	1	3.3%
Red	1	3.3%
<b>SAMPLE SIZE - 30</b>		

### ***Age, Race and Gender Profile***

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the 30 respondents. (12) males and (18) females took part in the study. The average age of the respondents is 17. Of them, (3) respondents are black, (22) colored, one white, one Indian and three are originally from Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo and Turkey. This study did not restrict itself to any certain race, but rather attempted to understand a learner's journey belonging to any race. Since the study was purely voluntary based research, all grade 11 learners of both schools were reached out to and only students who were interested in

participating. came forward. The researcher did not turn down volunteers based on their race, which is why this not a very uniform distribution of sample.

### ***Family Structure***

Twenty two respondents came from a nuclear family i.e. lived with both parents and siblings. Seven respondents were being raised by a single parent, either because the parents had split or the father had passed away. One respondent lived with their mother and step family.

### ***Community Background***

A majority of the respondents belong to communities Stan (5), Bay (3), May (3) and Het (3). The remaining belong to communities such as Win (2), Kay (2) and Sal (2) and a smaller group belongs to Net (1), Gus (1), Poll (1), Lan (1), Cap (1), Sten (1), Bon (1), Gill (1), Nang (1) and Red (1). Almost all these communities are predominantly colored communities and townships, except for Gus, Win and Kay. The schools that were chosen for the study were located in predominantly colored neighborhoods of Cape Town and hence, most learners who attended the chosen schools also belonged to colored families.

## **4.3 EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF RESPONDENTS**

*Table 2: Educational and Occupational Aspirations of Respondents*

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Aspiration</b>
AD	Lawyer (C)
MS	Maths & Business Science
EA	Marine Engineer
LS	Nurse
KH	Medicine or Forensic Biology
KD	Chef
SB	Nurse (NA)

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Aspiration</b>
KM	Interior Design
LG	Marketing or Photography
FJ	Geology
MJ	Baking
MR	Ceramics Design
AC	Lawyer or Dancer
QM	Chartered Accountant
QK	Medicine
AW	Football (S)
CF	Lawyer or Forensics Or Journalist
BB	Chef (S)
CB	Educator
	Cabin Crew or Firefighter
JW	Psychology or Occupational Therapy
AA	Don't know
KB	Game Design (S)
MP	Engineering or Drummer
KR	Interior Design
SD	Business or HRM or Accounting
NJ	Don't know (NA)
DD	Accounting or Lawyer (C) (S)
MD	Lawyer
TL	Lawyer (S)

### **Subject Interest or Aspiration**

Six of 30 respondents aspire to be a lawyer; two respondents would like to be a nurse; two have interest in medicine; two want to become interior designers and other aspirations include forensics biology, business, accounting, ceramics design, game design, dancing, football, marine engineering, baking, geology, cabin crew, educator and drummer. Two of these respondents also said they are confused about their choice. One respondent was not sure about what career choice they would make. One respondent expressed their desire to be a nurse, but could not take up the necessary subjects for it. Four respondents clearly mentioned that they aspire to study further.

Below are some of the narratives of the respondents articulating their interests or aspirations:

*I've been working for the past four years. I've been working at Mitchell's Plain Hospital as a nursing intern. Because, my mother is in that field I found myself that I.. I believe that I was born to be a doctor. But, because maths and physics wasn't.. didn't click with me, so I told myself, okay, I'm going to do nursing, but then I'm going to try and work my way up some way. But, then I told myself I'm going to do nursing. I was thinking of UCT, but UCT does not offer this. So then, I was thinking of UWC and CPUT, but now my father wants me to go to UJ. So, I do believe.. I know I'm going to become a nurse [giggles]. I'm hundred percent positive. (Respondent LS, Male, 20 years old)*

*I actually want to go for nursing, but the subjects I do doesn't allow me to.”(Respondent SB, Female, 17 years old)*

*When I finish matric I would like to just study to be a interior designer because its like something I like since a young age and I didn't find anything else interesting.. to do. (Respondent KM, Female, 17 years old)*

*So since I was eight I've always loved baking, so the hospitality industry. Umm.. I've started my own business like four years ago already; its going into my fifth year. Umm.. I love business studies, history and hospitality and design because I love the legal aspect of business; history that can rate to everything that we end up doing. The hospitality field I love because it allows yourself to travel; you can express yourself using cooking and like I love baking, so sugar artwork and chocolate artwork.. I always wanted to travel overseas, do the culinary things and then try and put that into like my own establishments. So my restaurants, using each culinary.. format that I've learnt. So, I have job offers already for institutions in Paris, where I'll be studying through them and working part time in a bakery. In the US, I have a working.. job opportunity, where I stay at one of the resort islands with my cousin. So, I'll pay for him.. I'll have a private theatre which teaches me french pastry and then I will work in the restaurant during lunch. **(Respondent MJ, Female, 17 years old)***

*I want to.. I actually don't know what I want to do after matric. My mommy wants me to do accounting, but I can't see myself sitting and working with numbers, long times.. so I really.. at this point I just want to get high marks so that I can have a variety. **(Respondent AA, Male, 17 years old)***

The above narratives demonstrate that the respondents have given their future a thought and have developed interests either through parental influences or self-discovery. While some respondents choose to pursue secured paths of being a lawyer or an engineer, some want to enter unusual and exciting career paths of being a chef or a drummer. However, most learners are confused about their choices and fear being rejected by higher education institutions due to lack of finances or eligibility.

LS has been consistently working as a nursing intern at a reputed hospital for at least four years and he believes he is inspired by his mother to be pursuing this field of work, who also works at the same hospital. Although, he dreams to be a doctor or in a professional position higher than a nurse, he has been unable to match his interests in the re-

quired academic subjects. SB aspired to pursue nursing but she was not permitted to take up the required subjects as she scored lesser marks in those. <lit about how bad performance in a subject restricts the student to take it up in higher grades at school and how that affects the aspirations of the child> LS seemed to have limited his occupational aspirations to being a nurse, about which he is very positive too, even though his true aspiration was to pursue becoming a doctor. <link to lit that says how people tend to change or adapt their aspirations according to their academic performance>. LS belongs to a single parent household and lives with his mother. He mentioned that his father expects LS to pursue his further studies in the University of Johannesburg. This expectation, however, does not affect LS's decision to continue working at the hospital and his dream to become a nurse.

Respondent MJ has been a professional baker for almost five years and has been running a successful business alongside school. She discovered her interest in baking at the tender age of eight and has since been passionate about it. For MJ, it was clear that she will join the hospitality industry in the future. She shows keen interest in other subjects at school such as business, history, design and hospitality, but favors hospitality the most as she believes it allows for travel and expression. The artwork in her baking is her form of expression and her keen interest in travel stems from her passion for exploring her culinary skills overseas. MJ is industrious in the way that she already has standing job offers, one in Paris where she can work part-time at the bakery and also study through them, and the other in America at one of the resort islands.

Another respondent KM has been keen on becoming an interior designer since her young age. She plans to study in the area after finished her matriculation. KM believes that she has always been interested in interior designing, but she also mentions that she chose interior design also because she did not find anything else interesting.

Respondent AA expressed his dilemma around studying accounting as it would involve long hours of sitting on a desk and working with numbers. AA does not sound interested in this idea which has been forced upon him by his mother. For the time being, AA wants

to focus on his studies as he believes that scoring high marks will give him a wide range of choices to pick from.

#### 4.4 PARENTAL BACKGROUND

*Table 3: Education Level or Profession of Parents*

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Education Level/Profession</b>
AD	No Matric
MS	Don't know
EA	Matric; (F) Teacher, (M) University
LS	No Matric; Technical College
KH	(F) Matric, (M) Failed thrice
KD	Didn't attend school; (M) Unemployed
SB	(F) Matric, (M) Homemaker
KM	(F) Matric, (M) Drop out
LG	Matric; (F) Maintenance staff, (M) Receptionist
FJ	Didn't attend school; (F) Security, (M) Domestic Worker
MJ	(M) Matric, (F) Grade 9
MR	Matric; (F) Post office
AC	Matric; (F) PHD, (M) Diploma
QM	Matric; (F) Accountant, (M) Nurse
QK	Matric; Nurses
AW	Don't know
CF	Matric; (F) Army, (M) Lawyer
BB	Matric; Bankers
CB	Matric; (F) Educator, (M) Imports company
CW	(M) Matric; (M) Hospital receptionist, (F) Don't know
JW	(M) Matric, (F) Grade 11

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Education Level/Profession</b>
AA	Matric; (F) Sales executive, (M) Management consultant
KB	(M) Matric, (F) Don't know; (M) Banker
MP	(M) Matric + Tertiary; (M) Book editor
KR	No Matric; (F) Carpenter, (M) Hairdresser
SD	Matric; (F) Sr. bank admin, (M) Law firm office manager
NJ	Matric
DD	(M) Matric; (F) Construction company worker, (M) Pick n Pay
MD	(M) No matric, (F) Don't know; (F) Printing shop worker, (M) Homemaker
TL	Matric; (M) Stock controller, (F) Store manager

***Parents' Education Level or Profession***

Of the 30 respondents, seven respondents' parents have not matriculated and at least ten respondents have only one of the either parents matriculated. Two respondents don't know their parents' education level, whether they matriculated or not and eleven respondents' parents have matriculated.

**4.5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Table 4 systematically lays out the aforementioned five broad themes that are further broken down into categories and respective sub-categories. The categories and their respective sub-categories are indicators that are chosen to help this research draw conclusions from the interviews conducted by the researcher. The following sections will discuss each theme separately. Each theme will categorically present the perspectives of respondents that best fit the sub-categories. Based on the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the sub-categories, the overall conclusions for each of the themes will be

formed. The results from all the themes out together will guide the conclusions and recommendations of this research.

*Table 4: Framework of Analysis*

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>SUB-CATEGORIES</b>
<b>School journey and educational experience</b>	Change in academic interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Positive change in interest</li> <li>- Negative change in interest</li> <li>- No change</li> </ul>
	Change in performance level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improvement in performance level</li> <li>- Non-improvement in performance level</li> <li>- No change</li> </ul>
	Educational or career guidance by teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers push and motivate</li> <li>- Teachers not very helpful</li> </ul>
<b>Plans after matriculation</b>	Discovery of aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents' profession</li> <li>- Inborn skill/talent</li> <li>- Subject Choices</li> </ul>
	Plans other than studying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gap year</li> <li>- Travel and work</li> </ul>
<b>Educational experience based on family background and neighborhood</b>	Parents' expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve grades</li> <li>- Do well</li> <li>- Get a degree</li> </ul>
	Parents' contribution to learning experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- - Help with homework</li> <li>- No help, only motivation</li> </ul>

THEMES	CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES
	Effect of neighborhood and community on studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quiet and easy to focus</li> <li>- Gangsterism in neighborhood</li> <li>- Supportive and well-educated community</li> </ul>
<b>Role of educational journey in shaping aspirations</b>	Aspirations born out of learnings at school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helpful learnings</li> <li>- Non-helpful learnings</li> </ul>
	Aspirations born out of other key elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participation in societies/clubs</li> <li>- Subject interest</li> </ul>
	Aspirations born due to factors outside of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extra-curricular activities</li> <li>- Media/Television</li> </ul>
<b>Role of SA education system in building aspirations</b>	Subjects that help discover aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No helpful subjects</li> <li>- A few helpful subjects</li> </ul>
	Missing elements that can help better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interaction with field experts</li> <li>- More career fairs</li> <li>- Better subject choices</li> </ul>

#### 4.5.1 School Journey and Educational Experience

Respondents were asked to reflect upon their school journey and educational experience with the aim of understanding their academic interest and performance level. The journey is also influenced by the involvement of teachers in giving educational or career advice to learners and hence it was of paramount importance to apprehend the role of teachers in shaping the educational experience of learners.

#### **4.5.1.1. Change in Academic Interest**

Looking back at their journey, most respondents felt their interest in academics had changed over the years. For some, the change in interest was positive, while the others had lost interest in subjects due to various reasons.

##### **Positive Change in Interest:**

*I think.. I think there has, because.. definitely there has, because if you had the same interest and same.. umm.. how can I say.. goals that you had in primary as to now, then it would mean you haven't evolved as a person. Personally, in primary I was like.. you know when they ask.. what do you want to be.. I always say that umm.. I always wanted to be a businessman, earning his big bucks and all of those things and that was the wealth midst I had back then. Umm.. coming now as I'm more maturing, I have developed traits of being more conscious of our society. Hence, as I said like earlier umm.. I'd really love to be a mathematician, but not just focusing on my art, but rather sharing the art with other people. So.. ya, I think there has been a shift. (Respondent MS, male, 17 years old)*

*There has.. like my artwork that I've been doing and I found a hidden talent that I could do cultural things like sculpting and things like that, so there's been a big change in my life and I found out that in my whole household I'm the only one that can draw. (Respondent AW, Male, 17 years old)*

*Definitely! I mean, as we grow up, our minds become broader and we think more, we do more, but for me I'm sure that I've been much more clever back then and more attentive than now because there's so much influences and there's so much to take in, its kind of changed my life as well. (Respondent KB, Male, 17 years old)*

Most of the respondents found that their interest in academics had positively changed from primary school to high school. As stated clearly by respondent MS, personal goals

for learners change as one moves on from one grade to the next. These changes are linked to personal growth and how they see the world and their role in it. For MS, becoming a businessman and being wealthy was what he aspired for while growing up, but as he is advancing in his life, he is realizing the importance of integrating with the people around him and sharing his art with them. This has been a positive shift in mindset for MS which has also influenced his interest in academics. For respondent AW, there has been a positive change in his artwork, a talent he discovered relatively recently. AW also expressed how it came as a surprise that he was the only one in his family who was creative and could draw. The aforementioned statement gives the researcher an impression that AW thought he did not have a talent that he could pursue and when he found out he was good at something, he was relieved and proud. The narrative also reflects the level of self-confidence in AW and how he believed that he could kindle a hobby that he had not acquired from his parents or rest of his family. Respondent KB explains how as part of growing up, one broadens their horizon and pays more attention to the nuances of life that change a person's outlook, which in turn helps shape aspirations and discover newer interests. The respondent's perspectives reaffirm the discussion outcomes that are highlighted in the earlier section, 'Educational Journey and Factors that Influence Learners' Aspirations'.

### ***Negative Change in Interest:***

*Well, I think the older you get, the less interested you become, so.. you kind of slack. And, because the higher level you get, the more work it becomes, so I think I have slacked from primary school till now. (Respondent BB, Male, 17 years old)*

*Yes, in primary school I did much better, because I was 100% focussed. (Respondent MP, Male, 17 years old)*

Although the data demonstrates a consensus on the importance of aspiration in the lives of learners, there are some who find themselves less interested in their studies

and future. Respondents BB and MP state how their focus has wavered, due to distractions, from primary school to high school and how the increase in the work load as they move up to higher grades makes them less interested and less hard-working. Respondent MP claims that her interest in academics has changed negatively as she was much more focussed in primary school than she is now in high school. The probable reason for this decline in interest could be due to lack of subject interest or increase in the difficulty level of subjects, and the literature on 'Linking Aspirations, Expectations and Achievements' also informs this finding.

#### **No Change in Interest:**

*Umm.. I can say its kind of the same, but last year and the year before I wasn't really focused. But now, like taking it as my aspiration because of college grades.. I have to get it right. But, actually the thing is that primary school helped me out.. (Respondent KD, Male, 17 years old)*

The above narrative indicates that some learners found their academic interests unchanged from primary school to high school, and that grades were their only aspiration. No change in academic interest is a neutral parameter and no clear conclusion can be drawn from this particular instance on whether this shall have a negative or a positive impact on the learner's aspirations in life. Grades being the only aspiration could be stemming from a variety of reasons. Perhaps the learner was still confused about what subject interests him exactly or perhaps there are socio-economic conditions that prevent him to experience the liberty of wide choices.

#### **4.5.1.2. Change in Performance Level**

##### **Improvement in Performance Level:**

*Yes, in primary school I wasn't that academically involved, because I used to get bored in the classes; I always used to learn at a higher level than the rest of my classes, so I used to slack off, but at high school I felt that I could compete acad-*

*emically. Like my mental aspect was at the same level as the work that was being taught, so I excelled more in high school than in primary school. (Respondent MJ, Female, 17 years old)*

*Well, I've traveled quite a journey. In primary school, I told you I moved schools. And when I swapped schools, the levels of the schools were completely different. School B is at a much higher level as primary school. So, when I came I struggled a bit and I went to every extra class and I really pushed away from being a student who's failing to a top student. And then, I came here to high school, and the level here was same, but I still wasn't performing as well as I should have. And at the end of my grade 8, I was only in top 20. And then I made this decision that I'm going to work harder and since then I've been in the top 5 throughout. (Respondent AC, Male, 17 years old)*

*Well, not necessarily. Mostly my mathematics stayed the same, but its just like.. the aim is.. When I was in primary school, it was much.. a little bit difficult for me and then when I came here it was easier, so then it changed. But, and my Afrikaans changed. In primary school I did very bad because I didn't connect with the teacher, but when I came to this school, like the teacher helped us and they were like football groups and everything, so.. it helped. (Respondent QM, Female, 17 years old)*

Overall, the respondents showed positive improvement in the performance level when it came to academics. Respondent MJ found the pace in primary to be too slow and hence disinteresting. He was easily bored by the level of studies as he believed he could learner faster as compared to his peers. The pace made him slack off and hence he did not perform very well. Whereas, in high school, MJ was challenged at his pace, which kept the interest in studies going. As a result, MJ outperformed and achieved excellence. Respondent AC had difficulty in coping with the high level of studies in primary school, which, by the virtue of being a high school was much harder. When he came to high school he pushed himself to become a top student by taking extra classes and as a

result started gaining better marks in assessments. When AC saw the positive change in his performance due to his own hard work, it led him to stay committed to working harder and remain in the top five students. Respondent QM expressed her genuine concerns about how primary school was harder for her as she was forced to study Afrikaans, which she could not do well in. But, when she came to high school, she found herself doing better due to strong support and good relationship with her teacher. Being part of the football group and other groups also motivated QM to perform better.

### ***Non-Improvement in Performance Level:***

*Oh, like my interest? My performance was way better in primary school. Like, I think primary school is easier, but maybe its just because of the type of school I went to. It was local, so there was no challenge or anything. But like now that I'm in high school, there's people from different schools, like more advanced schools, so its more difficult I guess; competition, which actually makes you want to work harder. (Respondent KH, Female, 17 years old)*

*Yes, in primary school I did well, like very well. Ever since grade 10 my marks haven't been so well. Probably.. because of.. I don't know.. friends? Some of the friends I have are classmates and the workload is like a lot. (Respondent KM, Female, 17 years old)*

*Well, I think the older you get, the less interested you become, so.. you kind of slack. And, because the higher level you get, the more work it becomes, so I think I have slacked from primary school till now. (Respondent BB, Female, 17 years old)*

*Yes, in primary school my math marks were really high, like super high and now in high school it dropped like.. this time I actually failed and I don't know why, maybe because I didn't put too much effort in. Its kind of also the teacher, but its also me. (Respondent JW, Female, 17 years old)*

The respondents seemed to believe that primary school was much easier than high school; that the subjects were easier; the overall pressure was less and hence, the effort that was eventually put in by the students was more. However, in high school, they claim to be facing tougher competition and some learners think that having more friends came in their way of their performance level. Respondent KH attributes her primary school performance to the kind of school she went to, which was easy and not very challenging according to her. When she moved to high school, she was starting to compete with students from other advanced schools which raised the bar of the competition overall. KH mentions that the competition is healthy as it makes her want to work harder. Respondent KM has not been achieving great marks since grade 10 and partly blames the company of friends he keeps. The researcher gets a feeling that KM is easily distracted by his friends and is unable to manage the workload due to mis-management of time and space. As the level of studies gets higher in high school, coping becomes harder. For respondent BB, there has been a drop in interest due to this reason. Respondent JW claimed to have been very good at mathematics, but after getting into high school his scores have dropped massively, to the extent that he even failed once. The reason for this decline, as expressed by JW, is unclear but could be attributed to his insufficient efforts and his belief in the teacher.

**No Change:**

*Change? Well, I've always wanted to become a marine engineer and I still want to become a marine engineer. There's no change. (Respondent EA, Male, 17 years old)*

*Umm.. no. I think its the same. (Respondent MD, Female, 17 years old)*

While some respondents claimed to be very consistent in their performance level, others confirmed that they always knew what they wanted to do or become and hence have the same, unchanged interests. The above responses by respondents EA and MD

indicate that no change in academic interest or performance level is not a just negative thing, but also a positive sign. For some learners, it did not take long to decide what they wanted to become and their aspiration then also remained unchanged.

#### **4.5.1.3. Educational or Career Guidance by Teachers**

Most respondents also highlighted the important role that teachers played in shaping their aspirations. The guidance offered by teachers with regards to school subjects, higher education programmes and future career choices contributed a great deal to the overall levels of motivation, direction, focus and willingness to continually put in efforts to perform better.

#### **Teachers push and motivate:**

*Well, a lot! A lot! Umm.. I think that our school has a collective of very, very diligent teachers. Like, I have one teacher, right, he's my mathematics teacher, but he's not.. he's more than just a teacher of the subject of mathematics. He motivates us in ways that we did not imagine when we were back in primary school. Like, he speaks more of the way to live life rather than to just be a passenger of life and there are many others like.. in the school.. who consciously make you aware of society out there, because so many times, right, you are a student of a high school institution like this and think that your life is here.. that if you get good grades and if you are a top student then it would mean that automatically you'll be the best outside, but there's major shift to the transition of high school and life out there. So, I think many of the teachers here prepare us for that transition.*  
**(Respondent MS, Male, 17 years old)**

*Umm.. I actually want to be a chef and my consumer teacher, she actually encourages me, because I'm a top learner in consumer studies. She encourages me and gives me like.. what do you say.. a list of colleges where I can go to.*  
**(Respondent KD, Male, 17 years old)**

*Everything. They'll tell us how to apply; tell us where to apply; what to look out for; how they can help us to get in. Like, my english teacher tells us focus on this; get that done because in college they're going to hit you with this; ask you that ; look here for scholarships and things like that. And especially my grade 8, Mr. SN; he also helps. So, he's like when I [inaudible].. getting involved in sports or clubs; making sure you can do both aspects; social and leadership wise; these things help us so much, its actually great. **(Respondent MJ, Female, 17 years old)***

*I think they're very supportive and they do open your eyes to see. There are lots more out there and that's the thing that I think our school is really good at. They don't just limit you; like certain schools, they just tell you to be a doctor, a lawyer. By opening up to many things and they kind of like, I know my teachers give me lots of guidance, so why are you choosing this course; I think this course would suit you better. Whereas, a lot of other schools don't do that. **(Respondent AK, Male, 17 years old)***

It is evident from the above narratives that the respondents find their teachers to be extremely supportive and helpful in guiding them towards their future. They also help in making them aware of the bursaries available for higher education, of the different career options out there and of what profession suits better to which personality. Respondents MS and KD have teachers in school who are more like mentors and role models for them. They both seem to have at least one teacher with whom they have found a connection beyond their studies. MS is inspired by his teacher's lessons on life and the reality outside of school. He also claims that most teachers in his school prepare learners for the transition from high school to college to work. Quaglia and Cobb (1996) suggest that educators/teachers may be in a position to positively impact students' desire to achieve and that aspirations of students can be easily influenced by school/peers.

### **Teachers not very helpful:**

*Ooh! That is very low [giggles]. I think it is very low because most of the teachers will just say “go to university!” But, they won’t actually tell you.. like most of them don’t know to get into UCT, for instance, you need to have very, very high marks. So, they’ll just say things.. I won’t say its very good at this moment. (Respondent QK, Female, 17 years old)*

*Umm.. its not really everyday that they talk to me about my future. They’re complaining about me and how I am in class. (Respondent AW, Male, 17 years old)*

*Its okay; Its not as much as like.. where they guide you and stuff. Most of the time you get the guidance in Life Orientation because of the subject. But, in other areas you wont really get that guidance. (Respondent CF, Female, 17 years old)*

The respondents do not seem to indicate a strong support received from their teachers at school regarding their future educational choices. As indicated by their narratives, they appear to be rather dissatisfied with the current support they receive from them. It seems that a talk regarding their future is not absolutely missing, but there is not much information or guidance provided or a push given to the learners to prepare them better for their next endeavor. Respondent QK and CF confirm that there is lack of guidance received from their teachers in school. The respondents ascertain that most of the teachers encourage the learners to go to university and get into the top colleges of the country but there is little focus on guidance that learners can follow in order to secure a place at the university. Respondents such as AW do not have any conversations about his future career plans with his teachers. Lower academically performing learners such as AW are rather discouraged by teachers who pick on learners for scoring lower marks in school work. This is evidence that most teachers in the South African education system focus more on learners performing well in school, although they might not actually be imbibing the roles of mentors in preparing them for further studies.

## **4.5.2 Plans After Matriculation**

This section presents the educational and occupational aspirations of the respondents, along with their plans for the future. A majority of the respondents were seen as being inspired by their parents' educational and occupational backgrounds. Some were unsure of what they wanted to do next and the others expressed their interest in taking a gap year to discover their interests and test their skills.

### **4.5.2.1 Discovery of Aspirations**

While some respondents had their minds fixated on pursuing a particular subject or field of study post-matric, others had already figured out what career or industry they would like to get into. Most of the respondents were seen attributing the discovery of their interest or passion to their parents or teachers.

#### ***Parents' Profession/Interest:***

*Because, my mother is in that field I found myself that I.. I believe that I was born to be a doctor. (Respondent LS, Male, 20 years old)*

*It started in grade nine. I always thought.. before I chose my subjects, I saw these consumer study learners and it looked like good stuff. So, my mother also like influenced me.. because she used to teach me to make things and stuff.. (Respondent KD, Male, 17 years old)*

The above narratives state that respondents were influenced by their parents; what their profession is and what their interests are. For respondent LS, it was a clear choice when it came to deciding his profession; he wanted to become a doctor. Most often, children who grow up seeing their parents work in the medical field, get strongly influenced by their parents' work and passion and eventually aspire to become like them. LS, too, attributes his aspiration to his mother who is in the medical field herself. Literature is evidence that family and community social capital are important resources for raising educational aspirations (Schneider and Stevenson 1999). Going by what Gut-

man and Ackerman (2008) say, it is possible that Innate abilities of children, their parents' and their own beliefs in those abilities, and their educational and occupational ambitions reinforce and influence one another throughout the school years, thus showing a direct link between profession/interest of the parents and aspirations of young learners. Respondent KD explains how just by looking at the students who were part of the consumer studies stream, he decided the subject would also interest him. KD is also influenced by his mother's interest in the field of consumer studies and because she is personally involved with him when it comes to studies and learning, it made his interest in the subject stronger. This goes to show how a parent's interest and involvement in the child's education can be a positive influence on building the child's aspiration.

***Inborn Talent/Skill:***

*Umm.. well, technically when I was eight. I always used to make cakes and then people was like, woah! You're talented and then I started going for fondant classes and then I think I went for one class and I'd already known whatever the teacher was teaching through that year. So, I left the classes and I started doing things on my own. I then got a mentor and she said; when I was ten she told me this is the field you have to go into, so its basically since I was eight. (Respondent MJ, Female, 17 years old)*

*Since I was small, I used to play in the yard and play with sand makers.. if I'm cooking something.. so its always been a passion for me since I was small. (Respondent BB, Male, 17 years old)*

Respondents indicated that it was an automatic choice for them when it came to deciding what they wanted to be in life. It was interests they had picked up in their childhood and which still remain with them today in the form of enhanced skills, easy to make a profession out of it. Respondent MJ was eight when she discovered her talent for baking, but validation from her mentor, when she was ten, made her plans of becoming a professional even more solid. Respondent BB had the opportunity to discover his inter-

est when he was little and used to play in the yard with sand. It did not take too long for his interest to convert into passion (of becoming a chef).

### **Subject Choices:**

*I think grade 10; Umm.. we did art as a subject in grade 10 and we most of the time did art work and stuff, but it wasn't about the furniture or interior designing. Ever since that time though it linked to it and I wanted to do it. (Respondent KM, Female, 17 years old)*

*I discovered, well, when I got to grade 10; I noticed that I had a keen interest in biology and in anatomy and I selected physics as a core subject. So, it took me out of the category of wanting to be a doctor and then I looked for ways that I could still be involved in medicine, but something that's kind of my strong suit and my strong suit in high school is doing what's right. Because, right now I am a guardian and disciplined, so its always been there and my mom and my dad kind of help, guide me.. they're not the parents who say :do this", but they kind of say, "look at these certain fields..." (Respondent AC, Male, 17 years old)*

*I discovered that in grade nine when I really started liking accounting and my teacher showed me that the.. she inspired me because she's also an accountant. And I spoke with different accountants and I just really like accounting, so.. (Respondent QM, Female, 17 years old)*

The above narratives indicate that most respondents discovered a subject/s that they were good at and further discovered an aspiration that matched the particular subject. While only a few number of learners have their occupational aspiration discovered by the time they reach high school, most of the others are unaware/confused or at least start to develop interest in subjects that they would like to pursue. In grade 10, respondent KM found herself deeply interest by the subject of arts in school, also because it

linked to her aspiration of becoming an interior designer. Respondent AC seems to come from a family which is highly disciplined and looks out for him when it comes to guidance towards pursuing certain fields of study. Although AC wanted to become a doctor, he ended up choosing physics as his core subject for reasons unknown to the researcher. However, there is a clear indication towards the respondent's will to still be involved in medicine, one way or the other. Respondent QM, in his narrative, also adds that her teacher, who was an accountant herself, played a key role in making her realise that she was good at accounting. It is not clear whether QM wants to become a professional accountant, but she is at least sure of her likability towards the subject.

#### **4.5.2.2 Plans Other Than Studying**

The respondents, when asked about their plans other than studying after clearing matriculation, expressed their will to take a year off and explore or travel around the world and gather work experience.

#### **Gap Year:**

*I'm thinking of taking a year gap, but I don't know yet. Maybe I'll work in that gap year. (Respondent SB, Female, 17 years old)*

*Well, I will be finishing young. I'll only be 17 when I'm done with matric, hopefully. Its either I go.. but, I would like to take a gap year. I would like to take a year to properly discover the world, because I'm too busy with school and things and studies too; maybe I'll take a gap year and I will just try and find myself properly before I go and make my life changing decision. (Respondent SD, Male, 17 years old)*

The narratives above highlight the unconventional paths the respondents are willing to follow after their matriculation. As respondent SD mentioned, the gap year will help him find himself and his passion in life. He stresses on the need to travel the world in order

to discover himself before making life-changing decisions, indicating that just growing up in the school environment is not enough to evolve as a person. Traveling will instill in him a sense of freedom which will help him learn more about himself, his likes and dislikes, hence enabling him to make sound choices in the future. Respondent SB too wants to take a gap year and probably work in that time. In a study by Karl Haigler & Rae Nelson, 'The Gap Year Advantage, independent study of 300 Gap Year students between 1997 - 2006,' it was discussed that gap experiences had an impact on the choice of academic major and career for most learners, in either setting them on a different path as compared to before a gap year or confirming their direction and aspirational choice.

### ***Travel and Work:***

*After matric, I was planning.. actually I am planning on going to England. I almost have like an interview with one of the clubs in England. Last year, a female manager from Everton, she came to me and she told me that she would like to see me at the club, so after matric I'm planning on going there.. going for a trial there and will successfully finish the trial. (Respondent AW, Male, 17 years old)*

*I first want to go work to get some money to pay for my university and stuff, so that I can see what I want to become. (Respondent NJ, Male, 17 years old)*

In the narratives above, the respondents state their plans of traveling and gaining work experience post matriculation. The experience will help them earn money for university, as well as, allow them to see the world in a different light and figure out for themselves what they want to become. For respondent AW, it was a confidence booster when one of his football club managers appreciated his game and invited him to play in the clubs of England. Also, the fact that he is good at something gives him assurance that he can afford to take a break from studies, work on improving his skills and then think about further education. Respondent NJ has made up his mind to first work to earn, which will also allow him to explore and understand what he likes and what he is really good at at.

This way he will collect money to pay for university and will also be able to make a wiser decision about what he would like to study.

#### **4.5.3 Educational Experience Based on Family Background and Neighborhood**

In this section of the interview guide, the respondents were asked about factors affecting their experience of education.

##### **4.5.3.1 Parents' Expectations**

Parents who hold higher aspirations for their children tend to be those who believe in their own ability and capacity to encourage their children and be more involved in their children's learning and education process (Gutman and Ackerman 2008). In other words, parents who take keen interest in their children's studies and homework are usually the ones who push and motivate their children to become great performers and achievers in life. These parents, by the virtue of having the ability to inspire their children, tend to hold higher aspirations for them.

##### **Improve Grades:**

*My daddy does, yes. Like he just wants the best marks, because he's so.. how do I put this? Like he's educated and.. like the type of work he does for himself, so he wants that for us as well. For me, from primary school I got like straight A's, so now he expects that from me all the time. When I don't, he's like you can do better {na na na..}. (Respondent KH, Female, 17 years old)*

*Umm.. not exactly, but my parents.. they want me to do good and do good in school like 7's and 6's.. that's the expectation, but they just like.. they're not hard on me to get the 6's and 7's, but they're happy in what I do, what I achieve. They always tell me I can do better. And.. its just never good enough for them, like even if I try my best they're like "you can do better". (Respondent KM, Female, 17 years old)*

The aforementioned narratives indicate that the parents of the respondents were focussing more on pushing their children to improve their grades and score better in school examinations. Respondent KH says that his father is always expecting him to get straight A's in school. Gutman and Ackerman 2008 theorizes that parents who are achievers in their own life usually tend to have similar expectations from their children; they too are expected to do well and make something well out of their lives. The observation made in this study complements the findings of the aforementioned research. Like for respondent KH, her father expects her to score very high marks in school so that she get a good job and live a comfortable life, just as him. The theories of Family Social Capital that deal with the effects of parental expectations on their child's interest in continuing school or focusing on their school work, validate the observations made in this study. Since primary school, KH was expected to get straight A's in all subjects and in now in high school, when she doesn't score too well, her father pushes her to do better and makes her believe she can. Respondent KM mentions that her parents always want her to do better and push herself to achieve above average marks in school. Although they are happy with KM in what she does and her achievements, they are constantly after her to remind her that she could do better and achieve more. This is despite KM giving her best performance possible. The researcher gets the impression that KH is easily stressed by the constant pressure of her parents, yet does not want to disappoint them. Although the theories of Family Social Capital deal with the merits of creating a strong foundation for a learner's educational journey, the findings of the study suggest that there definitely might be stress points attached to some of its ways.

**Do Well:**

*Umm.. I don't know. I think, yes and no. At the end of the day its all about what I put in and what I get out. So, my momma will tell me, "if you strive for a certain goal, you only going to get there if you push to that certain goal, so.. my mommy, I would say.. she looks for something in me, but she also doesn't want to push too hard because I might just like bounce back or whatever the case may be, so ya.. (Respondent TL, Female, 17 years old)*

*Umm.. not really. Just to like do my best and.. they would tell me just to do my best and my personal best is good for them, so ya.. (Respondent CF, Female, 17 years old)*

It is clear from the narratives above that the respondents' parents do not have any particular expectations from their children; all they hope for is for them to do well in school and in life. These parents also want to give their children the freedom to be whoever they want to be, as long as they are happy. Both respondents, TL and CF, come from families that do not put any pressure on them to score very high marks, but rather just motivate them to do their personal best. TL's mother appears to be a wise woman, who tries to help her daughter with her words of motivation. She does this only to an extent which she thinks TL can handle and not become rebellious thereafter. Many studies like (Crosnoe 2004; Israel et al. 2001) validate what this research also finds – how a constructive and motivational home environment can help maintain the children's academic interests and achievements.

### **Get a Degree:**

*They want me to finish university with good grades and to become.. umm.. to become what I want. (Respondent EA, Male, 17 years old)*

*Yes, they want me to bring them 60s or 70s; if its a 50 there's no problem, but 60s and 70s is what they want because they say nothing is impossible; it will be hard to get 80s and 90s. I really don't know, but I think they would want me to finish off, get my degree in what I want to become. (Respondent LG, Male, 17 years old)*

*Yes. I have to finish university; get a degree or doctorate.. I don't know. But, I have to finish.. I have to follow their footsteps and get the best education be-*

*cause they are sacrificing a lot for me actually. (Respondent BB, Male, 17 years old)*

In the narratives above, respondents EA, LG and BB claim that their parents would like them to eventually get a degree in whatever they choose to do or study. EA's parents would like for him to finish his university with good marks and then continue to do what he wants to. LG speaks of his parents' expectations in a way that seems like the learner is scoring marks in order to satisfy his parents. It does not come across as a mere expectation, but rather a demand from his parents. At the same time, LG's parents also want him to get his matriculation out of the way and move on to getting a degree in the field of his choice. There is however no mention of the field of study or occupation, but just a stress on getting a degree. Similarly, BB also seems to be under pressure of finishing university and getting a good degree. He believes that his parents have sacrificed a lot for him and his studies and he owes it to them by the getting the best education. BB mentions that he has no choice, but to follow the footsteps of his parents and do as well as they are doing. At the point of intervention of this study, it cannot be certainly determined as to what extent this pressure of performance will or will not be able to bring the best in the learner's educational journey. A study undertaken for a longer period of time with the same learners will help inform more sound understanding on this specifically.

#### **4.5.3.2 Parents' Contribution to Learning Experience**

The respondents were asked about the contribution the parents made to their educational journey and learning experience.

##### ***Help with Homework:***

*For me, its like.. they help me in whatever I do. If I like come home, the first thing I do is take out my books and do my homework and then, if its like done they'll always come to me and ask me, "are you struggling?" and they will like help me and stuff. (Respondent AD, Female, 17 years old)*

*My mother actually.. she kinds of annoys me by asking again and again if I have homework or study stuff. But, its actually supporting because when it comes to exams, she makes like a schedule up for me to study. (Respondent KD, Male, 17 years old)*

*So, the minute my mom walks in to the door, she's like what did you study today? What did you learn? Did you focus in class? Yes, yes and yes. Then my dad will be like, try your best; don't push yourself too much because after a while you'll burn out and that doesn't help with exams. So they'll motivate me; they'll ask if they can help. (Respondent MJ, Female, 17 years old)*

Connecting back to the Social Capital Theory, it is evident from the narratives above that family social capital, in terms of the interactions within the family, have a positive impact on the educational outcomes of learners. Parents who support and contribute to their children's learning experience are able to motivate them towards higher academic achievements. It seems that respondent AD's parents are helpful and inquisitive when it comes to her homework. They offer their assistance in case she is finding something difficult or struggling to work on. Respondent KD displays mixed emotions regarding the support he receives from his mother. According to him, she sometimes comes on too strong in nagging him about his homework. But at the same time, KD is appreciative of his mother's endless efforts as when comes exam time as the study schedule she designs for him turns out to be very helpful for KD. Respondent MJ's parents seem to be very involved in her studies and learning experience. So much so, that her mother has a list of inquisitive questions lined up for MJ when she arrives home as she wants to know everything that MJ did in school. On the other hand, MJ's father takes on the role of a motivator, while always warning her to not be too hard on herself when it comes to studies. He thinks MJ will burn out much faster if she stresses on her studies more than required. The researcher reckons that this gives MJ a comforting feeling.

**No Help; Only Motivation:**

*They always push me to work harder and study before hand and umm.. they always tell me to do it now, so you know that you will pass and you will carry on with your studies. So, ya, they just tell me to do it. (Respondent MR, Female, 17 years old)*

*They contribute by just being there and telling me what they did and how they studied for where they are. I can't like give a pin-point description.. there's something I like because I mostly learn about the stuff from my cousins, which is mostly females, so its kind of hard. (Respondent AW, Male, 17 years old)*

*Okay, so.. I don't think they're supportive when it comes to that, like [giggles]. My family is.. when its family time, its family time; they don't care about your exams [giggles]. I hardly sit with my family, so when it comes to family time I cherish that time. So, I won't say that my family.. okay yes, they would motivate me to a certain extent, otherwise its like.. (Respondent TL, Female, 17 years old)*

The narratives above suggest that the respondents parents were not so much involved in their child's actual studies, but were however supportive and motivating towards their performance in school. It is also evident from some of the narratives that these parents had workload, by the virtue of being either a single parent or from a low socio economic status, which subsequently resulted in spending less time with their children. Respondent MR is always pushed to work harder than she already is as her parents think that this is the only time she needs to work really hard, but once she has passes school it will be easier. There is some ambiguity in the way that AW describes the role of his parents in motivating him. Apparently, they contribute by telling AW stories about their studies and how they achieved success, whereas, when asked about what his parents do or what they studied, AW said that he did not know. Their contribution is also limited to them just being around for him. AW also expresses discomfort with regards to learning with his cousins as most of them are females. Again, these narratives reinforce the sig-

nificance of a sound family social capital for a learner to experience a dependable family backing that can help him/her to build the confidence needed to achieve academic success. In the absence of which, the narrative guides us to the opinion that the learner tends to mull over his/her future plans in confusion and in lack of direction.

#### **4.5.3.3 Effect of Neighborhood or Community on Studies**

Most respondents agreed that the kind of neighborhood they belonged to or came from had a major impact on their studies. While some respondents came from quiet and safe areas, some came from neighborhoods largely affected by gangsterism and violence. The ecological systems theory deals with these very effects on an individual's life journey and strongly guide this research's understanding of the narratives.

#### **Quiet and Easy to Focus:**

*Definitely! I mean, its a beautiful area; there's lots of nature which I enjoy because even if I have exams, I can look out the window and think, wow, you know? Then immediately go back in because then I can focus again. (Respondent KB, Male, 17 years old)*

*Its quiet, so.. its actually good; you can sit on your front porch and you can study there also if you like the area.. its not loud. (Respondent KR, Male, 17 years old)*

*Its actually very convenient because its quiet. So, I would say.. for me its like, I can go outside, I can chill and study because there's no thing of people screaming or shooting or.. and its very quiet, so.. I love my neighborhood! (Respondent TL, Female, 17 years old)*

In the narratives above, the respondents declare the relationship between having a safe and quiet environment, and the effect it has on their education. As Bray et al 2010 says,

growing up in middle-class neighborhoods often involves exposure to factors that facilitate success. Respondent KB displays extreme joy while talking about his neighborhood; he is surrounded by natural habitats and enjoys breathtaking views from his window. It helps him concentrate during exams and also gives him a break to look out the window. Similarly, respondent KR is delighted by the idea of sitting in the front porch of his house and studying as it is a quiet neighborhood. Respondent TL takes pride in the sanctity of her neighborhood; she claims to love it because it is quiet and she can step outside without having to worry about any sort of violence or disruption. Although having a quiet neighborhood and living in a non-violent environment might not seem like tangible factors, they are critical in giving children a sense of freedom and safety. This feeling of comfort then allows for children to focus on studies instead of being distracted by gangsterism activities and other disturbances.

### ***Gangsterism in Neighborhood:***

*It actually affects my studies a lot, because usually the smaller children like my brothers and my cousins go outside and when they like start shooting and all, we all have to worry like where are they and like sometimes I have to go out and look for them. (Respondent AD, Female, 17 years old)*

*Its very noisy because of.. there's always people outside and things going on. And there's a library, but we're not allowed to go there because of the shooting and stuff, so its like limited things you can do. (Respondent KH, Female, 17 years old)*

*My neighborhood is like.. a lot of gangsterism is going around; there's a lot of drugs and there are children that is falling into it, is becoming drug addicts and is becoming gangsters and all that. My community is.. it affects a lot because there's no.. how do I say now.. there's no quietness. It will never be.. there will never be silence or anything; there will always be noise from you wake up till you*

*are asleep. There will always be people outside, people fighting, but you will never have those few hours or those few minutes that you can just relax and think and study. (Respondent LG, Male, 17 years old)*

It is clearly indicated in the narratives above that gangsterism in the neighborhood acts as a hindrance when it comes to studies. Respondent AD is deeply affected by the fear of losing her younger siblings to gun violence in her neighborhood. Her studies are interrupted when she hears the noise of guns shooting and her immediate reaction is to leave her studies and run out to look for her brother and cousins. The researcher believes this could have a negative impact on AD as what she has to go through could be scarring to her mind. Respondent KH also shares similar apprehensions related to her neighborhood; it is noisy and there are limited activities around. What is more concerning is that she is sometimes restricted from stepping out of her house due to the likelihood of her being shot. Respondent LG, too, is faced with identical challenges; substance abuse and gangsterism are taking over her neighborhood and children are getting themselves involved in illegal activities rather than completing their education. LG expresses extreme disappointment and discontentment towards what she has been witnessing around her, leaving her sad about the fact that she will never experience peace and quiet in her neighborhood. As Bray et al 2010 says, growing up in poor neighborhoods typically exposes children to a range of influences outside the home that undermine prospects for educational success. The levels of Exosystem and Chronosystem guide the understanding of effects these situations have on the overall progress of the educational and aspirational journey of a learner. Fear, uncertainty, insecurity and physical disturbance are the first prominent facets that appear obvious in the situations explained by the respondents. Each of these negative aspects are strong in character. Individually and together, they can have deep impacts on the person's emotional health, academic performance and aspirations. A young learner residing in an unpredictable and potentially unsafe physical environment is devoid of a peaceful creative space where he/she can work towards making future plans. The situations can affect their motivation levels to a great degree that maybe further challenged if their home environment involves a low income household or single parent or many siblings or low guidance on

academic work.

### **Supportive and Well-Educated Community:**

*In my community.. like I said I come from the better.. part of the community and I think majority of the people expect you there to be educated; you have to have a good job. Just to like, to live there you have to have a good job; you can't just like not have one. So, at least they expect you and its also about they know you; where you belong. Like, they know your parents. If they know your parents are educated they think probably you are too and expect a lot from you. (Respondent AC, Male, 17 years old)*

*In my community education is like.. its very high because everyone.. in the morning every child will get up and go to school and everyone is like has a goal that reminds them of achieving something, so I would say its very high. It keeps me motivated because there will be days where like I don't even feel for it anymore, but everyone will be like.. everyone else is doing it, so I might just be like.. I'll do it as well. (Respondent KC, Female, 17 years old)*

*A lot of the people that you meet there like to say, "yes, my child! get a good education" because they don't want you to be the same as them. They want you to achieve better than they have because they don't want you to live like.. you see, I live in the flats now. They want like.. I know my mommy sees myself like maybe having a house of my own because it is.. its expensive, like the way we living now and its stressful to my mommy and to my family. Also, she's the only one that's bringing in money and my brother's at the age where he should be working and helping the family, but he doesn't. So, she also just wants.. everybody just wants to have to live better and have better experiences than they have. (Respondent CW, Female, 17 years old)*

Respondent AC belongs to a community where everyone around is working and doing well for themselves. In order to be able to afford to live there and to get along with the neighbors, it is essential for children to be studying and parents to be working. These are the two basic things expected out of people who live in AC's community, implying that it provides a motivating and competitive environment for children to do well and push them to shape their learning curve and aspirations with care and concern. The quality of such neighborhoods add great strength to the Exosystem level of the learner's life which in effect also provides great feedback to the Chronosystem level.. Respondent KC's community also enables a motivating environment and watching every child in the neighborhood wake up and go to school regularly serves as a constant reminder to keep up the good work. KC receives encouragement to keep moving in life from his neighbors. Respondent CW articulated that his community was very conscious of working hard and achieving something, simply because they do not want their future generations to go through the struggle they went through. It is interesting to note how harsh experiences of the parent generation has set a motivational drive for the young generation to work harder. Again, these add invaluable positive input to the Chronosystem level of the learner's educational and aspirational journey. Although CW's mother might not express her feelings, CW knows from within that her mother would like to see her own a house someday. The above narratives are a clear indication of how living in well-educated communities has a positive effect on the children of that community. As respondent KC explains, just seeing people around working and doing something useful with their lives acts as a motivation for the children in the community to study and work harder.

#### **4.5.4 Role of Educational Journey in Shaping Aspirations**

In this section the respondents were asked to throw light on the role of education journey in shaping their aspirations.

#### **4.5.4.1 Aspirations Born Out of Learnings at School**

Most of the respondents attributed the discovery of their aspirations to the learnings they had received at school. While some found the learnings useful, some simply expected more out of the school.

#### **Helpful Learnings:**

*Yes, especially when it comes to history and business, I've learnt so much, especially in business, I've learnt so much.. when it comes to the working environment, business environment. So, for me like, I figured something about, for example.. umm.. contracts; how you actually set up a business.. things like that or what the business should have or shouldn't have. So, I would say business has been a major impact on my career because its taught me a lot on what I'm going to take with me when I get there, so ya..* **(Respondent TL, Female, 17 years old)**

*Umm.. my learning at school actually did. I became interested in law because of like learning about the history and that is very big in law. And like the history of our country and how it got together, that is why I'm interested in politics. I mean it.. actually like.. boosted my.. I know why most things happen.* **(Respondent AD, Female, 17 years old)**

*Yes, it has. Like, I've changed my career field because of school. I wanted to be a french patisserie and a chocolatier and now I've decided Hotel Management and Food & Beverage Management. It actually suits me more because I'm really good at business and I never actually noticed that before; my teachers helped because they were like you want to bake and all, yes, but if you actually think of it, you are capable of much more than that and they open me to a new field that I never actually knew was open to me before.* **(Respondent MJ, Male, 17 years old)**

The narratives above elucidate the learnings that the respondents have taken from their classroom experience as well as their experience of interacting with various subjects. Different learners resonate with different subjects, which in turn leads them to take a deeper interest in the subjects and in some cases, perhaps, pursue those at a higher level. History and business caught TL's curiosity and he claims to have learnt a great deal about business environment, contracts etc. Since history and business provide a perfect base combination for anyone aspiring to study law, it was a clear choice for TL. Similarly, respondent AD also realised her inclination towards law due to the subjects taught to her in the classroom. This is a clear evidence on how certain subjects feed directly into the respondents' aspirations. Respondent MJ mentioned that he changed his career direction because of the guidance and motivation he received from his teachers. Although, the change in direction happened in the same broad field of work of interest, and that is, food and hospitality. The teachers made him realise that MJ was more capable than he thought he was.

### ***Non-Helpful Learnings:***

*It.. it didn't really happen, because we don't see the kind of stuff that I want to become. Umm.. so it was just a passion that I discovered. (Respondent EA, Male, 17 years old)*

*Umm.. no. I can learn all the stuff, but I still don't know what I actually like doing; there's nothing in school. (Respondent AA, Male, 17 years old)*

The respondents in the narratives above claim that none of their classroom learnings have any relation to their discovery of passion. In fact, some respondents even said that there is not enough in school for them to build or hone their aspirations. Respondent EA clearly states that he chanced upon his passion on his own; the school did not really offer him the kind of learnings that would help him with his discovery. It is worth considering that respondents EA and AA come from different schools (See Table 8 in Chapter 5)

although have very similar and strong experiences, with respect to their school's involvement in shaping their aspirations. The respondents clearly indicate a strong need for creative spaces in their respective schools that they could use to understand their interests or strengths. Respondent EA seems to have discovered a life direction and this could either be because of a strong ecological capital or family social capital or achievement motivation. Respondent AA does not quite know what direction he would give to his life and there can be a number of other reasons apart from a weak school social capital that has affected his overall sense of being directionless. However, we do know that the lack of required handholding from the school is definitely one of the reasons. The researcher feels that it is imperative that for facilitating their growth, learners at schools must be able to access solutions that shall fit their individual requirements, especially because each learner comes from different strengths of their capital or motivation.

#### **4.5.4.2 Aspirations Born Out of Other Key Elements**

A lot of learners seem to experience aspirations born out of indirect learnings such as through participation in societies and through subject learnings that lead to a bigger goal or aspiration.

#### ***Participation in Societies/Clubs:***

*Umm.. catering club! This club was super crazy; we catered for everyone. Sometimes, we had to stay; sometimes we never even went to classes because we had to cook from the morning straight through.. ya we had to cook! And we had this event called 'Food and Games', but they cancelled it this year and then I know, two years ago or last year it was run by them. We had like.. we had to cater for 5000 people and we were like we don't think those many are coming. They were like you have to remember families are coming after work to support their children; we're not going to have supper and we were stressing out and everyone was like, no, we have to do this! Because my teacher put us in envi-*

*ronment, she said 'this is your job; I am your boss; they are your clients'. So, we knew, this is my job; this is your job so we got everything and I was like, wait.. this is actually fun; I can enjoy this and this was like sticking to my career field.*

***(Respondent MJ, Male, 17 years old)***

*We've had accounting and mathematics olympiads where we went to UCT; that was the math olympiad at UCT - that helps. And we had accounting olympiad at school. (Respondent QM, Female, 17 years old)*

*Umm.. people to people ambassador.. we had that, so I was involved with that - its called the Representative Learners' Council and also other activities like.. we have like small events at school that also help me work with people because in law that's what you need to have.. the will to work with people and stuff. (Respondent CF, Female, 17 years old)*

The responses above indicate that the respondents have found participating in societies and clubs a fairly rewarding experience. For respondent MJ, being actively involved in the catering club at school was an unforgettable experience that she holds very dear. It gave her the chance to participate in something she loves on a grand scale, thus validating her choice of career, i.e. baking. It is also interesting to note how, on being given responsibility towards something so important and coveted, children display utmost sincerity and ethics in their work. Taking part in activities with large groups had made them realise the hard work that lies behind the success of group projects. It also gave them a sense of competition, as a result of which it made it more challenging and fun for the respondents. The aforementioned findings link to the literature contributed by Eccles (2003), under 'Key Activities in School That Help Boost Motivation'. The narratives in this section also help build a very important and definitive observation that time permitted to explore creative spaces can bring clarity of thought and direction in a learner's journey. If these learners weren't permitted the time or chance to engage in an activity that does not involve schoolwork per se, it wouldn't have been feasible for some of them

to discover their strengths in non-academic fields of work like baking. The role that these opportunities played in each of their journeys is an all positive one and must be understood as a crucial building block of their ecological capital.

**Subject Interest:**

*Well, we did like biology, especially life science, so like just everything about it like.. the experiments, practicals and the fact that my teacher.. like she'll always talk to you about it and give you different ideas on what to do and stuff. (Respondent KH, Female, 17 years old)*

*Well, design helped me towards it because of all the different backgrounds and how design developed and how it was constructed and everything, that its all around us. So, I really had passion for that and I wanted to know more about it. (Respondent MR, Female, 17 years old)*

Some respondents discovered their interest indirectly through the subjects that interested them. For instance, for respondent MR, learning design helped her realise that she had a knack for interior design. Respondent KH found all the elements of her biology and life sciences class fascinating. She also gave credit to her teacher for being inquisitive and discussing various ideas with her students.

**4.5.4.3 Aspirations Born Due to Factors Outside of School**

Not all school learners find their interest in subjects or academics in particular. The school is also a forum to explore and hone non-conventional skills and passion.

**Extra Curricular Activities:**

*My parents and I think.. dancing. That really.. it showed me so much, because I think the performing arts in general is like taking over. When you're there, you*

*realise the hard work and determination it takes; it really pushes you to say, "Okay! I'm passionate about this; I'm passionate about working hard or what goes hand in hand; what goes with thinking about others". We learned a lot through dancing. When we dance, its not just about moving the body, its to do with music and people and the different environments we've gained in. So, we just have to keep an open mind. (Respondent AC, Male, 17 years old)*

*Church! Our church, basically.. most of the time they're focussing on building young people, so in church like there's a lot of activities for us young ones. Maybe if we have a holiday program, there's a lot of things you do there; like you get to work with children or be in the kitchen, cooking for the children; so there's a place for everyone there, so that also helped me. (Respondent BB, Male, 17 years old)*

The narratives above indicate the benefits of extra-curricular activities in building or honing respondents' aspirations. These activities need not necessarily feed directly into the aspirations of learners, but the learnings and experiences from the activities makes them more dedicated and hard-working towards their goals. This can directly be understood as giving a strong feed to the chronosystem level in the learner's aspirational journey as explained by the ecological systems theory. In addition, the events explained in the narratives can be believed to strengthen the overarching social environment for the learner that directly affects their achievement motivation and in turn their aspirations. Respondent AC attributes most of her learnings to dance; it has made her more aware of environment and the surrounding people. AC also mentions the pivotal role of performing arts in pushing one's inner voice and testing one's determination towards a pre-decided goal. Respondent BB hinted at having access to opportunities where one can work in a community and be involved in group activities over the holidays. BB's church has helped him to develop into a more holistic person and wants the same for everyone growing up.

### **Media/Television:**

*I also think social media has helped; instagram and tumblr, as well as, fashion TV - those kind of things also.. (MR, Female, 17 years old)*

*Like.. mostly watching TV. Like I said, I found my passion while watching the series. I watch that a lot at my home [giggling] and that's how I thought it would be like very nice to become a lawyer, because like.. you meet different people and you get to see different things and you also get to defend innocent people.. as well. And, like I said, everyone likes it like.. when justice is served and the truth comes out, that's why. (Respondent AD, Female, 17 years old)*

*I don't know when.. oh I was watching a movie [giggles].. I was watching a movie, because I like watching TV and I like reading, so like I get lots of inspiration from things that I watch (Respondent CW, Female, 17 years old)*

It is clear from the responses above that respondents draw a lot from their exposure to media, which includes television and social media platforms. Respondent AD claims to have discovered her interest in law due to watching a crime series that shows a lawyer in good light. While it may have a positive influence on the respondent, it could later also prove to be frivolous to the career choice. These narratives draw the research's attention towards how the cultural environment governs the learner's immediate impressions of the world, choices and opinions. These affect at macrosystem level of the learner's journey as explained by the ecological systems theory.

#### **4.5.5 Role of SA Education System in Building Aspirations**

The National Youth Policy (2009:1) states that schools should provide knowledge and skills in a manner that helps youth build identity and self esteem through personal discovery and social interaction. In this section, the respondents were asked to describe the role of the education system in South Africa in building their aspirations.

#### **4.5.5.1 Subjects that Help Discover Aspirations**

When asked about the ways in which the education system helps learners at school level, the respondents pointed out at subjects being one of the key elements in bringing or not bringing about aspirations.

##### **No Helpful Subjects:**

*I don't think.. ya.. maybe if you go like; when I go to varsity and stuff; then they would like to focus more on what you would like to do with your education, but I don't think.. like majority of the stuff.. okay, we have seven subjects now, so four are compulsory and then the three you have to choose from a stream.. so, in my case I wanted to do Tourism as a subject as well, but and I saw life sciences in that column and I thought.. life sciences is accredited subject and tourism is not and I think that's more important.. like of you want to go to varsity and then.. I think they would take note of you doing life sciences, so I dropped that subject even though I would like to do it. So then, if I go to varsity I can always just take it; I can do tourism there. **(Respondent CW, Female, 17 years old)***

*Umm.. not really, because I have a passion for photography and passion for marketing. For tourism, I don't want to take that and then become nothing. But then, ya, marketing and photography mainly. **(Respondent LG, Male, 17 years old)***

From the narratives above, it can be concluded that many subjects taught in school do not match the aspirations or subject interests of the learners. What respondent CW expressed is a huge concern in the current education system in South Africa; it offers learners with limited choices when it comes to picking subjects of interest in conjunction with other subjects. The choice is further limited by setting difficult standards for the learners to score marks and to then pick between subjects to drop and subjects to major in. Respondent LG says he has interest in photography, but it is not taught in school as a subject. This means that he will only be able to take up a photography course after

matric, which could be late. The prevailing education system does not account into consideration the dire need for including subjects or short courses to focus on unconventional fields.

***A Few Helpful Subjects:***

*Yes, LO - life orientation! It speaks about like different situations, like self awareness and self reflection classes and stuff, so that helps.. (Respondent JW, Male, 17 years old)*

*Actually, history.. because history goes with law and that actually helps with what I need to know when I go there. (Respondent DD, Female, 17 years old)*

*Umm.. my learning at school actually did. I became interested in law because of like learning about the history and that is very big in law. And like the history of our country and how it got together, that is why I'm interested in politics. I mean it.. actually like.. boosted my.. I know why most things happen. (Respondent AD, Female, 17 years old)*

While most respondents vouched for Life Orientation as one subject that is helpful in discovering aspirations, some found history to be helpful in their journey to becoming a lawyer. As described in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (2011:8), “Life skills deals with the holistic development of the learner throughout childhood. It equips learners with knowledge, skills and values that assist them to achieve their full physical, intellectual, personal, emotional and social potential.” In other words, these are skills that push learners from a young age to become independent and fully aware of their surroundings, making them active young citizens of the society.

#### **4.5.5.2 Missing Elements That Can Help Better**

When asked about what was missing in the current education system, the respondents pointed out three main elements.

##### **Interaction with Field Experts:**

*Umm.. I think that if I had to sit down with someone who is like already in the position and they know what they're talking about. I'll know like if my choice will be the same or not. (Respondent AD, Female, 17 years old)*

*So, I think that in terms of the school there should be a lot of.. like bring in people who have lived the life in a particular career where we can go and say, hey, fill us in at this in-point and that in-point, so there should be a lot of communication and sharing from people who have experience of the team out here. (Respondent MS, Male, 17 years old)*

*Umm.. I'd like to read books about it and talk to people that are interior designers and what they went through to become one and experiences and how they went about it. (Respondent KM, Male, 17 years old)*

Interaction is key when it comes to deciding a career field, especially for someone who is unexposed to the bearings of the outside world. Most respondents felt that it would be easier for them to decide on what they wanted to do if they had field experts from their field of interest come speak to them about the good and the bad side of the profession. AD, MS and KM all expressed very similar feelings, but in different words. Having interactions with people working in the field will give them a sense of what to expect and how to plan the next steps accordingly.

##### **More Career Fairs:**

*Yeah, I hope like they have a career day, but they only have certain experts. If they focussed on trying to, like maybe do a survey before the time to find out how*

*much people want and what and finding people that's in the field, even if it's one person. (Respondent MJ, Male, 17 years old)*

*Well, if you tell me in grade eight it would be better if there was a broad explanation of all career choices. Yes, grade nine you get that, but it's still technically the subjects that the school provides. Like, we don't get, for example agriculture or something like that. And what if someone around us would like to become a farmer in the future or something like that, but the school doesn't explain it to us, so we wouldn't have an opportunity to learn about it. (Respondent QM, Female, 17 years old)*

Many respondents realise the need for more career fairs as it gives them the opportunity to learn and understand more about the profession or subject. MJ was of the view that if the school conducted a comprehensive survey to gauge what kind of field experts students are looking to meet and in what field, it would be a much more fruitful activity. According to respondent QM, the school should display all career options in front of learners earlier than they currently do, so that they have enough time to work on their subjects of interest and are then able to choose what they want in grade 11. She also raised a very interesting point on how the school fails to acknowledge unconventional fields such as agriculture. For instance, agriculture could be of deep interest to a student, but they might never have the opportunity to learn about it in school. The respondents also claim that the knowledge available in school is very limited and hence the fairs are a necessity.

### ***Better Subject Choices:***

*Like.. if they would explain what.. the real subjects you can choose because then you can see what you like and then you can explain that if you had the characteristics to do that.. that specific job.. (Respondent NJ, Male, 17 years old)*

*I wish they maybe expose us.. in grade 10 they made us chose our subjects and I didn't really.. because my parents chose my subjects for me, so I didn't really know anything about the subjects. So, I think maybe before even grade nine or 11, they could have just given a little bit of this and a little bit of that, just so we can taste what its actually like. Because, now that I do accounting and I really don't like it [giggles].. so maybe they could have just explained or just gave us more insight into what it actually is.. for our future. (Respondent AA, Male, 17 years old)*

Currently, in the South African education system, the learners are made to choose their subjects of focus or stream in grade 10. The narratives above clearly elucidate that it is too late to decide what they want to study further and hence they should receive a taste of all the subjects much before they are asked to decide their subjects. It is also evident that not much information related to the subject is given to the learners. At the tender age of 15 or 16, it is difficult for the learners to see all the way through the subjects and decide what is best for them. The lack of sure opinion and direction weakens the school social capital in the learner's journey thereby affecting their achievement motivation and aspirations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The final chapter of this thesis represents the findings of the researcher and also gives substantial recommendations in order to enhance aspiration building in young learners. The researcher first speaks on how the findings of the study are relevant to each of the topical areas identified and then an overall perspective of the relationship between schooling and aspirations is offered.

### **5.2 KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The conclusion drawn from the findings are in line with the five research objectives of the study. Performance of the findings on the themes that guide the framework for analysis have each been studied in separate tabular representations. Each theme has been judged based on review of its performance on their indicators, that is, their respective categories and its sub-categories. This has guided the main conclusions and subsequent recommendations of the research. A comparative study of how the indicators have fared within each category and then within each theme is done to determine the significant findings.

#### **5.2.1 Objective 1**

##### ***To Examine the Educational Experience of Learners at School***

Interaction with the learners suggest that academic interests of learners apparently were not steered by the fact that the school they attended were less or more resourced. The positive change in academic interests of learners cannot necessarily be attributed to the educational experience of learners at school, while it could have an underlying influence. The reasons that are understood to be positively affecting the change in academic interests are more self-driven than influenced by factors that are outside of the personal journey of the learners. They stated how their own conscious realisations about themselves and about the world around them have helped their minds evolve and shape their academic interests. It seems imperative to note here that the basic school

environment must have role of a certain degree in creating an enabling environment for its learners to be able to think independently or creatively. This gets validated by the responses received on the potential reasons for a negative change in academic interest of the learners. Factors attributed to causing a negative change revolve around the classroom environment, which is independent of the resource availability at the school.

Upon further interrogation, it was understood that the kind of school learners came from did not seem to have an effect on the performance level or grades of learners. The improvement or non-improvement in performance of learners rather appeared to be dependent on factors within the classroom. The reasons that stood out in the interaction with the learners included student-teacher connection, peer-pressure, overload of work and insufficient guidance by teachers. However, some learners negated any dependence on the school and credited their performance to their own abilities. This links back to the theoretical framework used in the study on achievement motivation; it implies the conscious or unconscious drive to do well in an achievement-oriented activity.

The resources available at school could have an impact on the educational experience of learners at a macro level. At the micro level, what seems to appear that the more important resource, in the form of human capital, are the teachers. Most learners from the under-resourced school expressed contentment in the motivation they received by teachers. Whereas, all learners from the better-resourced school seemed to find no sense of motivation coming from their teachers. This observation could again be conclusive to the fact that the kind of school learners go to could only have a limited repercussion on the learners' overall educational experience.

Table 5: Comparative Indicators of School Journey and Educational Experience

<b>Change in Academic Interest</b>			
<b>Respondent</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Reason</b>
MS	School A	Positive	Conscious realisation towards betterment of society
AW	School B	Positive	Discovery of hidden talent
KB	School B	Positive	Evolved mind with age
BB	School B	Negative	Increased workload
MP	School B	Negative	Less focus
KD	Worse	No Change	Only focus on grades
<b>Change in Performance Level</b>			
<b>Respondent</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Reason</b>
MJ	School A	Improvement	Calibre at par with high school studies
AC	School A	Improvement	Will to work harder
QM	School A	Improvement	Good connection with teacher
KH	School A	Non-improvement	Increased competition
KM	School A	Non-improvement	Distracted by friends
BB	School B	Non-improvement	Increased workload
JW	School B	Non-improvement	Lack of effort; less guidance by teacher
EA	School A	No change	Sure of career choice
MD	School B	No change	Academic performance consistently excellent

<b>Educational or Career Guidance by Teacher</b>			
<b>Respondent</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Guidance</b>	<b>Manner</b>
MS	School A	Motivational	Prepares for transition
KD	School A	Motivational	Encourages; offers college options
MJ	School A	Motivational	Prepares for future education; encourages extra-curricular
AC	School A	Motivational	Career counselling
QK	School A	Unhelpful	Lack of guidance on further education
AW	School B	Unhelpful	Unhappy with class conduct
CF	School B	Unhelpful	Not enough guidance

### **5.2.2 Objective 2**

#### ***To Investigate the Effects of the Parental Education, Neighborhood and Family Background of Learners on their Educational Experience***

The findings of this study reveal that parents' educational achievements guided their expectations of their children's educational outcomes. Learners whose one or both parents did not complete their matriculation exhibited different expectations as compared to expectations of those parents who had matriculated. Parents who had either failed matric or dropped early out of school wanted their children to work on improving their grades in school. This expectation stemmed from the belief that their children could do better, possibly even better than them. They also wanted the best for their child, indicating that they probably regret their own failures and non-accomplishments.

Parents who had both completed their matric expected their children to do well and get a degree. While some learners expressed that their parents' only expectation was for them to do well within their capacity; their personal best would be satisfactory for par-

ents. Other matriculated parents apparently expected their child to get a degree in anything they decide to pursue. In no narrative did the learner display this expectation of their parents as a demand, but rather portrayed it something they would like their child to achieve. These particular findings imply that parents who had themselves matriculated valued the importance of quality education, which meant not only improving marks, but doing well in what interests the learner and moving up the ladder by means of further education.

In family social capital, structural elements of the family shape and constrain social interactions within the family (Coleman 1998). The findings of this study resonate with the structural characteristics of family social capital mentioned in the theoretical framework section. Parents who were both, unemployed and single, contributed to their child's learning experience by means of helping out with homework, preparing study schedules and consistently reminding the child to study. It is imperative to note that although the family structure could denote a low frequency of parent-child interactions, the parents' unemployment could be the reason for increased involvement in the child's learning experience. Concurrently, learners who did not mention their parents' profession during the interview, admitted to their parents being considerably involved in their learning experience. This could also be because either the parents are unemployed or do not discuss their profession with their children at home.

Growing up in violent neighborhoods exposes children to a myriad of influences that undermine their day-to-day educational experience outside of school. Whereas, growing up in peaceful and middle-class neighborhoods often provides an encouraging environment to study (Bray et al 2010). The study found that learners who came from decent and peaceful neighborhoods mostly reported a supportive community and one that is always striving for a better future through education. This community dynamic also had a positive effect on the learners' focus and ability to study after school hours. On the other hand, learners who belonged to violent and poor neighborhoods complained of having limited access to factors that contribute to educational success. Neighborhoods stricken by gangsterism, alcoholism and high pregnancy rates had a negative ef-

fect on the educational experience of learners; it caused disturbance during study hours and restricted access to community study material. Most learners who reported average performance in school, came from both kinds of neighborhoods, implying that the dynamics of the neighborhood and community has a possible influence on studies.

*Table 6: Comparative Indicators of Educational Experience Based on Family Background and Neighborhood*

<b>Parents' Expectations</b>				
<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Respondent Aspiration</b>	<b>Parents' Education</b>	<b>Expectation</b>	<b>Reason</b>
KH	Medicine/ Forensic Biology	Father: Matric Mother: Failed matric thrice	Improve grades	Wants the best for child
KM	Interior Design	Father: Matric Mother: Drop out	Improve grades	Believes child can do better
TL	Law	Both: Matric	Do well	Encourages child to work within capacity
CF	Law/Forensics/ Journalism	Both: Matric	Do well	Respects child's personal best
EA	Marine Engineer	Both: Matric	Get degree	To become a professional
LG	Marketing/ Photography	Both: Matric	Get degree	To become anything the child wants
BB	Chef	Both: Matric	Get degree	Self-motivated to follow parents' footsteps
<b>Parents' Contribution to Learning Experience</b>				

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Family Structure</b>	<b>Parents' Profession</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	<b>Manner</b>
AD	Single parent	No mention	Help with homework	Help in difficulty
KD	Single parent	Unemployed	Help with homework	Constant reminders; Prepares study schedule
MJ	Nuclear	No mention	Help with homework	Motivate; involve in studies
MR	Grandparent; sibling & single parent	Post office staff	Only motivation	Push to work hard & pass
AW	Nuclear	Don't know	Only motivation	Presence; own example
TL	Nuclear; sibling	Father: Store manager Mother: Stock controller	Only motivation	Inconsistent motivation; focus on family interaction

### **Effect of Neighborhood or Community on Studies**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>School Performance</b>	<b>Neighborhood</b>	<b>Community Dynamics</b>	<b>Effect</b>
KB	Average	Peaceful	Supportive towards higher education/ career aspirations	Easy to focus
KR	Average	Peaceful	High drop out rate	Easy to focus
TL	Average	Peaceful	Striving towards a better future	Convenient
AD	Average	Violent	High pregnancy rate	Incessant disruption caused by shooting

KH	Good	Violent	Alcoholism; lack of parent interest in child's future	Restricted access to community library; disturbance
LG	Average	Violent	Gangsterism; education waste of money	Lack of silence and peace; cannot relax and study

### 5.2.3 Objective 3

#### ***To Explore the Learners' Plans After Matriculation***

One of the main research objectives was to trace the origin of learner aspirations and to understand what entailed their vision for the future. The researcher was able to draw a parallel between the learner's aspiration and their parents' interest or profession; it seems to be one of the ways by which the learners realise their aspiration. Often parents play an integral role in transferring their own interest or learnings from their profession on to their child. This happens by the virtue of the child looking up to the parents because of their success or because they grow up watching their parents do what they are passionate about.

Talent and skill are two things that could either be inherent or be picked up by a child while growing up. The study found that learners who discovered their talent at a relatively early stage in life, were the ones who were not only sure, but also specific about what they planned to do with their aspiration. These discoveries were made as a result of being given the creative and spacial freedom to explore and stumble upon their own likes and dislikes. In some cases, the stepping in of mentor figures at the right time played a critical part in reaffirming the learners' aspiration.

Subjects taught in school help form the base on which learners begin to make sense of the world and to take keen interest in certain subjects. The findings show that introduc-

tion to new subjects in the higher grades sparked a new curiosity in learners to delve deeper into those subjects. These subjects were not known to learners before high school, but when they were introduced, it gave learners a wider range of options to consider for further studies or aspirations.

In many parts of the world, unconventional pathways of education and learning face difficulty in gaining acceptance, especially by family and society. However, the research found that a considerable number of learners in South Africa consider opting for alternative pathways after completing their matriculation. Although the norm being going to college or university, learners were seen to be more favorable towards taking a gap year to either work or travel post matriculation. For most learners, the gap year will give them an opportunity to work and earn money for further education or it will help them discover the world, alongside discovering themselves. Some learners who will take time off might also find it beneficial for them to be able to understand and gauge their aspiration.

*Table 7: Comparative Indicators of Plans After Matriculation*

<b>Discovery of Aspirations</b>			
<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Aspiration</b>	<b>Means of Discovery</b>	<b>Reason</b>
LS	Doctor	Parents' interest/ profession	Mother in same field; born to be doctor
KD	Chef	Parents' interest/ profession	Influence of mother; taught child to make things
MJ	Baker	Inborn Talent/Skill	Early discovery; motivation from mentor
BB	Chef	Inborn Talent/Skill	Discovery while playing with sand makers
KM	Interior design	Subject choices	Introduction to arts subject in grade 10

AC	Law/dance	Subject choices	Keen interest in biology and anatomy
QM	Chartered Accountancy	Subject choices	Introduced to accounting in grade 9; influenced by teacher who is accountant; interaction with various accountants
<b>Plans Other Than Studying</b>			
<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Aspiration</b>	<b>Plan</b>	<b>Reason</b>
SB	Nurse	Gap year	To work
SD	Business/HRM/ Accounting	Gap year	Discover world & self
AW	Football (S)	Travel/work	Play at club abroad
NJ	Don't know	Travel/work	Earn money for university; understand aspiration

#### 5.2.4 Objective 4

##### **To Understand the Role of the Educational Journey of Learners in Informing Their Aspirations**

The data exhibits significant impact of the learnings at school on learner aspirations. Most learners attributed their aspiration discovery to the subjects taught in school. In this case, it did not matter what school the learners came from, but of paramount importance was the way in which the subjects directly fed into the learners' aspirations. This implies that the timing for introduction of those subjects is key; when they are introduced to learners, they start to develop an interest and assign an aspiration based on their choice. Very few learners remained unaffected by the teachings at school, which according to them, were not relevant to their interests. Such learners, however, expressed

very clear aspirations and showed positive signs of pursuing their passion, regardless of the resources available at school.

A majority of learners who came from school A attributed their discovery of aspirations to other key elements in school; participation in school clubs and societies, and own interest in subject. Exposure to activities in the school environment exposes learners to the vast world of competition, team work, authority, responsibility and management skills. These skills cannot be taught in a classroom from a textbook, but rather require practical simulations in a yet secure environment. Learners who exhibited specific aspirations in their field of interest were those who built their aspirations courtesy of the subjects they were taught in school. The practicalities of those subjects made the learning experience more engaging and exposed learners to a holistic view of the environment.

Research findings reflect that learners from both schools, A and B, had some idea about what they wanted to become or at least knew the subjects they wanted to possibly pursue after school. While most of them developed their aspirations within the school environment, there were some that were influenced by factors outside of school. Learners stated that exposure to extra-curricular activities outside of school, such as participation in religious programs and performing arts contributed to their broadening of mind and also gave them an opportunity to express themselves and be part of something that was larger than them. A large group of learners also claimed to be significantly influenced by media and television, which offers a wide variety of content. Exposure to online platforms, television shows and movies opened up new and exciting pathways for learners to gauge their aspirations. This means that media today has a larger role to play in influencing young people towards their future.

Table 8: Comparative Indicators of Role of Educational Journey in Shaping Aspirations

<b>Aspirations Born Out of School Learnings</b>				
<b>Respondent</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Aspiration</b>	<b>Learning</b>	<b>Manner</b>
TL	School B	Lawyer	Helpful	Teachings of business & history; Fed directly into career/ aspiration
AD	School A	Lawyer	Helpful	History taught much about the world; instilled interest in law
MJ	School A	Baker	Helpful	Discovery of talent in business through subject & teacher motivation
EA	School A	Marine Engineer	Unhelpful	Teachings in school not relevant to student interests
AA	School B	Don't know	Unhelpful	No interesting offerings at school
<b>Aspirations Born Out Of Other Key Elements</b>				
<b>Respondent</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Aspiration</b>	<b>Key Elements</b>	<b>Manner</b>
MJ	School A	Baker	School club/ society	Experience of team work, responsibility & creative freedom

QM	School A	Chartered Accountant	School club/ society	Exposure to inter-school competitions
CF	School B	Lawyer/ Forensics/ Journalist	School club/ society	Experience of organising events; working with people of same interests
KH	School A	Medicine/ Forensic Biology	Subject interest	Experiments & practicals made subject more engaging; teacher motivation
MR	School A	Ceramics Designer	Subject interest	Holistic learning of environment through exposure to subject

### Aspirations Born Due to Factors Outside of School

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Aspiration</b>	<b>Factor</b>	<b>Manner</b>
AC	School A	Lawyer/Dancer	Extra-curricular activities	Experience of performing arts; opening up mind
BB	School B	Chef (S)	Extra-curricular activities	Participation in church programs
MR	School A	Ceramics Designer	Media/ Television	Exposure to various online platforms; relevant TV programs
AD	School A	Lawyer	Media/ Television	Influenced by shows on TV; appears ideal

CW	School B	Air Hostess/ Firefighter	Media/ Television	Eureka while watching a movie on TV
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### 5.2.5 Objective 5

#### ***To Study the Role of the South African (SA) Education System in Building Aspirations of the Learners***

Equal number of learners from school A and B reported that the subjects taught in school were not quite helpful in invoking interest or aspiration in the learners. These group of learners also admitted that the subject choices offered by schools were limited or did not match their aspiration. Learners who found a few subjects to be helpful in the journey of discovering their aspirations were mostly from school B. Although as seen in the findings of objective 1 of the study, none of the learners from school B claimed to receive support or guidance from their teachers. However, it is interesting to note that a majority of learners who reported having a few helpful subjects in school were also from school B. This leads the researcher to conclude that there is sufficient valuable content available in the education system, but probably loses its essence in its channel of delivery. It is the prerogative and responsibility of the teacher to deliver content to learners in a way that it boosts their interest.

On further interrogation with the learners it was found that frequent exposure to career fairs and interactions with field experts was crucial to the building of learner aspirations. All learners from school A expressed the need for opportunities to communicate and learn from the journey of field experts. Possible avenues of discussion could include career fairs with themes more aligned with learner interests. This study displays that even though learners who demanded such opportunities came from school A, they were confident in the aspiration they had chosen for themselves. This confidence further led them to demand for additional support within the school limitations. The findings of this study find a direct link to the social capital theory, wherein one of the process features of school social capital is the number of organisations in which student is involved.

An interesting revelation was made during the interaction with learners from school B. Although they studied at a school that apparently had better resources than school A, they were yet to discover their aspiration for which the needs expressed by them were rudimentary. According to school B learners, what requires improvement in the current education system in SA is the range of subject choices offered to learners, especially at high school. For most of these learners, just when they were beginning to discover their inclination toward a particular subject or career path, they were forced to drop the particular subject either due to low grades or ambiguous subject combinations. The study reveals the importance of subjects choices and availability of those choices to learners at the right time.

*Table 9: Comparative Indicators the Role of SA Education System in Building Aspirations*

<b>Subjects That Help Discover Aspirations</b>				
<b>Respondent</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Aspiration</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Manner</b>
CW	School B	Air Hostess	No helpful subjects	Limited by choice
LG	School A	Marketing/ Photography	No helpful subjects	No match to his aspiration
JW	School B	Psychology/ Occupational Therapy	Few helpful subjects	Self discovery & reflection through LO
DD	School B	Accountant/ Lawyer	Few helpful subjects	Match with aspiration
AD	School A	Lawyer	Few helpful subjects	Subject intrigued learner to delve deeper & make a career out of it
<b>Missing Elements In The System</b>				
<b>Respondent</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Aspiration</b>	<b>Element</b>	<b>Manner</b>

AD	School A	Lawyer	Interaction with field experts	Reassurance via conversation
MS	School A	Maths/ Business Science-related	Interaction with field experts	Communication & sharing through experience
KM	School A	Interior Designer	Interaction with field experts	Learn from expert's journey
MJ	School A	Baker	Career fairs	Align learner interests with fair themes
QM	School A	Chartered Accountant	Career fairs	Opportunity to learn about unconventional field
NJ	School B	Don't know	Better subject choices	Exposure to link between subject & learner capability
AA	School B	Don't know	Better subject choices	Better insight into subject at the time of making choice

## 5.3 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

### 5.3.1 Introduction

The previous section presented a comprehensive discussion and interpretation of the findings of the study. The current section presents the various insights and contributions of the research to add to the existing knowledge on the educational journey of high school learners in South Africa and how the journey shapes their aspirations. The contributions discussed below provide deeper understanding on how learners experience

education differently based on their school, neighborhood and family structure; and how these experiences shape learner aspirations.

#### ***5.3.1.1 Deeper Insight into Learner Aspirations Informed by their Educational Journey***

The study explored the educational experiences and the educational overall journey of learners and how the journey shapes their aspirations. Previous studies reveal data on the factors affecting student aspirations, but there are none that include the critical nuances attributed to learner performance, relationship with teachers, family and school social capital as determinants of aspirations.

#### ***5.3.1.2 Understanding the Relevance of Student Interactions with Key Field Experts***

School plays a pivotal role in improving the educational experience of learners. Being the only formal institution young people are associated with for nearly two decades, it is important for the school to provide avenues to learners for interaction with the outside world. This study provides rich narratives and deeper understanding on the dire necessity of exposure to more career fairs and customised interactions with key players in various job or business fields.

#### ***5.3.1.3 Comparative Analysis of Two Schools***

This study compared and contrasted the educational journey and its implications on learner aspirations between a public school and former Model C school. As a result of the comparison, the study found no significant affect of the resourcefulness of the school on learner aspirations and educational journey. However, it revealed that school social capital, in the form of teacher-student interaction, was relatively better in the public school. This becomes relevant in informing the education department the significance of encouraging teachers to hone their involvement with students.

## **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.4.1 Introduction**

Taking into account the various missing elements in the current education system in South Africa, this section aims to make recommendations to schools and to the education policy makers regarding the possible ways in which they can foster learner aspirations. These include introduction of (a) gap year programs, (b) better subject choices and (C) early exposure to subjects and their possible professional avenues. These changes and additions will help learners make informed choices about their future in a more efficient manner.

#### ***5.4.1.1 Gap Year Programs***

This study reveals that learners who find it difficult to understand their interests at school, require space and time to self-reflect and to discover their passion. A gap year program could possibly provide a platform for such learners to gain exposure to various fields and to also be able to test and hone their skills, before deciding on what to study further. The program could also allow space for learners to work part-time or full-time in order to earn money for college or university. In the professional world, a gap year is the year taken off right after school and before going to college or university (American Gap Association). It is also referred to as a sabbatical year. Gap year programs are popular in the US and the UK and are typically designed to do volunteer work in a different country and culture Find academic citation or remove. In a study by Karl Haigler & Rae Nelson, 'The Gap Year Advantage, independent study of 300 Gap Year students between 1997 - 2006,' it was discussed that gap experiences had an impact on the choice of academic major and career for most learners, in either setting them on a different path as compared to before a gap year or confirming their direction and aspirational choice.

#### ***5.4.1.2 Offer Better Subject Choices***

Interaction with most learners lead the study to conclude that incorrect combination of subjects could dissuade them from entering higher education programs or career fields

of their interest. These subjects choices are seldom made by the learners, but are rather forced upon them either due to low grades in their subject of interest or due to the rigidity of the combination offered. Therefore, the researcher recommends a more fluid approach to subject offerings and opportunity for reconciliation with subjects learners wish to pursue.

#### ***5.4.1.3 Increased Exposure to Career Fairs and Interactive Sessions with Field Experts***

Narratives collected by the researcher indicate a pressing need for learners to receive more exposure to the real-world intricacies. Career fairs, frequently organised by schools will give the learners a platform to explore their future options related to education or work. Interactive sessions with experts from various fields will allow learners the opportunity to first-hand understand the nuances, dynamics and prospects attached to the field of their interest. Such productive spaces can further help learners make informed subject and career choices at the right time.

### **5.5 CONCLUSION**

This research was taken up in an attempt to put the learners' educational and professional aspirations in perspective to the larger education system with the intent to add more depth to the overall understanding on the subject. The factors that govern a learner's aspiration are spread across various aspects of their life in and out of the primary learning space, which is the school. The study tries to understand patterns that are reflected out of individual narratives and how these reflections shape when studied overlaid on a group of narratives in their respective contexts.

The recommendations that have emerged from the research study will aid the SA education system to create a more enabling environment for learners to grow and succeed academically or professionally in the future. Based on the recommendations, the arrangements that shall be made to create a conducive learning atmosphere in schools

may help the learners discover their own potential in fields that might be of interest to them and those that otherwise may seem out of reach to them.

Instead of only focussing on designing curriculum that will ensure smooth transition from school to work world, with the intention of removing poverty, the National Youth Policy could look at designing curriculum that helps in inculcating and honing student aspirations from a young age. Such a system will help learners to gain more confidence and prepare them better for transition from school to work.

The researcher has identified key areas to extend on and enrich the work of this study. Further studies needs to explore the possible life-long benefits of exposure to interactive session with field experts during early schooling years of a learner. Another gap to be filled is research on the relevance of gap year programs in the SA education system and how it could be crucial in reducing the rate of unemployment in the country. Taking into considerations the limitations of the study, more comparative research needs to be conducted on schools with wider socio-economic disparities.

In conclusion, even though racial inequalities in the society hardly remain, they still have legacies attached to the way in which children in South Africa experience education. If the legacy of Apartheid remains, then so, too, does racial inequality in South African society, even if no longer being driven by formal discrimination.

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## APPENDIX 1:

### Semi-structured Interview Guide for Experiencing Participants (High School Learners)

#### **1. Describe your family background/neighborhood you come from.**

This is a conversational start in order to put the interviewees at their ease. The researcher is trying to get a sense of the learners' overall background so that it can inform their educational journey within a broader context.

[PROBES: Where were you born and raised?

Who do you live with? How long have you lived with them?

Describe your neighborhood.

Did you go to a different school before this? Which one and where was it?

When and why did you join this school?

What is your parents' education level?

Describe your relationship with your parents/guardian.]

#### **2. Describe your school journey/educational experience.**

[PROBES: How are you as a student in class?

How well do you do in academics?

Have there been any changes in your academic interest and performance level from primary school until now? Could you describe them?

To what extent do your teachers in school provide you guidance regarding future career or higher education choices?

#### **3. What are your plans after clearing matriculation examinations?**

[PROBES: Have you already discovered an inclination towards a particular subject or career path/profession? In other words, do you have aspirations?

If yes, describe what are they and how/when did you discover them?

If not, what do you plan to do with your time after matric?

How involved are your parents/guardians in your future planning? What do they want for you?]

**4. How do you think your family background and neighborhood affect your educational experience?**

[PROBES: Do your parents or guardian have expectations from you in terms of achieving a certain educational level? If so, what are they?

Describe the role of your family in your day-to-day studies. How do they contribute to your learning experience?

How does living in your neighborhood/community affect your studies?

Do you think the environment in your neighborhood is conducive to your academic well being? Describe how.

What are the common perceptions about education and career/aspirations in your community and how would you say they affect you?]

**5. Describe the role of your educational journey in shaping or not shaping your aspirations.**

[PROBES: Has your learning at school helped you discover your passion or aspiration? If it has, how? If it has not, how?

What role have your teachers played in helping you understand your passion?

What other key elements in your schooling years have helped you discover your passion?

If not your school, what could help you?]

**6. In what ways do you think the current education system in South Africa supports learners to build their aspirations?**

[PROBES: Are there any subjects that focus on helping you explore or understand your passion/interest in your school? If yes, how do they help?

What would help you to better decide your future educational/aspirational/career choices?]

### **Closing Remarks**

These are all the questions I have. Is there anything else you would like to talk about? Is there a question you would like to revisit? Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate you sharing such valuable information. I would once again like to remind you that everything you have shared with me today will remain confidential.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Parental Informed Consent for Participation of Child in Research Study University of Cape Town**

#### **An Exploration of High School Learners' Educational Journey and How it Shapes Their Aspirations**

##### **Description of the research and your child's participation**

Your child has been invited to join a research study to look at student aspirations. The purpose of this research is to understand the factors that affect the educational journey of a learner and how the journey informs their aspirations. Your child's participation will involve answering a few questions asked by the researcher, Vidushi Malhotra.

The amount of time required for your child's participation will be 20-30 minutes.

##### **Risks and discomforts**

There are no known risks associated with this research. In case of any discomfort expressed by your child, the process will be terminated immediately and you will have the choice to withdraw the information provided at any given time.

##### **Potential benefits**

There are no known direct benefits to the child that would result from the child's participation in this research. This research may help us to understand the gap in the current education system in South Africa and how it could be bridged.

##### **Protection of confidentiality**

Your child's name will not be used when data from this study are published. Every effort will be made to keep clinical records, research records, and other personal information confidential.

The researcher will store the audio files of the interview on a personal phone or laptop, with a protected password, to keep information confidential, and to protect it from unauthorized disclosure, tampering, or damage.

### **Voluntary participation**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to allow your child to participate or withdraw your child from the study at any time. Your child will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to allow your child to participate or to withdraw your child from this study.

### **Contact information**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Vidushi Malhotra at University of Cape Town at +27 840264060 or +91 9811543063. If you have any questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Cape Town Human Research Ethics Committee at Old Main Building of Groote Schuur Hospital, Floor E53, Room 46, Observatory, 7925.

### **Consent**

**I have read this parental permission form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my permission for my child to participate in this study.**

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

A copy of this parental permission form should be given to you.