Our voice counts: adolescents' view on their future in South Africa

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We focus on the impact of societal change and related societal problems on the youth of post-apartheid South Africa. Within the parameters of an eco-systemic model, it is argued that adolescents' perspectives on their future in this country could be negatively influenced by the extent of societal problems that are currently experienced in South Africa. Amidst severe problems such as poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, and violent crime the findings of an empirical investigation into the views 1,326 adolescents from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds indicate that a general spirit of optimism and independence exists, paired with a strong desire to escape the trappings of poverty and to fulfil their career and social expectations. The findings indicate that a new, non-racial generation is emerging, but also highlight a formidable ethical dilemma: not societal factors, but ironically the ailing education system, is blocking the future ideals of thousands of South African adolescents.

Keywords: adolescents; future expectations; societal problems; youth

Introduction and rationale of study

The nature and orientation of adolescents' future expectations are of particular relevance in South Africa due to the extent of social problems which are currently experienced. Knowledge about adolescents' future expectations is also of crucial importance for education. Disinterested and negative inclinations towards the future could manifest in low learner motivation, poor academic performance and a-social problems such as aggression, drug abuse and crime (Harris, Duncan & Bolsjoly, 2002). Daily media reports on crime, corruption, mismanagement, poverty and HIV/AIDS are the order of the day and it seems that crime is spiralling beyond control. According to a national survey by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention focusing on the youth, 40% of South African children between 12 and 22 years have already been victims of crime or violence (CJCP, 2006). This situation begs the question: How do societal problems (like crime and violence) impact on adolescents' perspectives and expectations regarding their future in their home country?

In view of the above research question, we undertook a research project on the future expectations of South African adolescents, which focused on the impact of social change on the youth of the three main population groups (white, brown, and black adolescents) and the extent to which their future orientations and expectations are influenced by socio-political changes that have taken place over the past decade. Owing to South Africa's diversity, the initial assumption was that these changes might impact uniquely on each of the population groups for the following reasons.

It was assumed that a negative future orientation would be the strongest

amongst the white Afrikaans-speaking adolescents. The political transformation that took place in South Africa in 1994 had a substantial impact on the White Afrikaans-speaking population. Apart from their abdication of political power, they also had to give up several other social, economic and cultural privileges. In this process, the loss of their majority group status was inevitable. The practice, of transforming the "white face" of the work force in South Africa to reflect the demographic profile of the population, has closed the door for many white job seekers in South Africa, thus becoming a major motive for emigration (Kadalie, 2006; Kenny, 2007; De Lange, 2007). Major symptoms of this motive are bitterness and alienation, and it has become increasingly evident that white groups are experiencing negative personal, economic and social consequences due to the reversal of racial privilege (Buys, 2006).

A further assumption was that the future expectations of black adolescents would be inherently positive in accordance with the excitement with which the black population group entered the post-apartheid political era. Black people have had particularly high expectations of their future (also in terms of retributive and affirmative dimensions of the new political dispensation) in South Africa. Möller (2005:258) maintains that after 1994, black South Africans have been the main recipients of benefits and they are still the group which believes that they stand first in line for future benefits. According to her, the majority of the black population is youthful and may anticipate considerable improvements to their life situations during their lifetime. Equal opportunities policies have raised expectations of job opportunities, especially among black youth. Various authors (Tyson & Stones, 2002; Everatt, 2002; Möller, 2005; Ganagakis, 2004) consistently report that the black youth feel 'enabled' and they express a sense of connectedness to themselves and their future. The new political dispensation resulted in an awareness of patriotism and a sense of ownership concerning their country and optimism regarding the future. Despite this confident and individualistic trend in the minds of the black youth, we felt the need to determine the extent to which the black youth have perhaps been disillusioned by the wide-spread incidence of crime, violence, poverty, HIV/AIDS, and the like, in South Africa.

As was the case in the previous political dispensation, brown societies still seem to experience a lack of a collective identity and they struggle to establish a rightful place in their country. In the midst of this struggle, brown adolescents have to prepare themselves for a future in South Africa. In the new political dispensation the brown population is still (to a debatable degree) a marginalised group. "First we were not white enough and now we are not black enough" (Adhikari, 2004:168). This situation causes considerable bitterness in the realisation that they have not really advanced from a minority group position.

In the light of the above, an investigation into the youth's outlook on their prospects in South Africa seems of particular relevance.

In the following discussion a brief orientation on the role that social context plays in the future expectations of adolescents is provided. Next some

major social problems in South Africa are highlighted. This orientation sets the theoretical and contextual backdrop against which the findings of an empirical investigation are put forward.

The influence of social factors on the future expectations of the youth

When reflecting on the future of the adolescent, the ecosystemic model can be used as point of departure, as it considers factors in the immediate environment of the adolescent (family, school, peer group, community) and the mutual interaction between these factors. In this context, the contextual framework of Bronfenbrenner (1986) is relevant (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). This framework is based on the systems theory which explains mutual relationships between people, communities and institutions. The systems theory, therefore, views different levels or group in the social context as 'systems' where the functioning of the whole is totally dependent on the interaction between the various parts, and vice versa. These systems can be distinguished as micro system, meso system, exo system and macro system (Figure 1).

For the purposes of this study, the macro system is of importance. This system includes the attitudes, beliefs, values and ideologies inherent in a community and culture and consequently has a pertinent impact on the exo, meso and micro systems (see Figure 1). Future expectations are decisively determined by the macro level, where it is grounded by and through the economy, politics, social health, social values, as well as the nature of the community and relevant circumstances. These aspects of the macro level are influenced and moulded by, and impact simultaneously on, different aspects of the various systems, as indicated in the figure. To put it simply: the circumstances, attitude to life and future expectations can mainly be understood within a comprehensive framework of concentric systems, with the macro system (as "fundamental character" of society) as essential determinant.

Alsaker & Flammer (1999) report extensively on the impact of the social context (in terms of macro socio-economic, political and cultural factors) in the so-called Euronet study. This project explored the future expectations of adolescents in 11 European countries and was widely supported by prominent international youth studies (Crockett & Silbereisen, 2000; Larson, Bradford, Brown & Mortimer, 2002). The study indicated a few common denominators in the modern youth's mind-set as far as their future expectations are concerned. Amongst others, the following findings are worth mentioning: adolescents generally have a feeling of control over their future (Grob & Flammer, 1999:111) and their love for the own is stronger than the urge to settle elsewhere (although there is a relation between an unfavourable political order and an outward orientation) (Flannagan & Botcheva, 1999:141). Despite the fact that religious convictions remain a significant influence (Larson, 2002:13), materialistic values and aspirations appear to be prominent (*ibid.*). As can be expected, variations in these generic results are determined by gender, age, self-concept and personal circumstances (Trommsdorf, 2000).
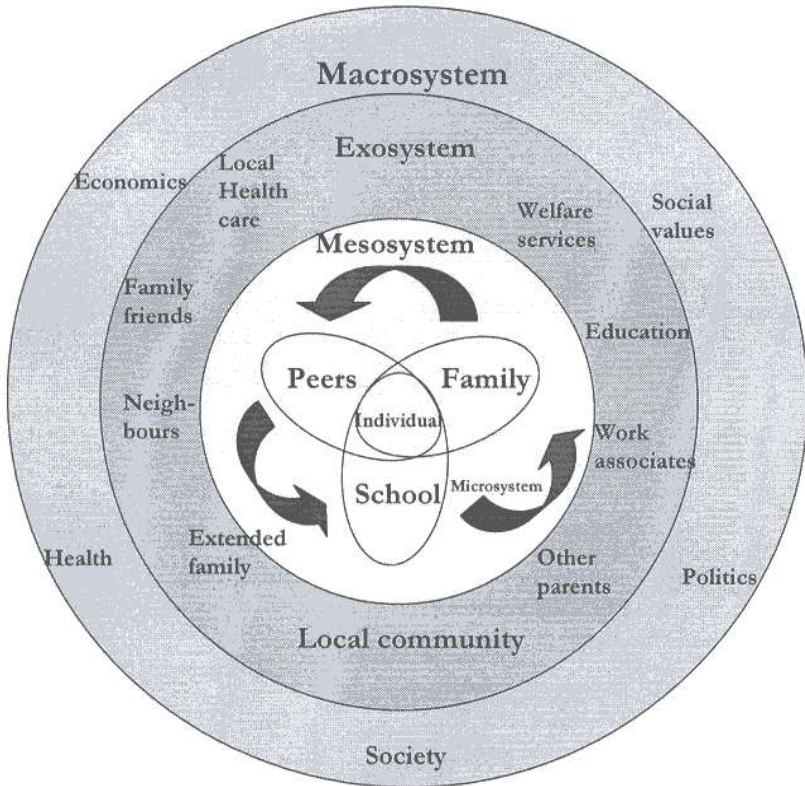
Figure 1   (Swart & Pettipher, 2005:11)

Elder and Russell (2000) undertook an extensive study on the extent of outward future orientation amongst adolescents who find themselves in deprived social conditions. According to their findings young people, especially the more ambitious ones, will look for greener pastures when their circumstances are unfavourable, regardless of family ties and love for their own. Although their research focused on economic deprivation, the findings on outward future orientation could be applied to other forms of social problems (*ibid.*:34). Of importance is that the extent and intensity of young people's outward future orientation serve as pointers of the relative welfare (or lack thereof) in society.

Larson, Wilson and Mortimer (2002:159) emphasise the social imperative to provide a secure future in the interest of the youth. They provide an exten-

sive profile of the modern adolescent based on studies in eight world regions (*ibid.*:159-166). Some social obstacles which adolescents may encounter on their way to adulthood in the 21st century are highlighted. These include global poverty, inadequate and irrelevant provision of education, increasing unemployment rates, political apathy regarding the youth's welfare and future, and insufficient provision to equip people with interethnic communication skills in a globalized age. The necessity of comprehensive research concerning the social welfare and development of the youth is hence implied (*ibid.*:165).

Larson (2002:16-17) draws attention to the fact that the social contexts in which the youth build their dreams and formulate their plans concerning the future are determined by politics and the domestic affairs of the state, such as political order and the efficiency and stability of the state. He points out that weak, destabilised and distracted governments are less able to provide a beneficial developmental infrastructure to children and adolescents. He concludes that stable governments and minimizing domains of misrule are vital to the future of adolescents.

We asked ourselves: To what extent does a "beneficial developmental infrastructure" (see above) exist for the South African youth?

Societal challenges : the South African scenario
Social transitions are traumatic events which are characterized by distress and uncertainty (Sarakinsky, 2001; Jung, 1998). The political reform which South Africa underwent in 1994 from an apartheid government to a democratic state impacted on all population groups and filtered through to every facet of life. South African adolescents find themselves in a particularly precarious situation. On the one hand they must negotiate the development of their own identities, while, on the other, they must adapt to the social changes that are occurring around them (*cf.* Finshilescu & Dawes, 2001:132).

South African adolescents face significantly greater challenges than their counterparts in countries where society is more stable (Smith & Stones, 2001:159). The extent of these challenges is reported on an almost daily basis in the media. Poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, and violent crime are societal problems which are faced by adolescents across racial boundaries in South Africa in varying degrees. This is evident from the following summary.

Kamper (2001:11) reports the distressing fact that 40% of South Africa's population find themselves in acute poverty conditions, so much so that they are living below the so-called poverty line. Less than 30% of the employable poor are actually working and this is compounded by the fact that 72% of the country's poor live in rural areas (*ibid.*). The most unfortunate aspect of the problem of poverty in South Africa is that it is ever-increasing, notwithstanding the political change in 1994 (Terreblanche, 2004:213-214). The brown population, in particular, is subjected to this social evil. In a study conducted by researchers at the University of Stellenbosch it was found that poverty decreased amongst all population groups between 1990 and 2000, except in the case of the brown population (Adhikari, 2004:172).

Kingdon and Knight (2004:199) believe that the unemployment rates in South Africa are extremely high by international standards. They point out that the general unemployment figure has increased from an already elevated percentage of 31.5% in 1993 to 42.4% in 2008 (Statistics South Africa, 2008:19). Apparently unemployment figures vary significantly according to race. Africans face unemployment rates of 41% whilst the rate for whites is only 6%. The incidence of unemployment also differs significantly in relation to variants such as age, region, gender, and education (Kingdon & Knight, 2004:199).

The HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa is the most recent in Africa and one of the most severe worldwide (Whiteside & Sunter, cited in Prinsloo, 2005: 2). The life expectancy of South Africans has consequently decreased to about 50 years (Dorrington, Bradshaw, Johnson & Budlender, 2004). Prinsloo (2005:2) cautions that during the period 2000 to 2010 approximately eight million people will have died of the disease — most of them in the age group 17 to 45. Estimates of the prevalence of HIV/AIDS for 2004 indicate that the 15 to 24 age group and, more particularly, young women, have the highest infection rate (Dorrington *et al.*, 2004:8).

The persistent media reports on violent crime demonstrate that this is one of the most topical societal problems in South Africa. South Africa is aptly characterized as a "high crime society" (Berg & Scharf, 2004:78). Whereas delinquency under the previous dispensation was more politically inclined, the face of crime has changed and violent crime is now the norm (*cf.* Keegan, 2005:20). According to Berg and Scharf (2004), violent crime manifests as murder, attempted murder, culpable homicide, aggravated robbery, rape (and attempted rape), assault and common assault. These authors furthermore emphasize that many incidents of crime are not reported and are therefore not reflected by the official statistics. Consequently a so-called 'dark figure' of unrecorded crime exists (*ibid.*:62).

Racism, the most apparent flaw of the apartheid era, has now presumably been replaced by other manifestations of an ailing society like fears of crime (Smith & Stones, 2001:159). These authors conclude that a new nation cannot be built on fear and mistrust (*ibid.*:162). Crime has indeed become a significant emigration factor. In a research study conducted in 2006 by Research Surveys, it was found that 55% of all South Africans who settled in Australia and New-Zealand based their decision to emigrate on reasons tied to violence and crime (Poverty, 2006).

In view of the fact that adolescents' views on their personal futures, as well as their emerging identities, are influenced by their societal, political and economic contexts (*cf.* Finchilescu & Dawes, 2001:33) it appears that circumstances in South Africa could have a significant negative impact on adolescents' future expectations. To establish the extent to which this is indeed the case, an empirical study was done to gain insight about adolescents' perspectives and expectations regarding their future in South Africa. More specifically, the following research questions guided the empirical research: Are

adolescents positive about their future in South Africa? What are adolescents' views on future opportunities and threats in South Africa? To what extent do adolescents tend to a global, rather than a South African, future orientation?

Empirical survey
The research questions, with their focus on general views held by South African adolescents, implied the need for a questionnaire survey. In accordance with the eco-systemic model (see Figure 1), such a survey would ensure a representative body of data on the views of a quantitatively significant number of respondents from various backgrounds and socio-economic strata.

The empirical study therefore involved respondents from the three population groups in South Africa who are most impacted by the political situation in South Africa, i.e. brown, black and white adolescents, living in rural, as well as peri-urban and urban areas. This was based on the assumption that the histories, as well as the socio-economic circumstances, of these groups would impact on the way they view their future.

Sampling
Although Grade 12 learners would have been the ideal research population, principals have good reason to disallow any infringement on these learners' preparations for the matriculation examinations. Grade 11 learners were therefore selected. There was no reason to believe that these learners would differ significantly from Grade 12 learners in contemplating their future.

A total of 13 secondary schools took part in this study. The selection of schools was made on the assumption that economic and geographic variables may influence the future expectations of the youth, and subsequently schools were purposively selected on the basis of their potential to provide rich data. Schools were further selected on the basis of their learner composition (culturally diversified versus monoculture), the socio-economic location of the school (prosperous versus challenged areas) and geography (urban versus rural schools). The distribution of the participating schools and their Grade 11 enrolment are indicated in Table 1. The distribution of the 13 schools is 8:5 for both the urban : rural, and challenged : prosperous ratios, which was regarded as representatively valid.

Questionnaire design and application
In order to ensure the content validity of the questionnaire, its design was preceded by a qualitative pilot study. Having obtained the necessary school management permission, all the Grade 11 learners from a culturally diversified school in Pretoria were requested to write an essay, not exceeding 300 words, on the topic: "My future in South Africa". The learners were informed about the research project, and their participation was voluntary. A text analysis was made of these essays to determine trends and themes in the future expectations of learners.

The text analysis produced valuable data. In order to verify the data, a

focus group interview was conducted with eight of the learners. The partici-
pants (boys and girls) in the discussion were culturally diversified (in view of
the research assumptions, as already alluded to) and were selected on the
basis of the positive and negative viewpoints on their future in South Africa,
as expressed in their essays. In adherence to the requirements for ethical
principles, the participants were informed about the research project, and
their voluntary participation in the focus group interview was ensured. Sub-
sequently, themes from the essays and focus groups were identified in order
to design a questionnaire for application on a bigger scale.

A concise, user-friendly questionnaire was designed, of which only the
last item was an open one. The questionnaire focused on the respondent's
self-image, home and school environment, future plans, views on South
Africa's assets and problems, and own future plans.

The principals of the participating schools (see Table 1) were approached
and informed about the aims and scope of the research project as well as the
importance of their schools' voluntary participation. As was stated in each
questionnaire, assurance of the confidentiality of data was once again given.
The principals then had the opportunity to scrutinize the questionnaire con-
tent, and to consent to its use. All principals were positively inclined towards
the project and gave permission for the completion of the questionnaires.

Table 1   Geographical and socio-economic distribution of participating schools, with number
of Grade 11 learners per school

	Population group			
Province	Brown	Black	White	Total
Gauteng	A (u,c) :105	A (u,p) : 60	A (u,p) : 120	6 : 533
		B (u,p) : 62	B (u,c) : 98	
		C (u,c) : 88		
Free State		D (r,c) : 182		2 : 359
Mpumalanga			C (u,p) : 177	1 : 107
			D (r,p) : 107	
Northern Cape	B (r,c) : 60			1 :
Western Cape	C (u,c) :127			1 : 180
Eastern Cape	D (r,c) : 77			2 :
	E (r,c) : 63			
Total	5 : 432	4 : 392	4 : 502	13: 1 326

u = urban; r = rural; p = community prosperous; c = community challenged

Language teachers distributed the questionnaires in their classes, which
meant that all the Grade 11 learners of the participating schools got an oppor-
tunity to be voluntarily involved in the research project. No respondent re-
fused participation. The return rate was thus approximately 100%.

Findings
In reporting and interpreting the findings, attention will first be paid to biogra-
phical data (see Table 2), followed by the exposition of data on respondents'

home and school environment, their plans for the future, and their views on South Africa.

Table 2   Biographical data

Population group	Brown		Black		White		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
15 years	0	0.0	15	3.8	24	4.8	39	3.0
16 years	155	36.3	91	23.2	95	19.0	341	25.9
17 years	163	38.6	159	40.6	302	60.2	624	47.5
18 years	64	15.2	86	21.9	70	13.9	220	16.7
19 years	39	9.2	41	10.5	11	2.2	91	6.9
Total	421	100	392	100	502	100	1 315	100

The total number of respondents in the survey was 1,326, and their age distribution was as follows: 15 years (3%); 16 years (25.9%); 17 years (47.5%); 18 years (16.7%), and 19 years (6.9%). The findings represent the views of a particular age cohort of respondents (16–18 years), which was the original research intention. The respondents' gender representation was almost ideal, i.e. 616 boys (46.5%) and 708 girls (53.5%).

Self-assessment

The respondents were asked to assess themselves according to various aspects of self-image and self-knowledge, and the results of this self-assessment are presented in Table 3.

The data in Table 3 clearly reflect a generally positive self image, with a particularly strong perception of personal success (83.7%), a happy, easy-going disposition (85.9%) and out-going, social life-orientation. A positive inclination to life is evident from strong goal orientation (83.3%), enthusiasm about new opportunities (87.0%), optimism about the future (93.2%), as well as from the relatively low incidence and lack of energy for life (22.5%). The respondents expressed particularly strong identification with religion (93.7%).

Youth is often regarded as the carefree stage of life, and with this in mind the percentage on being frequently worried is unexpectedly high (48.3%). It is also significant that white adolescents expressed the inclination of being "frequently worried" (being in an anxious state of mind for multiple reasons) to a much larger extent than black respondents (64.3% versus 29.8%), whilst the percentage for the brown respondents was in between at (46.5%). These scores could be linked to a previous study (Kamper & Steyn, 2007) where unemployment as a result of affirmative action and violent crime are cited as the main reasons for white people contemplating emigration. A survey amongst metro dwellers in South Africa resulted in the alarming finding that 75% of the respondents (blacks 71%, whites 87%, coloureds 71%, Indians/Asians

90%) did not feel safe any more due to the crime levels (Research Surveys, 2006).

Table 3   Self-knowledge

Population group	Brown		Black		White		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
I know myself as ...								
Reserved, not very social	147	34.0	203	51.8	131	26.1	481	36.3
Goal-oriented	359	83.1	342	87.2	404	80.5	1 105	83.3
Enthusiastic about new opportunities	380	88.0	332	84.7	441	87.9	1 153	87.0
Successful in what I do	336	78.0	339	86.5	435	86.7	1 110	83.7
Satisfied with my life thus far	289	66.7	216	55.1	376	74.9	884	66.7
Frequently worried	201	46.5	117	29.8	323	64.3	641	48.3
Like taking the lead	277	64.1	244	62.2	306	61.0	827	62.4
A happy, easy-going person	372	86.1	336	85.7	431	85.9	1 139	85.9
Lack energy for life	74	17.1	77	19.6	147	29.3	298	22.5
Like to participate in sports activities	212	49.1	276	70.4	286	57.0	774	58.4
Religious	410	94.9	361	92.1	475	94.6	1 246	93.7
Outspoken	210	48.6	243	62.0	286	57.0	739	55.7
Looking forward to the future	415	96.1	370	94.4	451	89.8	1 236	93.2
Total	432	100	392	100	502	100	1 326	100

Particularly noteworthy is the extent of expressed satisfaction with life thus far. These data represent the political situation in South Africa where the white population group are still to a great extent the beneficiaries (74.9%) followed by brown adolescents (68%) and lastly the black respondents (55.1%) who are still mainly living in deprived circumstances. It is also worth mentioning that brown adolescents scored highest with regard to their future expectations (96.7%) followed by black learners (94.4) with white adolescents portraying a score of 89.8%. These percentages reflect that, essentially, South

African adolescents from diverse cultural backgrounds hold a common positive view about their future prospects in their home country.

Home and school environment
To form an idea on how the respondents' home and school environments accommodated principal values and possibly influenced perceptions about South Africa positively or otherwise, the questionnaire included items on the attendance of religious gatherings; home conversations about South Africa; teachers' remarks about South Africa, and the frequency of reading newspapers. The data on these items are presented in Table 4.

These data reflect first of all a rather strong religious living context, with 75.6% of the respondents expressing a frequency of church attendance of between once a week and twice a month. This finding verifies the previous one on religious self image (see Table 3). The nature of home conversations about South Africa varied between positive and negative (59.9%) and to lesser degree exclusively positive (13.0%) or exclusively negative (14.9%). The very same trend, with almost comparable percentages, is evident from the respondents' feedback on their teachers' remarks about South Africa. The data on the frequency of newspaper reading indicates that about 43% of the respondents do so daily, or two to four times per week.

From the contextual data on respondents' home and school environments, it would appear that they were mostly exposed to critical, rather than overly positive, remarks about South Africa, that they were reasonably informed about socio-political circumstances in South Africa, and that their life and world views were significantly underpinned by religious values.

Future plans
In order to ascertain whether the wish to build a future elsewhere was significantly present amongst South African adolescents, a number of items probed their future career and study plans, and their main motive for leaving South Africa, if they had an intention of doing so. There was also an open item in the questionnaire on which the respondents could freely express their vision, on where they would see themselves in terms of career and family in ten years time. The item responses are indicated in Table 5, with the exception of the responses to the open item, which will be presented separately.

The data in Table 5 firstly reveal that only about 8.8 % of the respondents have any wish to settle permanently overseas — see item on working overseas permanently, for which support fluctuated between 11.5% and 3.9%. The same overall margin of interest is expressed in working overseas before taking up studies (13.1%) and could be ascribed to the popular trend where school leavers opt for working overseas for financial reasons before returning to South Africa to start a career. This is also supported by the percentage for the wish to work overseas and then return to South Africa (32.7%). These findings appear to indicate a significant measure of global thinking amongst adolescents, i.e. to go for best opportunities, but only for a small minority this would imply uprooting from South Africa. The data also spell out clearly that further

Table 4 Home and school environment

Population group	Brown		Black		White		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Attendance of religious gatherings								
At least once a week	225	52.1	197	50.5	309	61.6	731	55.5
Approximately twice a month	112	25.9	68	17.4	86	17.1	266	20.1
Irregular	70	16.2	68	17.4	53	10.6	191	14.4
Seldom/Never	25	5.8	57	14.6	54	10.8	136	10.3
Total	432	100	390	100	502	100	1 324	100
Home conversations about SA								
Usually positive	49	11.3	93	24.0	29	5.8	171	13.0
Usually negative	33	7.6	39	10.1	124	24.9	196	14.9
Alternating between positive and negative	296	68.5	207	53.4	286	57.4	789	59.9
Don't really talk about SA affairs	54	12.5	49	12.6	59	11.9	162	12.3
Total	432	100	388	100	498	100	1 318	100
Teachers' remarks about SA								
Generally positive	58	13.5	104	26.8	92	18.3	254	19.2
Generally negative	23	5.3	45	11.6	43	8.6	111	8.4
Alternating between positive and negative	333	77.3	199	51.3	310	61.8	842	63.7
Don't really talk about SA affairs	17	3.9	40	10.3	57	11.4	114	8.6
Total	431	100	388	100	502	100	1 321	100
Frequency of newspaper reading								
Daily	90	20.8	90	23.3	63	12.6	243	18.4
Two to four times per week	82	19.0	142	36.7	101	20.1	325	24.6
Only now and then	234	54.2	125	32.3	253	50.4	612	46.3
Hardly ever	26	6.0	30	7.8	85	16.9	141	10.7
Total	432	100	387	100	502	100	1 321	100

Table 5 Future plans

Population group	Brown		Black		White		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Future plans after completing school								
Working overseas before studies	67	15.9	40	10.2	62	13.2	169	13.1
Working in SA before taking up studies	24	5.6	55	14.0	35	7.4	114	8.8
Immediately taking up studies in SA	210	48.7	201	51.3	226	48.0	637	49.4
Studying overseas immediately	24	5.6	46	11.7	14	3.0	84	6.5
Own business or other work in SA	23	5.3	9	2.3	35	7.4	67	5.5
Own business or other work overseas	18	4.2	7	1.8	21	4.5	46	3.6
Not sure yet	65	15.1	30	7.7	78	16.6	173	13.4
Total	431	100	388	100	471	100	1 290	100
Future plans regarding career								
Working overseas permanently	17	3.9	45	11.5	53	11.0	115	8.8
Working overseas but returning to SA	139	32.3	156	39.8	134	27.7	426	32.7
Working in SA	191	44.3	145	37.0	198	41.0	534	41.0
Not sure yet	84	19.5	43	11.0	98	20.3	225	17.3
Total	431	100	389	100	483	100	1 313	100
Main reason, if to leave SA								
To earn money	113	26.3	95	24.6	138	30.6	346	27.3
Career success	253	59.0	256	65.3	206	45.7	715	56.4
Living in a safe environment	11	2.6	13	3.3	44	9.6	68	5.4
Not applicable — no intention of leaving	52	12.1	23	5.9	63	14.0	138	10.9
Total	429	100	387	100	451	100	1 267	100

studies weighed rather heavily with the respondents, with 54.9% indicating that they would prefer to immediately continue with after-school studies, locally (49.4%) or overseas (6.5%).

If they were to leave South Africa, the majority of respondents (56.4%) gave career considerations as the main reason for doing so, whereas the materialistic/financial motive was expressed by a significantly smaller percentage of respondents (27.3%).

Fear for own safety as a reason for leaving rendered a negligible percentage (5.4%), which is rather surprising in view of the violent crime situation in South Africa, as already alluded to.

The responses on the open item, which requested respondents to envisage their position in life in 10 years time, revealed that most respondents had the desire to be successful in a career, and to be well off financially. To a lesser extent, the ideal to be settled and experience fulfilment in marriage was mentioned, as was the wish to contribute in whatever way to make South Africa a better place. The pertinent expressed wish to live abroad permanently for safety reasons was almost non-existent.

It seems, therefore, that the respondents were mostly locally oriented regarding their long term future plans, but certainly open to the prospect of leaving the country for shorter or longer spells to pursue attractive (mainly career related) opportunities. The tendency to view future opportunities in global terms is clearly discernible, but certainly not motivated by a fear factor.

Views on South Africa

The gist of the questionnaire had to do with respondents' views on South Africa, and their future prospects for having a good, meaningful life here. Respondents were probed on what they regarded as the country's biggest advantage, its biggest problem, and their positive, neutral or negative view on their personal future in South Africa. The responses are indicated in Table 6.

As for South Africa's strengths, the majority of respondents (39.8%) opted for ecological and sport features, and 35.1% regarded social aspects (see the items on human relations, freedom of speech and human rights) as benefits of living in South Africa. Economic aspects were in third position (20.9%) (see items on work opportunities and economic prospects). There are also notable differences between the different population groups. White adolescents view "beautiful scenery" much higher (47.1%), than the other groups, which can be attributed to the better opportunities these respondents probably have had to travel. Black adolescents place a relatively high value on human rights (23.2%) in comparison to the brown (16.0%) and white youth (4.6%). On the other hand, human relations were regarded with less enthusiasm (8.7%), as were the opportunity to be of service to others (4.4%). This could be attributed to the fact that at this age, adolescents are more self-centred in their outlook on life and being absorbed in their individual future plans.

HIV/AIDS was singled out as South Africa's biggest problem (30.2%). Black adolescents seemed to be more inclined marginally to view HIV/AIDS as the most important problem (40.3%), compared with brown adolescents

Table 6 Views on South Africa

Population group	Brown		Black		White		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
South Africa's biggest advantage								
Economic prospects	58	13.7	30	7.7	30	6.3	118	9.2
Beautiful scenery	61	14.4	39	9.9	225	47.1	325	25.3
Work opportunities	67	15.8	58	14.8	25	5.2	150	11.7
Human relations	37	8.7	28	7.1	47	9.8	112	8.7
Opportunities to be of service to others	25	5.9	16	4.1	15	3.1	56	4.4
Freedom of speech	50	11.8	69	17.6	39	8.2	158	12.3
Importance of human rights	68	16.0	91	23.2	22	4.6	181	14.1
Sport achievements	58	13.7	54	13.8	75	15.7	187	14.5
Total	424	100	385	100	478	100	1 287	100
South Africa's biggest problem								
Poverty	49	11.3	53	13.5	34	7.2	136	10.6
HIV/AIDS	150	34.7	158	40.3	81	17.2	389	30.2
Mismanagement	5	1.7	7	1.8	46	9.8	58	4.5
Racial tension	4	0.9	8	2.0	38	8.1	50	3.9
Unemployment	74	17.1	65	16.6	78	16.5	217	16.9
Affirmative action	2	0.5	0	0.0	60	12.7	62	4.8
Violent crime	124	28.7	76	19.4	81	17.2	281	21.8
Corruption	22	5.1	16	4.1	53	11.2	91	7.1
Land claims	2	0.5	2	0.5	1	0.0	5	0.3
Total	432	100	385	100	472	100	1 289	100
View on own future in SA								
Future in SA bright.	161	37.4	211	53.8	103	20.5	475	36.0
Positive about future in SA due to God's care	203	47.2	109	27.8	221	44.0	533	40.4
Will leave if circumstances deteriorate	14	3.3	19	4.8	69	13.7	102	7.7
Will leave immediately, but return on improvement	27	6.3	22	5.6	55	11.0	104	7.9
Prefers to leave permanently	12	2.8	15	3.8	40	8.0	67	5.1
None of the above views	12	2.8	12	3.1	14	2.8	38	2.9
Total	429	100	387	100	502	100	1 318	100

(34.7%). Although HIV/Aids is recognized by the white youth as a concern, it does so to a significantly lesser extent (17.2%), clearly indicating the marginal direct impact of HIV/AIDS on the typical white household. Poverty and unemployment (27.5%) came into second position as serious societal problems in South Africa and violent crime is also regarded as a grave concern (21.8%), with the brown population group awarding the highest percentage (28.7%). This finding supports the literature which depicts without exception violence, gansterism and abuse of women and children as major social ills in brown societies (Kamper & Steyn, 2009).

In contrast to the high incidence of corruption reports in the media, respondents apparently did not view mismanagement and corruption as that serious (11.6%). Affirmative action was only regarded to a discernible degree as a problem by white adolescents (12.7%) and land claims were not regarded as problems at all (0.3%) implying that the latter does not feature in the life worlds of the respondents. It is also notable that the respondents did not regard racial tension as a problem in South Africa (3.9%). This is one of the most encouraging findings of this study, implying that our youth, as the future generation, do not regard the diversity realities of South Africa as a challenge at all.

Most respondents (76.4%) identified with the first two statements regarding their own future prospects in South Africa, revealing a strongly positive stance. The positive outlook on the future in South Africa was not shared by about 13% of respondents.

Although there is a large degree of agreement on the different items, certain aspects relating to a specific population group's experience were meaningful: South Africa's biggest assets (the constitutional emphasis on freedom of speech and human rights), and its most serious problems (the scale of HIV/AIDS, poverty, unemployment) was found among the black and brown respondents, whereas the white respondents regarded the beautiful scenery as the biggest advantage and also mentioned violent crime as the biggest disadvantage.

Generally speaking, it is clearly evident from the empirical data that respondents' views on South Africa and their future here were primarily driven by personal ambitions and dispositions with due consideration of the social strengths and weaknesses of South Africa. The latter were not regarded by the majority of respondents as casting a shadow on their local future prospects. Within these future perspectives, there are clear signs of some cultural shifts, i.e. from local communal interests to individual global ones. The research findings also indicate that the black adolescents' future expectations show signs of cultural shifts from collectivism to individualism and from caring/societal values to consumerist/materialist ones.

Conclusions and implications

Reflecting on our empirical findings *vis-à-vis* our literature review and theoretical basis, we found no discrepancies. The value of the eco-systemic model in investigating societal issues has again been verified regarding the inter-

action between the various systems and their relative influence, as were the findings of earlier studies on the future perspectives of adolescents, which *inter alia* highlighted adolescents' firm sense of control and adherence to pragmatic motives in conceptualising their future (Alsaker & Flammer, 1999). In terms of Elder and Russell's (2000) research we could not find any evidence of a substantial "push factor", as featured in dysfunctional societies.

Returning to our initial research questions, we could come to distinct conclusions. Firstly we asked: Are adolescents positive about their future in South Africa? In the light of the theoretical exposition and the empirical research questions, the survey revealed a distinct profile of the modern South African adolescent's future perspectives. There can indeed be little doubt that the youth of South Africa feel excited about the future in their home country. Many of them still live in dismal social circumstances, but there exists the firm belief that these circumstances will change for the better.

We also asked: What are adolescents' views on future opportunities and threats in South Africa? Our survey gave clear proof of a general spirit of optimism and independence amongst South African adolescents, despite being well aware of societal challenges such as poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS and violent crime. It appears that the new emerging generation of South Africans is characterized by a common, non-racial view of life and future expectations. Comparisons per population group revealed little variation in respondent outlook towards the future.

Lastly we posed the question: To what extent do adolescents tend to a global, rather than a South African future orientation? Our findings indicated that South African adolescents' future perspectives are mostly locally oriented, but global future perspectives are discernable, albeit mostly for temporary opportunities. In view of the very positive gist of our findings on adolescents' views of their future in South Africa, a global future orientation amongst South African adolescents can only be interpreted as conforming with the global perspectives of the so-called "Generation Y", the "Millennium Kids" (Codrington, 2009:5), of which South African adolescents are part.

Evidently, our research has pertinent implications for the provision of education in South Africa. Metaphorically speaking, our findings indicate that we find ourselves on fertile soil regarding learner motivation and idealism. Yet the disconcerting, starkly ironic reality is that the South African education system is failing to meet the future perspectives of many thousands of learners, as demonstrated year after year by the disappointing matric results. "We have betrayed a whole generation of young people and left more than a million of them with no prospects for the future" (Sparks, 2010). An education system which blocks adolescents' future hopes, rather than functions effectively to realise them, creates a formidable ethical dilemma, and can actually stand accused of a crime against humanity. The situation must be turned around as a matter of acute urgency, and coming back to our article title, "our voice counts": adolescents' voice must be clearly heard in the need for reform of our education system.

A last remark: Research on the future expectations of adolescents and

young adults should be conducted on a repetitive basis, as the data are of crucial importance to every aspect and avenue of youth work. The data are also valuable as a barometer of societal tranquillity and well-being. The need for such a barometer is particularly strong in South Africa, in view of the high incidence of violent crime, poverty, unemployment and HIV/AIDS.

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