

**EXPLORING INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN EDUCATION:**

**A CASE STUDY OF A RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOL IN**

**KWAZULU-NATAL**

by

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## **DEDICATION**

To my beloved parents, Mr. & Mrs. T. A. Naidoo, for the number years you have toiled and, the sacrifices you have made, in order to educate your three children.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study explores barriers to learning and development experienced by learners at a rural school situated in Upper Tongaat, on the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. Qualitative research methodology, which took the form of a case study, was used. The barriers to learning that the learners at the school experienced were examined from the perspective of both the learners and teachers. Other social factors that may affect a learner's development such as poverty, poor health and poor living conditions were also explored. The data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Although policy documents such as the White Paper on Education and Training (1995) and the South African Schools Act (1996) emphasize the provision of **quality** basic education for all learners, the study found that learners at this rural school continue to be marginalized. Factors in this schooling context, such as the poor physical environment, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching resources, lack of ongoing professional development, and socio-economic factors such as poverty and poor health care, impede access to the curriculum. The major challenge at the school is how areas such as school organization, ethos, curriculum, teacher development and community involvement can be improved so that the barriers to learning and development can be overcome.

**Declaration**

I declare that this is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master in Education (Special Needs in Education) in the School of Education at the University of Natal. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Gonasagaran Theeyaagaraj Naidoo

  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DEDICATION</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Preamble	1
1.2 The Problem	3
1.3 Motivation to the Study	4
1.4 The Focus of the Study	5
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Introduction	6
2.2 Education in South Africa: Current Situation	7
2.3 Education in Rural Areas of KwaZulu-Natal	11
2.3.1 What Constitutes a Rural Community?	11
2.3.2 Rural Schools in KwaZulu-Natal	13
2.3.3 Access to Schooling	16
2.3.4 Considering Redress	17
2.3.5 Poverty in Rural Areas	19
2.4 Barriers to Learning and Development	20
2.4.1 Re-Conceptualization of the Term “Special Educational Needs”	20
2.4.2 Identification of Barriers to Learning and Development	22
2.5 Concluding Remarks	24
<b>CHAPTER THREE: THE STUDY</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1 Background to the Study	27
3.2 Broad Issues to be Investigated	27
3.3 Research Methodology	28
3.3.1 Qualitative Research	28
3.4 Design of Present Study	31
3.4.1 Case Study Approach	31
3.4.2 Research Methods	32
3.4.3 Data Analysis	35
3.4.4 Validity	36
3.5 Research Process	37
3.5.1 Introduction	37
3.5.2 Research Questions	37
3.5.3 Entry into the Setting	37
3.5.4 Subject Selection	38

<b>CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS</b>	<b>39</b>
4.1 School Policy and Ethos	39
4.2 Access to Education for All Learners	39
4.2.1 Learners with Disabilities	40
4.2.2 Teacher-Learner Ratio	41
4.2.3 Learner Attendance	42
4.2.4 Over-Aged Learners	43
4.3 The Learning Environment and Resources	45
4.3.1 The Physical Structure of the School	45
4.3.2 The Learning Environment	46
4.3.3 Teaching Resources	49
4.4 Health and Safety Issues	54
4.4.1 Access to Purified Water	54
4.4.2 Sanitation	55
4.4.3 Cleaning of the School	56
4.4.4 Common Learner Ailments	57
4.4.5 School Feeding Scheme	58
4.5 The School Curriculum	58
4.5.1 Subjects Offered	58
4.5.2 Teaching Methodology	59
4.6 Assessment	61
4.6.1 Examinations	61
4.6.2 Continuous Assessment	62
4.7 Excursions and Field Trips	63
4.8 Learners Experiencing Difficulties in Learning	64
4.9 Teacher Development	67
4.9.1 Improving Qualifications	67
4.9.2 In-Service Teacher Development Programmes	68
4.10 Means of Transport of Teachers	69
4.11 Learners' Home Environment	69
4.12 Learners' Views on Schooling	71
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS</b>	<b>73</b>
5.1 Introduction	73
5.2 Accessing State Funding	73
5.3 Access to Basic Education	75
5.4 Issue of Medium of Instruction	77
5.5 Improving Curriculum Access	80
5.6 Poverty and Education	84
5.7 Parents as Partners	87
5.8 Ongoing Professional Development	87
5.9 School-Based Support Team	88

<b>CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION</b>	<b>90</b>
6.1 Limitations and Strengths of the Study	90
6.2 Implications of the Study	92
6.3 Recommendations for Future Research	94
<b>References</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Appendix 3</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Tables</b>	
1. Total learner enrolment by Province	8
2. Number of children of school-going age that are out of school	8
3. Classroom shortages	9
4. Electricity supply at schools	9
5. Ratios of Teacher/Learner/Classroom in 1997	10
6. Number of schools in 1996 without basic facilities	10
7. Over-aged learners in the school	44
8. Assessment procedure	63
9. Breakdown of marks for promotion purposes	63



## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### 1.1 Preamble

South Africa is saddled with decades of politically inspired neglect in the field of education; and the people most affected are those in the rural areas. During the long period of National Party rule, with its policies of Christian National Education and Bantu Education, KwaZulu-Natal was the most neglected region (Daily News, 1998). Rectifying these imbalances in education in KwaZulu-Natal, where there is a large school-going population that has been historically marginalized, is not going to be easy task. One of the major factors that is going to affect reconstruction in KwaZulu-Natal is that 93% of the R6, 8 billion allocated to education in this province, goes towards salaries alone. This leaves very little to meet urgent needs such as stationery, textbooks and the building of additional classrooms and schools (Daily News, 1998). Although R6,8 billion may seem a large amount, the 1997/8 education budget represented a reduction in real terms, if one takes into account the level of inflation (SADTU, 1998).

Since the historic elections in April 1994, South Africa has been developing legislation and policy aimed at the transformation of education provision. Some of these are the White Paper on Education and Training (1995), the South African Schools Act (1996) and the National Norms and Standards for Funding Bill (1998). Various policy documents in South Africa suggest that the government supports equality, equity and redress in education.

The prefatory message of the National Minister of Education, Professor S. M. E. Bengu, in the White Paper on Education and Training, 1995 states that,

**This policy document describes the process of transformation in education and training which will bring into being a system serving all our people, our new democracy and our Reconstruction and Development Programme (Department of Education 1995, p. 5).**

The White Paper on Education and Training has two priority areas. They are the providing of access to schooling for all learners and the organization, governance and funding of schools (Fataar, 1997). The issue of equity and redress is stressed in most policy documents. The claims that have been advanced are that in a transformed education system, no group or individual should be advantaged at the expense of others (Sayed & Carrim, 1997). The White Paper on Education and Training (1995) states that:

**There must be special emphasis on the redress of education inequalities among those sections of our people who have suffered particular disadvantages, or who are especially vulnerable including street children, out-of-school youth, the disabled and citizens with special educational needs, illiterate women, rural communities, squatter communities, and communities damaged by violence (clause 4:7).**

The right to basic education for all South African citizens is entrenched in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (May 1996):

**Everyone has the right –  
(a) To a basic education, including adult basic education (clause 29:1).**

The South African Schools Act (1996) emphasizes quality education for all learners:

**Subject to this Act the governing body of a public school must,  
(a) promote the best interests of the school and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners (clause 20:1).**

However, the above would be easy to achieve at semi-private public schools where middle-class parents make large contributions to cover additional human and material resources for their children's education, but it would be very difficult at rural schools where the majority of parents live below the bread line.

## 1.2 The Problem

Despite the sound principles enshrined in the above documents, educational planning for the creation of a single education system based on equality and equity has to contend with a fundamentally distorted legacy (Fataar, 1997). The "new" South Africa has inherited 19 education departments, which catered for the various ethnic and race groups. There were great disparities among these departments. The former White education departments were well endowed, Coloured and Indian education to a lesser degree while African education was neglected.

For a vast majority of learners, in particular rural learners, not much has changed. They are still being marginalized and in some cases, they seem worse than before. For example, schools were previously funded on a "Rand for Rand" basis. This meant that for every one rand the school raised to fund a project, the government would contribute one rand. This is no more the practice. The effectiveness of the learning environment is also dependent on the access to infrastructure such as electricity, water, proper sanitation, libraries and laboratories. It is well known that rural learners experience various social, economic and political barriers to learning and fail to gain access to quality education.

### 1.3 Motivation to the Study

There is limited applied research documenting how rural learners experience schooling in South Africa. The present study aimed at exploring barriers to learning in a rural school and how learners experience schooling. In particular, the study explored the challenges learners face in gaining access to the curriculum.

Since 1994, schools from the historically more advantaged education departments were told that the reason for cutbacks was the redress of schools in the previously disadvantaged communities. In July 1997, the researcher was transferred to a school situated in a rural area in the North-Durban Region of KwaZulu-Natal. It became evident that although the school wanted to provide quality education for all learners, as emphasized by the National Department of Education and Culture (NDEC), through the White Paper on Education and Training (March 1995) and the South African Schools Act (November 1996), it was difficult to do so because of the number of barriers that rural schools face. There are many basic facilities and resources that are unheard of at rural schools, for example, electricity in each class, clean water, hygienic toilets and safe buildings.

The ultimate goal for education in South Africa is to teach all learners in the most enabling environment. The National Commission on Special Needs in Education & Training (NCSNET) and National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) Report (Dept. of Educ., 1997) were appointed by Education Minister S. M. E. Bengu, and the Department of Education to investigate and make recommendations on all aspects of

‘special needs and support services’ in education and training in South Africa. Their Report stresses that it is imperative that the education system not only prevents learning breakdown and exclusion, but that it is also able to create equal opportunities for effective learning by all learners. The Report argues that it is when the education system fails to provide for and accommodate diversity that learning breakdown occurs, and learners are excluded. The Report stresses the need to focus on the nature of barriers experienced by learners. By focussing on these barriers the components of the education system that need to be supported and developed, can be identified.

#### 1.4 The Focus of the Study

This study focussed on how learners at a rural school in KwaZulu-Natal experience schooling. In particular, it explored the challenges faced by learners in gaining access to the curriculum. The various barriers to learning and development in the school context were observed, and the possibilities for increasing participation within the curriculum, the schools culture and in the community are discussed.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

### 2.1 Introduction

The present state of education in rural areas can be traced back for decades and is the outcome of the history colonialism, segregation and apartheid. “Whites were provided with quality schooling, and schooling grew rapidly, while schooling for Africans, Coloureds and Indians grew incrementally. African schooling was the most neglected sector. Missionaries provided the dominant form of schooling for African learners,” (Fataar, 1997, p. 339). Missionaries built many schools in rural areas.

In the 1930s South Africa was becoming industrialized and there was a demand for labour. African youth rushed to urban areas in search of jobs. The government knew that they had to be provided with an education. It wanted to provide only enough education so that the African people could fill in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. This led to the introduction of apartheid education, that is, the provision of a system of mass schooling for Africans. Therefore, mass schooling for Africans came in reaction to interplay of social, economic and political factors. Education for the people of South Africa was separated along racial lines. By the 1940s, African youth in the townships were becoming very aware and politicized. Urban schooling for Africans was proposed as a means of controlling youth. Education responded to the demand of the changing economy for semi-skilled labour (Fataar, 1997). Schooling in rural areas was neglected because rural people did not pose a threat to the oppressors.

In South Africa, it is evident that the education provision was very different, and to a certain degree still is, for the different race groups. It is important to note that there were also great differences between the different African Education Departments, and also within these authorities, in terms of funding and service delivery. In KwaZulu-Natal the two major African Departments were KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture (KDEC) and Department of Education and Training (DET). Krige (1991) explains:

**In urban areas, KDEC generally covers the cost of building. Only 19 of the 2630 KDEC schools are classified as government schools and are fully funded by the Department. 5 of the 19 schools are in urban areas, (p. 14-15).**

This means that there were many schools in KwaZulu-Natal that were partially funded. Many of these partially funded schools were in rural areas. Therefore, there would be enormous differences between education in rural and urban areas, in terms of provision of resources.

## 2.2 Education in South Africa: Current Situation

A major problem facing KwaZulu-Natal is that it has a large number of children of school-going age as compared with other provinces. Many learners are in school but there still are a large number of children of school-going age that are not at school.

Tables 1 and 2 that follow show the number of children in school and out of school, respectively, in the various provinces.

Table 1. Total learner enrolment by Province

PROVINCE	TOTAL ENROLMENT
Eastern Cape	1 959 781
Western Cape	727 431
Northern Cape	178 476
North West	800 405
Northern Transvaal	1 620 874
Eastern Transvaal	763 634
Gauteng	1 199 514
Orange Free State	690 296
<b>KwaZulu-Natal</b>	<b>2 137 260</b>
Total	10 077 671

Source: HSRC 1991 (cited in Fataar 1997)

Table 2. Number of children of school going age that are out of school.

PROVINCE	AFRICAN	WHITE	COLOURED	INDIAN
Eastern Cape	20 694	646	3 589	49
Western Cape	4 070	1 917	12 737	125
Northern Cape	5 795	357	5 208	12
North West	31 796	909	647	40
Northern Transvaal	94 730	493	53	23
Eastern Transvaal	57 617	977	137	62
Gauteng	35 294	6 256	1 820	590
Orange Free State	33 743	1 263	996	2
<b>KwaZulu-Natal</b>	<b>161 815</b>	<b>1 702</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>3 233</b>
TOTAL	445 555	14 521	25 839	4 137

Excluding former TBVC states (i.e. Former Independent Homelands of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei).

Source: Krige et al. 1995 (cited in Fataar 1997)

In 1997, KwaZulu-Natal had a drastic shortage of specialist rooms, classrooms, sport facilities as well as furniture and equipment for administration (HSRC, 1997). The following tables: 3 & 4 reflect the basic resources that are unavailable to a large number of our schools throughout the country.



Table 3: Classroom Shortages.

Western Cape	926
Northern Cape	207
Northern Province	13 670
North West	3 345
Mpumalanga	4 455
<b>KwaZulu-Natal</b>	<b>14 534</b>
Gauteng	2 332
Free State	2 492
Eastern Cape	15 538
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57 499</b>

Source: HSRC 1996 (cited in SADTU NEWS LETTER).

Table 4: Electricity Supply at Schools.

PROVINCES	NOT SUPPLIED	SUPPLIED
Northern Cape	95	426
Western Cape	191	1 568
Gauteng	283	1 937
Mpumalanga	920	975
North West	1 305	1 092
Free State	1 638	1 238
Northern Province	3 280	898
<b>KwaZulu-Natal</b>	<b>3 311</b>	<b>2 079</b>
Eastern Cape	4 505	1 340
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15 528</b>	<b>11 553</b>

Source: HSRC, 1996 (cited in SADTU NEWS LETTER).

According to Tait, Whiteford, Joubert, van Zyl, Krige & Pillay (1996), considerable areas of the former Transkei and KwaZulu have learner/teacher ratios exceeding 50:1 and almost all of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal schools have averages exceeding 40:1. In the North Durban Region, where the study was carried out, the same picture of lack of provisions prevails. The document entitled, “A Snapshot of Basic Education in Kwazulu-Natal” (HSRC, 1997) showed the following information for the North Durban Region.

Table 5: Ratios of teacher/learner/classroom in 1997

	L:C	L:T	T:C
North Durban	38.17	29.07	1.31

L:C Number of learners to a classroom

L:T Number of learners to teacher

T:C Number of teachers to a classroom

Source: HSRC, 1997.

The figures in Table 5 show the average teacher/learner ratios for the North Durban Region. The North Durban Region is, however, made up of schools in both urban and rural areas. These statistics may, therefore, not be a true reflection for schools in rural areas, which have been severely neglected over the years. It is likely that the situation is worse.

With reference to basic facilities such as water, electricity, telephone and suitable buildings, Table 6 reflects the situation in the North Durban Region.

Table 6: Number of schools in 1996 without basic facilities:

	Without water	Without electricity	Without telephones	With buildings not suitable for education
North Durban	184	269	280	22

Source: HSRC, 1996.

It is evident that KwaZulu-Natal has the largest enrolment of learners, but at the same time is severely neglected by the Department of Education and Culture. Considering that Provincial Education Departments spend an average of 90% of the education budget on teachers' salaries (Sunday Times, 1998), it would be some time before equity is reached in the province.

In addition, there are enormous differences between the education provision in urban and rural areas. Before the 1994 elections in South Africa, Natal and KwaZulu were considered as separate areas. KwaZulu was a self-governing homeland. After 1994, these two areas have been incorporated and are known as KwaZulu-Natal. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find separate statistics for Natal and KwaZulu. The African population with the poorest access to education resides in the rural, former Natal and KwaZulu magisterial districts. These areas have widely scattered populations, further complicating the provision of education facilities. In certain impoverished KwaZulu areas only 8% of the population aged 15-64 years is in local employment. Consequently, it would be indeed difficult for the community to contribute financially to the building of classrooms on a “Rand for Rand” basis (Krige, 1991). Furthermore, the Education Department has discontinued this form of funding and is making it increasingly difficult for communities to build and sustain their schools.

## 2.3 Education in Rural Areas of KwaZulu-Natal

### 2.3.1 What Constitutes a Rural Community?

There is sometimes confusion between the terms “rural” and “homelands”. The first point to be made is that “rural” and “homelands” are not synonymous terms. There are, for example, areas such as Mdantsane (Ciskei), Umlazi (KwaZulu) and GaRankuwa (Bophuthatswana) that are in former homelands, and therefore might be considered rural (Hartshorne, 1992). These areas border South African cities and are essentially more urban than rural in character.

The most marked characteristic of rural African communities is poverty. Hartshorne explains that,

**Poverty is usually associated with ill-health, damaging malnutrition and fatigue in children. There is evidence that children who grow up in poor communities lag in their level of cognitive development because of psychological deprivation, (p. 123).**

According to Hartshorne (1992), other criteria that would make up a rural community are: geographical isolation; smallness of scale; limited access to the usual social amenities and facilities; low population density and a limited range of employment possibilities; and dependence upon local employment rather than commuter employment.

In educational terms, a useful concept is that of the “isolated learning community”.

**An isolated learning community has the following weaknesses:**

- **separation (socially, politically, intellectually) from the main stream of educational thought and progress;**
- **low levels of internal and external efficiency;**
- **high rates of wastage;**
- **low rates of financial inputs;**
- **low levels of educational relevance to the real world;**
- **and low levels of professional expertise in the community, (Smith, cited in Hartshorne, 1992, p. 124).**

The area in which this study was carried out is characteristic of a rural community. However, there are people in the area with high levels of professional expertise, especially in the educational field. For example, the principal and the deputy principal of the school in the study were raised in the area. It is important to note that some of the people with high levels of professional expertise have moved out to urban areas while a few reside permanently in the area.

### 2.3.2 Rural Schools in KwaZulu-Natal

According to the School Register of Needs Survey (HSRC, 1996) there are 5 455 schools in KwaZulu-Natal of which 3 685 are in rural areas. Therefore, it can be said that approximately 68% of KwaZulu-Natal schools are in rural areas. Delivery of quality education in South Africa, more especially in KwaZulu-Natal, is going to be difficult because most of its learners are at schools in poorly resourced rural areas. Most schools in these areas would, therefore, have large classes, few resources, and generally unmotivated teachers.

#### 2.3.2.1 Physical Resources

The physical resources include school buildings and classroom space, textbooks, learning aids, laboratories and libraries. In order to bring about equity between the advantaged and the previously disadvantaged, the Education Department needs to meet the demands of providing physical resources, where there are shortages, and upgrade existing physical resources. At some of the rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal visited by Krissy Bissetty, an education reporter, dark dingy storerooms are used as classrooms and other classrooms have no windows, electricity or even floors (Daily News, 1998). According to Hartshorne (1992), the schools in rural areas are too often stark, uncomfortable, dilapidated, and have basic furniture. The physical structures are drab, often with unpainted plaster, broken windows, and cracked walls, cold cement floors. Chalkboards are often no more than a patch of faded green paint. The school buildings are surrounded by tall trees, which serve as windbreakers, and arid land.

In rural schools, facilities are frequently inadequate. Because of the shortage of classrooms, and to a lesser extent, the shortage of teachers, those who do go to school find themselves in over-crowded classes in which even the competent teacher struggles to provide an effective education. In 1990, the average teacher/learner ratio for all African schools was 1:50, while in KwaZulu it was 1:56, in KaNgwane 1:63 and Gazankulu 1:64 (Hartshorne, 1992).

Basic essentials such as water are taken for granted at an urban school, where most schools have more than 20 taps. According to Sapere & Mills (1992):

**In some of the rural areas visited by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), a single water pump has to serve up to 1300 pupils as well as villagers. If each child were to have a drink, while temperatures are reaching up to 44 degrees Celsius, the 10-minute break would have to be extended by 5 hours, (p. 41-42).**

If the Education Department uses, on average, 95% of its budget on salaries, it is left with only 5% to provide for all the other resources. Meeting the backlogs is going to be a mammoth task. Sapere & Mills (1992) states that

**It has been estimated that 110 000 classrooms are required today to make up the shortfall. The cost of providing a single classroom together with the administrative and managerial facilities to ensure its effective operation is estimated at R85 000. This figure is based on cost effective design estimates, undertaken by the CSIR using conventional building materials in an urban context. The extra transportation costs to far-flung areas inflate this estimate even further. In order to accommodate the backlog alone R9,4 billion will have to be found (p. 42).**

Considering the present budget, it will take the education department years to address this backlog.

It is estimated that the average population growth per year in rural areas is 6,6%. In the next 10 years, the school-going population should increase by 10 million. This would mean that 31 000 new classrooms at a cost of 2,6 billion rand per annum, at today's prices, would be required each year (Saprere & Mills, 1992).

### 2.3.2.2 Human Resources

According to HSRC (1997) the number of teachers in public schools in KwaZulu-Natal is as follows:

Table7: Number of Teachers in KwaZulu-Natal in 1997

Perm.	Temp.	Pvt. Paid	TOTAL
11 847	1 108	769	13 724

Perm: Permanent appointments

Temp: Temporary appointments

Pvt. Paid: Privately Paid and Governing Body appointments

Source: HSRC (1997).

These statistics show that there are still a large number of teachers that are unqualified. Historically, the standard of education at African schools has been inferior to that in White, Indian and Coloured schools, and one of the major reasons usually cited is under-qualified teachers. Research has indicated that, because many African teachers are under-qualified, teaching practice is often of a low standard, (Botha cited in Botha & Cillier, 1992). In 1988, 32,6% of African teachers who held professional qualifications had not yet attained Grade 12 certificate (Steyn & van der Westhuizen, 1992). For example, many teachers went to college, after Grade 10 to study for a Primary Teachers Certificate (PTC).

In preparation for the development of a new policy on teacher education, the Department of Education initiated two processes- a national teacher-education audit, and the development of norms and standards for teacher-education. The national teacher-education audit was released in November 1995. One of the issues highlighted in the findings of the audit, was the poor quality of teacher-education (SADTU, 1998). This highlights the need for the National Department of Education and Training to run in-service training courses to improve the quality of teacher-education in all provinces.

### 2.3.3 Access to Schooling

#### 2.3.3.1 Cost of Schooling

One of the harsh realities is that very often the cost of access is highest for those who can least afford it. Although every learner has the right to a basic education, the quality of that education will depend on how well the Governing Body of the school can supplement the basic resources provided by the Education Department.

The South African Schools Act (1996) states that:

**A governing body of a public school must take all reasonable measures within its means to supplement the resources supplied by the state in order to improve the quality of the education provided to all learners at the school (clause 37:2).**

At former House of Assembly schools, and some former House of Delegates and House of Representatives schools, most parents are middle-class and are able to supplement state funding to such an extent that better resources and smaller classes are possible. In rural areas, where people are extremely poor and live far below the bread line, the supplementing of state funding becomes a very difficult task.



### 2.3.3.2 Access in Terms of Distance from Home

Rural areas have a dispersed population. Therefore, it is not uncommon for a pupil to walk 10 km to and from school. It is not implied here that those within 10km are well provided for, but that those beyond 10km are very poorly provided for. According to Krige (1991), 32% of pupils in rural areas live beyond 10km from a DET school. As a result, some learners leave home very early in order to be at school on time and are often tired after walking such long distances.

### 2.3.4 Considering Redress

During the apartheid era, rural communities were marginalised to such an extent, that their schools should be given priority in terms of provision for schooling. The legacy of apartheid has generated gross disparities and distortions in education and there should, therefore, be specific strategies to correct the historical imbalances (Sayed & Carrim, 1997). In a sense, it has been argued that a tension exists between redress and the notion of equity.

After much deliberation at National level, there will be a major shift in State funding for schools from April 1999. This will result in provincial education budgets being focused on poor, underprivileged schools. This new policy, contained in the National Norms and Standards for School Funding Bill (1998), provides for a redistribution of State funds away from affluent schools to the thousands of schools that have been neglected in the past (Daily News, 1998).

According to the Bill, provinces will have to rank their schools in five categories ranging from the poorest 20% to the wealthiest 20%. Funds for buildings, repairs, stationery, equipment and hostels will be channeled to the schools with the greatest need (Sunday Times, 1998). The new funding Policy will result in pupils in affluent schools receiving a seventh of the funds provided to those in poor schools (Daily News, 1998). In order for the Bill to achieve its goals, the implementation and management of funds must be done under the strictest supervision. It is important that the allocated funds reach the people that need it most, the rural learner. In KwaZulu-Natal, where the large majority of rural schools are in a poor condition and lack resources, directing funding to 20 % of the very poor schools is still likely to exclude many poor schools that may, in relative terms, fall outside this cut-off point. These schools may also be in dire need of funding in order to provide learners with basic education.

However, in order to bring about equity, there has to be quantitative, as well as qualitative expansion. Quantitative expansion without quality would merely reinforce existing inequalities in presently disadvantaged schools. Quantitative schooling provision should incorporate the provision of good teachers, commitment to educationally sound teacher/pupil and classroom/pupil ratios, and provision of adequate learning materials (Fataar, 1997). The precise form of these provisions should be the subject of major policy debate in all provinces.

### 2.3.5 Poverty in Rural Areas

One of the major problems facing third world countries is trying to overcome poverty. In rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal, there is widespread poverty and disadvantages, similar to those that exist in third world countries. According to the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) Summit Report (1998) there are great disparities in income distribution in South Africa. Only 3,32% of the country's income goes to the poorest 20% of the working population, while 63,29% of the country's income goes to the richest 20% of the working population. The Report also states that 23,7% of the people in South Africa live on less than 1 United States dollar a day (SADTU, 1998).

According to Olver & White cited in Donald (1994), people who are subjected to poverty, are inevitably more prone to health risks associated with malnutrition, disease and infection than are those who are not. People, who experience poverty, associated health risks, inadequate health care, limited access to services, overcrowded and under resourced basic education may be socially and educationally disadvantaged. Teachers are aware that these problems do exist in schools but addressing them is difficult because of the lack of basic health services in schools and communities.

If rural communities are living under such conditions, it is likely that the number of learners experiencing barriers to learning and development stemming from socio-economic factors may, in fact, constitute a significant proportion of the school going population. The impact of socio-economic barriers is more severe on those learners who

are already excluded or marginalized in the society. According to the Report of the NCSNET & NCESS (1997), learners whose families are unable to meet the basic needs such as nutrition and shelter are subject to increased emotional stress, which adversely affects learning and development of children. In addition, under-nourishment leads to a lack of concentration and a range of other symptoms, which affect the ability of the learner to engage effectively in the learning process. According to Professor D. Griesel, University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, at least 24% of all children in South Africa fail their first year of school and a likely reason for this is poor nutrition (Daily News, 1998).

## 2.4 Barriers to Learning and Development

### 2.4.1 Re-conceptualization of the Term “Special Educational Needs”

Two government reports (Hattingh 1987; Human Science Research Council 1987) estimates that there are 2,7 million Black children with special educational needs (Donald cited in Donald, 1994). Learners with special education needs (LSEN) are said to be those children who, because of physical, sensory, cognitive or other exceptionalities, require some form of specialized intervention if they are to be effectively educated (Brennan 1985, cited in Donald, 1994). According to Donald (1994), children with “special education needs” constitutes a relatively small proportion (approximately 10%) of the school-going population in a society that is socially and educationally advantaged. In a severely disadvantaged society such as we have in South Africa, the proportion is likely to be higher.

According to Donald (1994), in contexts where severe social, economic and educational disadvantages operate, deficits are created that are structural and systemic in nature and are, therefore, extrinsic to the learner. Therefore, it can be said that these learners are experiencing barriers to learning that impede access to, and full participation in, education. Similarly, the NCSNET & NCESS Report (1997), stresses that it is imperative that the education system not only prevents learning breakdown and exclusion, but that it is also able to create equal opportunities for effective learning by all learners. It argues that it is when the education system fails to provide for and accommodate diversity that learning breakdown occurs, and learners are excluded. It also stresses the need to focus on the nature of barriers experienced by learners. By focussing on them in this way that components of the education system that need to be supported and developed can be identified. It can, therefore, be said that many African learners, particularly in rural schools, are experiencing barriers to learning.

Within the context of the NCSNET & NCESS Report (1997), “special needs in education” refers to the needs or priorities of individual persons or the system, which must be addressed to ensure effective learning. Acknowledging that special needs often arise as a result of barriers within the curriculum, the centre of learning, the system of education, and the broader social context, it is suggested that “special needs” be reconceptualized as “barriers to learning and development”. Barriers to learning and development can occur within all aspects of the system- the curriculum, the centre of learning, the education system, and the broader social context. The Report states that all learners may either permanently or temporarily encounter or experience barriers to

learning and development. In particular, this includes those learners who have been historically neglected in the system; those learners with disabilities and needing specialized equipment or assistive devices to access the curriculum and participate in the learning process; those learners who experience some form of learning breakdown as a result of a particular barrier; and those learners who are at risk for personal and social reasons.

The NCSNET & NCESS Report states that enabling mechanisms need to be developed to ensure that the system and the curriculum are continuously transformed to address the needs of all learners. This requires the provision of additional support to learners and the system where there is a need. “Education Support Services” include all human and other resources that provide support to the individual learner and to all aspects of the system. While these services should attempt to minimize and remove barriers to learning and development, they should also focus on the prevention of these barriers and on the development of a supportive learning environment for all learners.

#### 2.4.2 Identification of Barriers to Learning and Development

The NCSNET & NCESS Report (1997) identify the following barriers to learning and development: -

- Socio-economic barriers: Poverty and under development, factors that place learners at risk, and lack of access to basic services.
- Attitudes: Discriminatory attitudes resulting from prejudice against people on the basis of race, class, gender, culture, disability, religion, ability, sexual preference and

other characteristics manifest themselves as barriers to learning when such attitudes are directed towards learners in the education system.

- **Inflexible curriculum:** When learners are unable to access the curriculum, learning breakdown occurs. The nature of the curriculum at all phases of education involves a number of components, which are all critical to facilitating or undermining effective learning. Key components of the curriculum include the style and tempo of teaching and learning, what is taught, the way the classroom is managed and organized, as well as materials and equipment which are used in the learning and teaching processes. Assessment processes are often inflexible and designed to only assess particular kinds of knowledge and aspects of learning, such as the ability to memorize rather than understanding.
- **Language and communication:** Teaching and learning for many learners takes place through a language, which is not their first language. This not only places these learners at a disadvantage, but it also leads to linguistic difficulties, contributing to learning breakdown.
- **Inappropriate and inadequate provision of support services:** In rural areas access to professional assistance is limited or non-existent.
- **Lack of enabling and protective legislation and policy.**
- **Lack of parental recognition and involvement:** The active involvement of parents and the broader community in the teaching and learning process is central to effective learning development.
- **Disability:** For learners with disabilities, learning breakdown and exclusion occurs when their particular learning needs are not met as a result of barriers in the learning

environment or broader society. For example, a learner in a wheelchair will have problems moving around a classroom that is overcrowded.

- Lack of human resource development strategies: The absence of on going in-service training of teachers, in particular, often leads to insecurity, uncertainty, low self esteem, and the lack of innovative practices in the classroom.

Central to the education systems ability to promote effective learning and prevent learning breakdown, is its ability to identify and understand the nature of the barriers which cause learning breakdown and leads to exclusion.

In the context of NCSNET and NCESS Report (1997), all schools should have an inclusive orientation. Inclusion is defined as the process of increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, cultures, curricula, communities of local centres of learning, and addressing barriers to learning and development experienced by all learners. It sees inclusion as a never-ending process dependent on continuous pedagogical and organizational developments within all schools (Booth & Ainscow, 1998).

## 2.5 Concluding Remarks

In recent years, the deficit model of special education which results in segregation and labelling, has been subject to massive criticism in the special needs field (e.g. Ainscow, 1991; Barton, 1993; Dyson, 1990; Fulcher, 1989; Oliver, 1988). Consequently, we have seen a shift in thinking that moves explanation of educational failure away from the



characteristics of individual children and their families, towards the process of schooling (Ainscow, 1995). As explained, addressing barriers to learning and development becomes a critical issue in education.

This research is informed by the philosophy of inclusive education. According to this philosophy, education is seen as a human right of every individual regardless of race, religion, language, gender, physical appearance, social and economic influences, and geographic location. The philosophy of inclusive education is also enshrined in the countries policy documents, namely:

The White Paper on Education and Training (March, 1995) which states that:

**The Constitution guarantees equal access to basic education for all. It goes well beyond the provision of schooling. It must provide an increasing range of learning possibilities, offering learners greater flexibility in choosing what, where, when, how and at what pace they learn (clause 4:6).**

And The South African Schools Act (November, 1996) which states that:

**The Member of the Executive Council must, where reasonably practicable, provide education for learners with special educational needs at ordinary public schools and provide relevant educational support services for such learners (clause 12:4).**

It is the task of the education system to identify ways in which the school, as part of the social system, can create better learning opportunities for all learners. "It is not the child that is failing general education but it is the system that has failed to meet his/her needs," (Taylor, 1994).

The research will be guided by the 'organization' paradigm proposed by Ainscow (1995) in his research on school effectiveness. It is founded on the assumptions that there are inadequacies in the current state of development in mainstream schools, and that ways can, and should be, found to make schools more capable of responding to diversity in the student population (Clark, Dyson and Millward, 1995). Those schools that value diversity are effective schools because they minimize the difficulties of students and reduce the exclusion of pupils from the curriculum.

This study will explore the barriers to learning prevalent in a particular rural school context. The focus will be on the school as an organization, and on the curriculum that is offered to learners.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE STUDY**

### **3.1 Background to the Study**

The school at which this study was carried out is in a rural area on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal. Missionaries started the first school building, but the exact date of its establishment is unknown. A teacher who was at the school for many years stated that he saw records dating as far back as the late 1800s. The various principals and the community raised funds to build the rest of the classrooms. The department subsidized such projects on a “Rand for Rand” basis.

There are a few houses in close proximity to the school. Yet, the school has a learner population of 1278. Therefore, it can be deduced that children walk long distances to get to school. The human resources at the school comprise of a principal, a deputy principal, 4 heads of department and 26 teachers (23 permanent and 3 temporary). Of the 32 teachers at the school, 8 have permanent residences in the area, 6 board in singles quarters in the area, and the rest of the teachers travel daily from urban areas to school.

### **3.2 Broad Issues to be Investigated**

- The barriers to learning and development at this rural school that impact on learners’ access to basic education.
- The influence of social, political and economic factors on educational provision in this schooling context.
- The extent to which the school is attempting to meet the challenge of providing a curriculum accessible to all children in this rural context.

### 3.3 Research Methodology

The measurement process is an integral part of the research study. The approach one uses in a single study can be quantitative, qualitative or a combination of the both methodologies. As stated, for the purpose of this study, qualitative research methodology in the form of a case study has been used.

#### 3.3.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research encompasses a variety of approaches to investigate the world. Qualitative research procedures are employed in disciplines such as education, sociology, anthropology, history, theology and literary criticisms. Some types of qualitative investigations are case study, participant observation of a particular group or sub-culture of the biographies, or life histories of certain individuals. According to Eastwood (1988), the principle characteristic of qualitative research is that it is concerned with the understanding of a real-life event or situation. This approach enables the researcher to discover what people are up to, what is important and meaningful to them, how they adapt to change, and how they make sense of the world. More importantly, it is an approach where the investigator does not set the criteria, but where the perceived reality of the participants in the research situation forms the core of the study. The outcomes of qualitative research are, consequently, directly applicable only to the particular setting or event concerned. The approach does not deal with generalities, although it is significant to note the influential effect of much qualitative research both within the field in which it was conducted and across other disciplines.

According to Eastwood (1988), for a researcher wishing to employ qualitative research, the stages of the process may be summarized as follows: -

1. **Observation:** - By choosing a setting or naturally occurring event, it will allow the participants to display their own values, ideas, practices and principles.
2. **Description:** - Record and describe in detail what you have found. The recordings can be done on audio or videotape, or in the form of written notes.
3. **Self-reflection:** - Examine your own value judgements and preconceptions and your own academic or theoretical biases. Ask yourself what makes you draw the conclusions you do, and what alternative explanations are possible.
4. **Interpretation:** - The researcher determines what the situation means to the participants and to him/her as an observer. Outline themes or principles which emerge and compare these to other research in related areas or to theory relevant to the issues which have assumed importance, (p. 182).

In this study, the researcher chose qualitative research methodology for the following reasons: --

Qualitative research investigates a situation or event initially without reference to hypotheses or theory. Therefore, the researcher is not seeing the school as a divergent variation from some norm but as a school with its own particular identity, characteristics and culture. Qualitative research allows the researcher to encompass the dynamic social and value systems operating in a situation and to infer the meanings of these systems for the participants. A researcher who wishes to employ qualitative methods also chooses a real setting or event to study. An essential component of qualitative research is its personal viewpoint. The researcher using this method is not aiming to discover the one correct interpretation of a situation. He/she may submit and make clear the evidence for his/her conclusions and must present this as a logically argued case.

The researcher wanted to allow his subjective point of view into the research. Qualitative research approaches take account of the fact that investigators have personal biases, viewpoints, and subjective attitudes towards the issues under investigation. There seems to be no reason why a viewpoint based on personality and individual experience, should not be included as a research project. Qualitative approaches to investigation allow the interpretation of the individual investigator to inform the design and results of the study. It also takes account of the inseparability of the researcher and the issues under investigation, and acknowledges that each informs the other. Researchers combat this by employing a variety of techniques to demonstrate trustworthiness of their findings.

The researcher in the present study wanted to focus on a particular setting. Qualitative research is centred on the setting as much as the behaviour to be studied, and looks at the relationship between the two. Qualitative research methodology allows the researcher to investigate a setting, which already naturally exists.

The researcher's purpose is to clarify the meaning of the events and behaviours being studied. The ultimate goal of this kind of inquiry is to portray the complex pattern of what is being studied in sufficient depth and detail, so that one who has not experienced it, can understand it. Thick description conveys to the reader, what experience itself would have conveyed. Qualitative inquirers seek to interpret human actions, institutions, events, customs, and the like, and in so doing construct a "reading", or portrayal, of what is being studied (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 1990).

### 3.4 Design of Present Study

#### 3.4.1 Case Study Approach

In this study, qualitative research method, in the form of a case study was used. Stake (1988) explains:

**The case study focus is on a single actor, a single institution, a single enterprise, maybe a classroom, usually under natural conditions so as to understand it - that bounded - systems - in its natural habitat, (p. 257).**

The reason for the use of case study is a sincere interest in learning how the learners and teachers at the school, function in their ordinary pursuits and surroundings.

Case studies are important because they give information about the characteristics of a given population or area of interest (Merriam, 1988). It allows the researcher to focus on a bounded-system, which has character and totality. Therefore, it is not something we want to represent by an array of scores, rather we would like to find out what complex things go on within that system. It offers insight and illuminates meanings that expand its readers' experience. Many researchers use case studies in order to advance a field's knowledge base. Educational processes, problems and programmes can be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps improve practice (Merriam, 1988). Case studies begin in a world of action and contribute to it. Their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use; for staff or individual self-development, for within-institution feedback; for formative evaluation; and in educational policy making (Cohen & Manion, 1995).

When using the case study approach the researcher should bear in mind that there are limitations to the approach. First, the researcher should bear in mind that case studies can oversimplify or exaggerate a situation, leading the reader to erroneous conclusions of the actual state of affairs (Merriam, 1988). Second, while working on a case the researcher might sometimes experience the problem of becoming involved in the issues, events or situations under study. Third, it is important for the researcher to maintain the confidentiality of his/her subjects. This is sometimes difficult because anonymity might prevent the validation of data. Fourth, the opportunities for insight in a case study are also opportunities for subjectivity or even prejudice (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 1990). This could be especially true if one is a member of the institution in the study. Fifth, the researcher should bear in mind that although he/she might like the dynamics of one individual or social unit to bear relationship to the dynamics of another, this might not always be the case (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 1990). One cannot use a case to generalize, as what might be true for one situation might not be true for another.

#### 3.4.2 Research Methods

In an attempt to answer the research questions the following techniques were used:

- **Participant Observation:** In participant observation the observers engage in the very activities they set out to observe. Sometimes as far as the participants are concerned, the observers are simply one of the group. In observation studies, investigators are able to discern ongoing behaviour as it occurs and are able to make appropriate notes about its features.



In a natural setting, it is difficult for the observation to be structured and non-participant. In this study, the researcher used unstructured participant observation. While searching for themes, the situation determined the method of observation that was used. Unstructured participant observation was favoured because of its flexibility as a technique. The technique will allow the observer to concentrate on any variable that proves to be important.

In the present study it was difficult for the researcher to be non-participant because he was part of the management team and some times became involved in the issues, events and situations under study.

- Interviews: In an interview, data is collected through face to face or telephone interaction between the interviewer and the respondent. In this research the interviews were semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews are less formal. This technique allowed for questions to be repeated as well as changed in order to suit the situation. This type of probe allowed the interviewer to clarify anything he was uncertain about, and press for additional information when a response seemed incomplete or not entirely relevant.

Although the researcher went into the interview with a set of questions, interviews were not like a survey with the same questions asked of each respondent. Questions varied from interviewee to interviewee because each interviewee was expected to have had unique experiences and special stories to tell. The types of questions asked

were open-ended. They encouraged lengthy and full explanations. Both teachers and learners were interviewed. Learners were asked about their home environment, as well as about their interactions with peers and teachers. Teachers were questioned about the identification of learners experiencing difficulties in learning, and how they helped the learners overcome some of the barriers to learning.

The interviews conducted with teachers were tape-recorded. Exceptions were made where the teacher felt intimidated. In such cases, upon conclusion of the interview, the interviewer immediately wrote down notes. In the case of the learners, no tape-recorder was used. The researcher initially used a learner who had a good command of both Zulu and English to ask questions, in Zulu, to learners included in the study. This did not prove successful because the learner found it difficult to record the responses accurately. Teachers were then given a set of questions to ask the learners. Most of the questions were open-ended.

- **Document Analysis:** Before studying the documents the researcher should estimate in advance the potential usefulness of different documents. In the present study the following documents were examined, namely, school policy, textbooks, preparation books, test records and supervision reports. The researcher looked for practices, reflected in these documents, which could create barriers to learning and development.

### 3.4.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis started as soon as the research started, so that the researcher could give meaning to his first impressions. Two strategic ways were used to explore meanings in this school setting. They were through direct interpretation of the individual instances, and through aggregation of instances, until something could be said about them as a class. For example, because the school had no duplication paper, tests were given on the board, and this disadvantaged learners who had difficult reading from a distance (direct interpretation). The barriers to learning and development caused by lack of physical resources were grouped together and then commented about as a class (categorical aggregation).

Patterns were looked for immediately, while receiving documents, observing, or interviewing. Some patterns were identified in advance, drawn from the research questions, serving as a template for the analysis, or sometimes emerged unexpectedly.

The data obtained in the study were initially placed into broad categories, for example, “the learning environment and resources”. The finer details were then gathered together and placed within sub-categories, for example, “the physical structure of the school” and “teaching resources”. The information then validated the category.

#### 3.4.4 Validity

Validity refers to the problem of whether the data collected is a true picture of what is being studied. To help validate the emerging trends in this study, two techniques were used.

- Saturation: Saturation is where data was collected until they became repetitive adding nothing new to the fund of information. The researcher identified important issues that were repeatedly brought forward by participants.
- Triangulation: Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour (Cohen & Manion, 1994). It is important that what was noticed and recorded by one researcher would be the same as that observed and recorded by another. According to Cohen & Manion (1994), exclusive reliance on one method may bias or distort the researcher's picture of what is being investigated. Triangulation allows for evidence from different sources to be examined, compared and cross-checked. All the contrasting accounts finally produce as full and as balanced a picture possible.

In the school in this study data was collected from a number of different sources, using a variety of methods, for example, interviews, observation and document analysis. Data collected through observation was cross-checked with data collected through interviews.

### 3.5 Research Process

#### 3.5.1 Introduction

When carrying out an inquiry, the researcher determined the boundaries of that inquiry. In this study, the school was the bounded-system and case study told the story about this bounded-system.

#### 3.5.2 Research Questions

Some key questions that were asked:

- What are some of the factors in this rural schooling context that impact on the learners' ability to learn effectively?
- What are some of the challenges faced by management and teachers at the school?
- What barriers to learning and development are there present in this school context, particularly with regard to school organization, school ethos, curriculum, teacher development, and community development?
- Is the school providing appropriate educational opportunities for all learners, and responding effectively and equitably to learners with diverse needs?
- How are learners who are failing to cope academically experiencing the curriculum, and what are their needs?

#### 3.5.3 Entry into the Setting

The school is situated in a rural area on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal. The school is approximately 30 kilometres from the nearest town. The researcher was transferred to this school in July 1997. He was shocked when he saw the conditions under which the previously disadvantaged community was educated.

In October 1997, he expressed his interest, to the principal, in documenting the barriers to learning and development experienced by learners within this school context. The principal felt that the study would provide information on the type of resource provisions needed by the school in order to improve service delivery to all its learners, including those who experience barriers to learning.

In November 1997, when the researcher was ready to conduct his research. He handed over a letter to the principal requesting permission to conduct research at the school. Although the principal was in agreement he had to consult with members of the governing body. The governing body and the principal granted him permission. The principal informed the staff that he had granted the researcher permission to carry out a study at the school and that they should help, wherever possible.

#### 3.5.4 Subject Selection:

The researcher identified a pool of teachers at the school who were willing to be interviewed, have observations conducted in their classes, and were willing to be participants in the study. Five teachers were randomly selected from this group. The researcher, with the help of the grade teachers, identified three learners per grade, who were having difficulty coping academically and socially. This was done taking into account teacher perceptions and through document analysis (school books and test results). There were twenty-one children in all.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Through the use of participant observation, interviews and document analysis, the researcher explored barriers to learning and development in this schooling context. The findings were first placed into broad categories such as school policy, access to education, learning environment and socio-economic issues. These were then regrouped according to specific issues that emerged.

### 4.1 School Policy and Ethos

At the beginning of 1998, staff drew up the “School Policy Document” for presentation to the school governing body. The **Mission Statement** reads as follows:

**We, at Esidumbini C. P. School aspire to develop our school into a centre of excellence by providing an education of the highest quality, which develops the child to his/her full potential, while working together with parents and the community at large, without discriminating against race, religion, political conviction, gender and disability.**

This mission statement reflects the ethos of the school. It articulates a commitment to accommodating diversity in the learner population, and to providing quality education irrespective of the economic, social and political factors that impact on its development as an institution.

### 4.2 Access to Education for All Learners

The study revealed that, for various reasons, many learners have difficulty gaining full access to education as a basic right.

#### 4.2.1 Learners with Disabilities

According to the staff, no learner with disabilities has been refused admission to the school. At present, there is no learner with disabilities enrolled at the school. Teachers, who know the community well, do not know of any child out of school, who has a disability. A few years ago, however, there was a learner who walked with the aid of crutches. He has, subsequently, left school and all contact with him has been lost.

There was a child at the school who had a severe squint. His mother was called in and advised to seek medical help for him. Consequently, she informed the school that the doctors recommended corrective surgery. A Sangoma, however, recommended against corrective surgery because it might be too dangerous. This child had to walk approximately 3.5 kilometres to school everyday. His journey to school included crossing a main road. He was regularly absent from school. In October 1998, he died after a short illness.

There are two learners who have vision in one eye. One of them had his eye injured by a leaf blade from a sugar cane plant. There are also some learners who show signs of mental disability. Although the needs of these learners are not catered for, they seem happy and are socially accepted by their peers. In the case of the learner who had visual problems, his friends helped him to school. One teacher remarked:

**These learners are not teased. They are treated as part of the school. When teachers ask these learners questions in class their class-friends quickly help. Sometimes you do get learners who tease them; we punish those learners.**



The researcher was concerned about the number of children with physical or mental disabilities, who might be out of school. A teacher at the school suggested that records at the local clinic might have these statistics. An interview with the sister-in-charge indicated that clinic records show 19 children with physical disabilities and 3 with mental disabilities.

The head nurse explained her perception as to why these children were not at school:

**Maybe the children stay a long way from school and the parents are frightened to send them.**

**They do not come to the clinic on wheelchairs. Many of them are small built and their parents carry them to the clinic.**

**Parents don't like people to see their physically handicapped children.**

#### 4.2.2 Teacher-Learner Ratio

As was mentioned before, the school does not have a shortage of teachers. There are 27 Level-1 teachers, 4 Heads of Departments, 1 Deputy Principal and 1 Principal. The total number of teachers is 32. The school, therefore, meets the Provincial learner/teacher requirement of 40:1. However, because of the shortage of classrooms there is a high learner to classroom ratio.

When teachers were asked what the most difficult problem they faced in education was, one teacher said:

**Managing large numbers is our most difficult problem. There are too many learners to check who understands or who doesn't. If our class numbers were smaller we would be able to help those learners who are finding it difficult to cope.**

The teachers explained that the crowded classroom inevitably places a barrier in the way of individual attention and the development of meaningful teacher-learner relationships. With large classes, it is difficult for the teacher to get to know all their learners' names. Getting to know the learners' home background is even more difficult.

Teachers pointed out that large class numbers lead to discipline problems. A Grade 7 teacher felt that learners presented discipline problems because:

**Some of them are much bigger than their class friends and wanted to feel important by making them laugh.**

**Some of them smoke drugs.**

**The big ones are not interested in school.**

Grade 7 teachers, all female, sometimes had their authority challenged. The problem is compounded by the fact that the age difference between teachers and learners is often very narrow. In Grade 7, there are learners who are about three years younger than their teacher.

#### 4.2.3 Learner Attendance

Late coming and absenteeism are two areas that are difficult to control. Every morning there are a number of latecomers. The number of latecomers varies according to the weather and seasons. In winter and on dull or rainy days, the number of latecomers sometimes reaches as much as 150. In summer and in good weather, the number drops to about 70 learners.

There are many reasons for this. Teachers' comments were:

**“Many of them walk at least 3.5 kilometres to school while others walk between 5 to 10 kilometres.”**

**“Many of the learners live in huts and because it is cold they would like to sleep a bit longer.”**

**“Many of them need to fetch water from the rivers early in the morning.”**

**“They are damn lazy because before when we punished them most of them used to come early.”**

**“Many homes have no clocks and they rely on the rising sun to tell the time.”**

**“Many of their parents or grandparents are not working so learners don't have anyone to wake them up.”**

**“On Tuesdays the boys need to take the cattle to the dip before coming to school.”**

Other reasons given for absenteeism were:

**“On pension days learners who stay with their grandparents stay at home to look after the younger children while granny goes to collect her pension.”**

**“Some learners stay at home when their parents need to go into town.”**

**“Some learners stay away in order to fetch wood.”**

In September 1997, the school called up a meeting of parents. The principal expressed his concern about late coming. It was unanimously agreed that teachers administer corporal punishment. Teachers were made aware that corporal punishment is illegal, even though Governing Body approved of it. It is the feeling of the teachers that corporal punishment is the only way to prevent late coming. To date, the school has not found a solution to the problem of late coming.

#### 4.2.4 Over-Aged Learners

The Education Department stipulates that a learner should first attend school when he/she is between 5 years 6 months and 6 years 6 months.

According to the South African Schools' Act (November 1996):

**Subject to *this Act* and any applicable provincial law, every *parent* must cause every *learner* for whom he or she is responsible to attend a *school* from the first *school* day of the year in which such *learner* reaches the age of seven years until the last *school* day of the year in which such *learner* reaches the age of fifteen years or the ninth *grade*, whichever occurs first (clause 3:1).**

In this school, many learners attended school for the first time when they were much older than the stipulated age. The investigation revealed that more learners in the junior primary phase, than the senior primary phase, fit the departmental age classification.

Table 7. Over-aged learners in the school:

	Grade 7 (13yrs)	Grade 6	Grade 5	Grade 4	Grade 3	Grade 2	Grade 1	Grade 0
7yrs								2
8yrs							24	
9yrs						42	6	
10yrs					46	10	3	
11yrs				69	39	10	-	
12yrs			32	26	18	7	1	
13yrs		44	24	18	15	2	-	
14yrs	33	38	16	8	3	-	-	
15yrs	26	18	15	1	-	1	-	
16yrs	24	22	9	3	-	-	-	
17yrs	9	5	2		-	1	1	
18yrs	6	-	2		1			
19yrs	-	2	1					
20yrs	2							
Roll	133	169	152	205	225	187	153	55
No. Over age	100	129	101	125	122	73	34 of 143*	2
% over age	75	76	66	60	54	39	24	4

\* 10 learners did not produce identity documents.

It is evident that some of the learners at the school ought not to be in a primary school. In fact, those over 18 years are old enough to be at tertiary institutions. Some of the reasons, given by teachers, for the many over-age learners at school are:

**Parents do not know when to send their children to school or learners do not have birth certificates. Many families relied on their more informed neighbours. For example, if their neighbour's child was going to attend school and if their child was born in the same year then it meant that their child was also ready for school.**

Other reasons given are:

**Some parents feel that their children are not yet ready for school. Some parents keep their children at home to look after cattle but this is not so common these days.**

## 4.3 The Learning Environment and Resources

### 4.3.1 The Physical Structure of the School

The school buildings comprise:

- A large hall with no partitions, which serves as three classrooms.

(At the end of September 1998 it served as four classrooms because learners from the small classroom were removed in order to store cement for the building of toilets.)

- A large classroom, also with no partitions, which serves as two classrooms,
- 15 standard classrooms,
- 3 smaller than standard classrooms, and
- A modern Reception-Class unit for pre-school learners.

There are three small rooms for the management staff. The principal and deputy principal share the first room; the four Heads of Departments share the second and the third, is utilized as a stockroom for books. The school has no staff-room for teachers, and they have to sit outside during their non-teaching periods. A library and other specialist rooms, which are basic facilities at most schools in urban areas, are conspicuously absent. The average provincial requirement of learner to classroom ratio is 40:1. The school has 1278 learners. It should, therefore, have 32 classrooms. At present the school has 21 classrooms, a shortfall of 11.

### 4.3.2 The Learning Environment

#### 4.3.2.1 Overcrowded Classrooms

Overcrowding, as a result of the shortage of classrooms, has a great impact on the learners' ability to learn. Teachers, who are housed in the large rooms that serve as more than one division of a grade, stated that they experience great difficulty teaching and stated that:

**The learners are easily distracted.**

**Sometimes the learners are not listening to me but to what the other teacher is saying. This happens especially when I am teaching English and the other teacher is teaching Zulu.**

**Sometimes I have to stop my lesson and wait for the other teacher to finish. This happens when the teacher asks her class to say things aloud.**

#### 4.3.2.2 Physical Structure of Classrooms and Furniture

The classrooms are drab and are not conducive to learning. The classrooms do not have electricity and are painted light brown. As a result, they are dark on a dull day. At the end of July 1998, the Electricity Supply Commission (ESKOM) pegged an area inside the school, and indicated that the school would soon have electricity. By mid-November 1998, this did not materialize. The staff feels that renovations to buildings should take place before electricity is connected. The reason is that some of the buildings are so old that a short circuit could lead to the whole building catching alight. Undertaking renovations after the connection of electricity would result in extra costs because large portions of the buildings need to be replaced.

There are no ceilings. This results in sound from one classroom travelling easily into another. Learners in one classroom are easily distracted by sounds from another.

The roof of one section of the school is of corrugated tin. It is hot in summer, cold in winter, and leaks heavily whenever it rains. The other sections have asbestos roofs. Loose asbestos fibre is known to cause respiratory problems, and might also be carcinogenic.

The wooden flooring in two buildings has holes. The holes are sometimes covered with old desk lids. On two instances, in February 1998 and June 1998, the floor panels had to be broken in order to free the pupils who fell through. The other classrooms have cement floors. Over the years, the cement has chipped away leaving holes. A teacher injured her ankle in one of the classrooms as a result of the uneven floor.

Some classrooms have chalkboards that are so old that they now appear to be a mixture of white and green. In other classrooms, huge pieces of plaster from the chalkboards have fallen off. Chalkboards like this make it difficult for learners to see work on the board, on dull days in particular.

All the roof gutters require repairs. Some of the gutters are hanging loose and can easily fall on a learner or teacher. Many classrooms do not have windowpanes or have broken windows. In winter, these classrooms are so cold that learners prefer to sit three to a desk to keep warm.

The Department of Education requested the principal to motivate why the school needed renovations. A lengthy letter of motivation was sent to the Department of Public Works



in the Department of Education. With the limited funds allocated, only one-third of the corrugated tin roof could be renovated. The rest of the school continues to require renovations.

In many Senior Primary classes, three pupils are seated at a desk meant for two. In August 1998, a count was made of desks available at the school. It was found that there was a surplus of Junior Primary desks. These were stored away in a passage at the school. The shortage of desks in the Senior Primary classes resulted from the desks being used in Junior Primary classes. The Junior Primary Head of Department explained:

**Many of the pupils in the Junior Primary were too big to use Junior Primary desks, and therefore desks were borrowed from the Senior Primary.**

The Department did not consider that there are many overage learners in the Junior Primary phase.

Some classrooms have broken cupboards and others have none. Teachers have no secure place to store textbooks and stationery. Learners are asked to take their stationery home every day. Many of the learners do not have schoolbags. This is one reason why the learners' class-work books are untidy. Teachers felt that they should be provided with personal lockers in order to stock their resource books.

#### 4.3.3 Teaching Resources

##### 4.3.3.1 Textbooks

There are textbooks for most subjects, but teachers find most of them out-dated and feel that they should be discarded. Teachers were not consulted or given a choice in the

selection of books. Many of the teachers bought their own reference books. In the sections below an analysis will be made of teachers' experience of textbooks in the various subjects.

- Language Textbooks

Most teachers who teach Zulu are pleased with the textbooks. There are adequate books for all learners. On the desirability of the textbooks, a teacher of Zulu commented:

**I bring my own Zulu passages because the ones in the textbook are not always grammatically correct.**

Another said:

**The Zulu textbook is good but it has too many comprehension passages but too little grammar lessons.**

The school does not have basal readers to use in Zulu and English teaching. The Grade 7 has Zulu literature and poetry books.

“Mapep”, which is a core English textbook used by Grade 2 and 4 has people and settings with which learners can identify. However, the book does not depict the diversity of the South African population. The Grade 4 teacher commented:

**The learners enjoy using the book but there are not enough copies for all the learners.**

Grade 5 and 6 uses “Primary English Project” as the core textbook. It contains comprehension, grammar and vocabulary exercises. The comprehension passages are used for oral reading as well as written comprehension.

In “Primary English Project Std 4”, most of the comprehension passages are about historical events, African people and American Indians. Most of the passages do not make for easy reading for learners whose mother tongue is not English. The language used is that of the South African English middle-class and does not depict the cultural diversity of the South African population.

The core English textbook used in Grade 5 are, “Advance with English”. The book teaches grammar incidentally and not through ‘formal’ grammar rules. The approach is communicative and encourages dialogue between learner and teacher, and learner and learner. The book makes learners aware of issues such as disability and environmental awareness.

On the issue of whether the textbook is suitable for the learners, the teacher of English commented:

**I like the book. It has many nice exercises but most of them are too difficult for our learners.**

The passages are too long and the language used is not within the experiences of the learners.

- Humanities Textbooks

There are history textbooks at school but teachers believe that they are not appropriate.

They said that:

**These textbooks don’t explain well, we prefer “History 2000”.**

Teachers have purchased their own copies of “History 2000”. They found it the best book of those available to them and also felt that it must be good because it is prescribed for ex-HOD schools. They were aware of new history textbooks on the market but could not comment on them because they had not read them.

- Natural Science Textbooks

The teachers of General Science and Geography are satisfied with the textbooks they are using. The information provided covers the syllabus adequately.

The Mathematics textbooks are satisfactory. The books show the algorithm method as well as providing alternative methods of arriving at an answer.

For example: Algorithm method:

$$\begin{array}{r} 123 \\ 648 \\ +197 \\ \hline 968 \end{array}$$

Alternative:

$$\begin{aligned} 123 &= 100 + 20 + 3 \\ 648 &= 600 + 40 + 8 \\ 197 &= \underline{100} + \underline{90} + \underline{7} \\ &800 + 150 + 18 \\ &= 800 + (100 + 50) + (10 + 8) \\ &= (800 + 100) + (50 + 10) + 8 \\ &= 900 + 60 + 8 \\ &= \underline{968} \end{aligned}$$

Learners can, therefore, choose and use the methods they understand. The books do not develop “problem solving” in Mathematics.

#### 4.3.3.2 Stationery

The Education Departments' delay in providing stationery has further disadvantaged learners.

In 1997, the school received stationery from the Education Department but the requisition came in late. The school was uncertain as to whether the Department was going to supply stationery to the learners. At the beginning of 1998, the school was informed that the education budget for KwaZulu-Natal was overspent and that only the poorest 40% of schools would receive stationery. The staff was confident that the school would receive stationery. A few days later the principal, with regard to funding of schools, stated:

**There are many schools that are worse off than ours is. We are not considered as part of the poorest 40% of schools.**

It was decided, at the beginning of 1998, to ask learners to buy some stationery until the Education Department reached some finality on the issue. It was also decided that if, and when, the Education Department issued stationery, each learner would be given his/her full pack. Learners from economically deprived backgrounds had difficulty purchasing the stationery on time. By the end of the first term of 1998, stationery for Grades 2 to 7 was delivered to school. By that time, learners had already purchased their stationery. This was an unnecessary cost for parents.

Grade 1 Teachers followed the new curriculum, "Curriculum 2005". The Education Department supplied the first batch of workbooks at the beginning of the year. These workbooks were finished by the beginning of the second term. The next batch of workbooks reached the school at the end of the third term. Between the first and second

deliveries, teachers had to improvise. Whenever possible, they photocopied worksheets, from a sample copy, at their own cost. Other stationery such as paints, brushes, papers and so on were supplied in the second term.

#### 4.3.3.3 Teaching Aids

There is a lack of teaching aids at the school. Some equipment, that is standard issue at most advantaged schools, is unavailable at this school.

There are some lively charts for science and a wall map of the “old” South Africa. Some old science equipment and chemicals were found at the back of the stockroom. The teacher of science did not know of their existence. Equipment such as typewriters, duplicators, over-head and slide projectors, televisions, video recorders and tape recorders are non-existent at school.

Teachers are afraid to put up charts because the windows and some classroom doors do not lock. The classrooms are vandalized during weekends and holidays. After erecting a fence around the school, the problem has been contained.

#### 4.3.3.4 Extra-Curricular Activities

The school’s sporting facilities are unsatisfactory and there are no funds to maintain or develop the playgrounds. The school has a field that serves as a netball field, a soccer field and a playground. This field is arid with tufts of grass on the edges. Many teachers are reluctant to take their classes out for Physical Education because of the condition of

the playing fields and the lack of sports equipment. Therefore, because of poor facilities, learners are denied access to Physical Education.

#### 4.4 Health and Safety Issues

##### 4.4.1 Access to Purified Water

The school does not have access to clean drinking water. From May 1997, the school received purified piped water that was brown in colour. The condition of the water is slowly showing signs of improvement. There are two taps to cater for 1278 children and 32 teachers. Most of the time only one is operational. Throughout the lunch break, there is a long queue at the tap. In October 1998, the tap handle broke.

The reaction of a teacher was:

**The tap is broken, these damn children don't know how to look after anything.**

What he failed to realize was that the tap was opened and closed by approximately 1278 learners five days a week for a period of one and a half years. It might not have been abuse that led to the malfunctioning of the tap, but extensive use.

For over a month in 1998, the school and community went without water because the water pump was broken and the suppliers had problems fixing it.

##### 4.4.2 Sanitation

The toilet facilities are primitive and unhygienic. This toilet is commonly known as a "pit toilet". None of the toilets have doors. According to a teacher, the doors were stolen

a long time ago and were never replaced. The female teachers use an old tabletop for a door. There is no toilet paper in the toilets. The only tap at the school is far away from the toilet. Therefore, very few learners bother to walk the distance, to wash their hands after visiting the toilet.

An interesting comment to describe the condition and danger of the female toilet block was made by a teacher at a staff meeting:

**We need to warn children about the toilets because if we don't very soon one will be baptized, as did one in 1978.**

The principal applied to the governments Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) for funds to build toilets. The Illembe Regional Council controls RDP funds for the area. They were willing to build toilets provided that the school raised a deposit of R6 000. The deposit was paid from funds raised by the community specifically for this purpose. The project started in April 1998, but experienced some setbacks when the water pump was damaged. The school was without water for over a month. The contractors stopped because there was no water. The project is now back on track, and it is hoped that the toilets would be operational by January 1999.

#### 4.4.3 Cleaning of the School

There are no cleaning services at the school. Teachers at the school have no alternative but to use learners to clean up the school. One Grade per week is given the duty to clean the school. The learners clean while the teachers supervise. The learners utilize time just before the morning bell to do the cleaning up. This task invariably runs into the first



period. Therefore, valuable, optimum teaching time has to be spent cleaning up the school.

Some learners are given the task of sweeping the school grounds and verandas. No brooms are available so learners have to cut branches from trees to sweep. Others are given the task to wash and sweep the toilets. It is the task of all learners to sweep and polish their classrooms. This is now done at the end of the day.

When the new management arrived at the school in July 1997, it found that cleaning was done in the last period of the each day. On Fridays learners start cleaning their classrooms at 12 o'clock. They made polish in order to polish their classrooms. They brought old candles from home, melted them on a fire, and then added paraffin to the molten wax to make polish.

In October 1998, the Department of Education allocated funds to pay for one cleaner. One cleaner is insufficient for such a huge school. The school's management felt that they would employ someone as soon as they were certain, that this funding is definite policy. The principal explained that he would not like a recurrence of a past incident. In 1997, the school employed a night watchman. He was paid R200 a month. When the schools' funds ran dry, his services were terminated. The night watchman threatened the then acting-principal with violence because he felt he was being treated unfairly.

#### 4.4.4 Common Learner Ailments

School health nurses have very rarely visited the school. Therefore, many illnesses that school health nurses usually pick up, go undetected at this school. The management requested school health nurses to visit school in the second term. Because of their heavy workloads, nurses were only able to meet this request in November 1998. By this time, school examinations were over and attendance was very poor.

The sister-in-charge at the local clinic indicated that the most common problems among children of school going age, that they treated, were forms of malnutrition, roundworms and bilharzia. One of the symptoms of these conditions is tiredness. It is possible that there are learners at the school who suffer from the above conditions. The most visible illnesses at school are leg-sores, head-rashes, and the common cold and coughing. Colds and coughing are very evident in winter.

#### 4.4.5 School Feeding Scheme

In 1998 the school was introduced into the Education Department's feeding scheme. The learners looked forward to the meal that was provided for them. For some this was the only meal they had each day.

The feeding scheme still has to overcome some teething problems. For example, the learners receive their meals after 11:00 everyday. They require the nourishment earlier in the mornings. The feeding scheme was interrupted for six weeks because the department did not pay the supplier.

## 4.5 The School Curriculum

### 4.5.1 Subjects Offered

Both examination and non-examination subjects are offered at school. Emphasis is, however, only placed on examination subjects. The following examination subjects are offered: Zulu, English, mathematics, history, geography and general science. The non-examination subjects are agricultural science, religious studies, guidance, art, writing, physical education, health education, music and gardening.

Examination subjects are taught conscientiously even though the teachers are faced with many barriers. The non-examination subjects are not taken seriously. Some reasons given by teachers were:

**We don't have a syllabus to follow.**

**We don't have material and equipment to work.**

**We don't have proper facilities like they have in white schools.**

In July 1997, teachers were asked to choose the subjects they wished to offer to learners at school. The teachers felt it was not necessary to offer Afrikaans at school. They felt that two languages were adequate. Teachers decided unanimously to discontinue Afrikaans as a third language.

However, the secondary school close-by still offers Afrikaans as a compulsory subject. The learners from the school in this study, who are going to enrol at the Secondary School in 1999, are going to be disadvantaged. The staff feels that the secondary school needs to offer Afrikaans as an optional subject.

A teacher from the secondary school gave the following reasons for maintaining Afrikaans as a compulsory subject:

**You need Afrikaans when you apply for a job.  
You will know what the Afrikaners are saying in Parliament.**

#### 4.5.2 Teaching Methodology

The most frequently used method of instruction is the transmission mode. According to Alfery & Murray (1994), in this method the teacher has control over what is available to students. Information is provided and learners are not given the opportunity to internalize knowledge and understanding. Education is, therefore, a one way process. Again, the main reason given by teachers for this method of teaching is the lack of resources.

A teacher said:

**The Education Department does not provide the basic resources that will make teaching easy and exciting. Learners are too poor to afford equipment like math sets.**

There are many factors that impede access to the curriculum. This was evident from the observation of lessons as described below:

A lesson on “The use of a protractor” revealed that the lack of resources impeded full participation in the curriculum. In this lesson, the teacher taught the use of a protractor by demonstration. Many learners did not have the opportunity of measuring angles because there were inadequate protractors for the whole class. It would be very difficult for learners to grasp the concept of measuring if they did not measure the angles for themselves.

In a mathematics lesson the researcher observed that there was little active involvement by learners. The teacher was of the opinion that he should teach for half an hour and give learners application exercises for the next half an hour. The lesson was on multiplication and division by 10, 100 and 1000. The teacher first demonstrated how to multiply by 10, 100 and 1000. He then called learners to the front of the class to work out examples. It was noticeable that only the bright learners volunteered. After the learners completed the exercise the teacher did the exercise on the board. Learners corrected their own work. Learners were neither given the opportunity to discover for themselves, nor discuss the various solution paths with their peers. They had to accept the teacher's method.

In English and Zulu lessons, most of the time is spent on formal grammar rules, with very little time spent on reading, discussion of texts, getting learners to actively interact with the text, and on oral communication. The researcher found that teachers saw reading as a mere identification of individual words. They did not see comprehension as critical to reading. The children are not proficient in English but long comprehension passages are given to them from textbooks. The long passages make it difficult for learners to follow the story, and then answer questions based on the passage.

#### 4.6 Assessment

##### 4.6.1 Examinations

The main assessment techniques are formal tests and examinations. This form of assessment requires that learners have a sound memory in order to recall facts. There is mass failure in tests and examinations. In most cases, more than half the class fails.

The test or examination papers were written on the chalkboard. This meant that the length of the paper was determined by the size of the chalkboard. Because the chalkboard is so clustered with information, learners invariably missed out sections in tests and examinations.

At the end of 1997, Grade 7 learners wrote their final examinations in a classroom that was about 12 metres long. The chalkboard in this classroom had cracks and was turning grey. The learners performed poorly in the examinations.

A Grade 7 teacher's reason for the poor examination results was:

**These children are not serious, they just don't learn, that's how it is.**

After some reflection the teacher, agreed that the poor state of the chalkboard and the distance some learners sat from the chalkboard could have added to the poor results. The teachers at this school are so used to teaching under these conditions that they overlook the poor facilities.

One teacher overcame the problem of writing the examination paper on the chalkboard by photocopying the paper. Each learner was charged a fee for the paper. This would prove very costly, for this poor community, if every teacher adopted this practice.

With regard to writing examinations, a secondary school Head of Department commented:

**When learners come to Secondary School they don't know how to answer examination papers.**

He was shocked that examination questions were still written on the chalkboard. The school acquired an old duplicating machine at the beginning of 1998 but the problem still exists because duplicating paper and ink is expensive.

#### 4.6.2 Continuous Assessment

At the beginning of 1998, the staff agreed, after much discussion, that the continuous assessment approach should be introduced. Different forms of assessment and criteria were discussed.

Table 8. Assessment Procedure.

Group Work	Individual Work	Short Tests X 2	Projects/ Assignments	Home work	Monthly Tests X 2	1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter Total
10%	7.5%	20%	10%	2.5%	50%	100%

The same would apply for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Terms. In the 4<sup>th</sup> Term a full-scale examination will be written.

Table 9. Breakdown of Marks for Promotion Purposes.

1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter	2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter	300 ÷ 6	Exams	Final %
100 marks	100 marks	100 marks =	50 marks +	50 marks	100 marks
			50%	50% =	100%

The teachers tried the system out for the first term and then evaluated it. After a term staff opinions were charted. The general feeling was that:

**The system was a better one.**

**It involves more work for the teacher.**

**To assess group work is not easy with such large numbers.**

**It is hard to find projects for the class because there is no material at school.**

The number of failures is expected to drop. Although teachers experienced problems they felt that continuous assessment was a good system. They want to be work-shopped on assessment of group work and projects.

#### 4.7 Excursions and Field Trips

Teachers feel that excursions and fieldwork activities are very important in the overall development and education of learners. At the school excursions and fieldtrips are seldom conducted because parents cannot afford to send their children on these trips.

At the end of 1997, the school undertook an excursion to Mitchell Park, Durban Museum and the Durban beachfront. The excursion was called "The Trip of the Year". Although this excursion was open to all pupils from Grades 0 to 7, i.e. 1278 learners, only about 100 could afford the R20,00 needed to go on this excursion.

In order to cut costs, learners need to go to places in large numbers. In October 1998 a soccer and netball match was arranged with a school in Phoenix.

The host school extended an invitation to 30 learners and 4 teachers. However, the school could not respond to the invitation because it was too costly to take 30 children by bus. At least 100 learners needed to be taken in order to meet the cost of hiring a bus. The host school was not prepared to accommodate 100 learners.

Great team spirit exists at the school. If the school team is playing against another school, the school is closed for the day. Supporters walk to the venue to watch the game.



Recently, they walked about 12 kilometres through sugar cane-fields to get to the host school.

#### 4.8 Learners Experiencing Difficulties in Learning

Although all children at school experience barriers to learning at some time or the other, there are those who experience it more often than others.

From the researcher's observation of teaching at the school, it is apparent that most teachers taught to the whole class and were not concerned whether each learner had full access to the curriculum. A few teachers tried to help learners who had difficulties accessing the curriculum sometimes, but not all the time because class numbers were too large.

A reason given for the learners experiencing difficulties in learning was the high incidence of absenteeism. They felt filling in these lags would consume too much time.

One teacher commented:

**If I re-teach a lesson for the benefit of learners who were absent, others would not be serious about coming to school because they know that I am going to repeat the lesson for them.**

Many teachers believe that their teaching is good but learners do not want to learn. It is believed that the problem lies with the child. Teachers seldom questioned their teaching style or reflect on their teaching. They bombard the learners with facts and hope that the

learners grasp the facts. They do not evaluate the success of their teaching by how well the learners understand.

Although it was said that the learners at this school were “unintentionally integrated”, there was a group of learners, in 1997, that had been intentionally excluded. From a group of approximately 170 Grade 1 learners who were promoted to Grade 2 in 1997, 42 learners were identified as having severe writing and math problems. They were then separated from the rest of the learners. They occupied a classroom of 15 square metres. There was very little room left for a teacher to walk around.

A Grade 2 teacher volunteered to take this class. The teacher taught in the conventional way, but at a slower pace. She did not have any training on how to help learners experiencing difficulties in learning. The teacher then went on maternity leave in June 1997. A substitute teacher was brought in. She was an unemployed teacher who completed her studies in 1996 and had senior primary qualifications.

Specialized education was not part of the curriculum during her teacher training. The form educator returned from leave at the beginning of November.

In the junior primary phase, some learners are given “remedial help” in the form of small group supervision. The teacher re-taught the lesson to the small group but did not change her strategy. While these learners are receiving “remedial help” their peers had time to do homework.

The school has a committee and procedure for addressing the needs of learners who have “learning or behaviour problems”. It is called PIDA (Panel for Identification, Diagnosis and Assistance) and is made up of the principal and three teachers. The procedure for intervention is as follows: --

The form teacher identifies the learner with a problem and then tries to help the learner. If the teacher is unsuccessful, the phase teacher (i.e. senior teacher in the Grade) is called in to help. Should this teacher fail, PIDA is called in. PIDA would then make home visits to inform parents of their child’s “problem”. The panel and parents provide support for the child. One learner, who was considered as being severely mentally disabled, was referred to Tongaat School for the Severely Mentally Disabled.

The support from District Support Structures for children experiencing difficulties in learning is limited. The methods suggested for identifying learners with difficulties in learning is superficial. The Superintendent (Learners with Special Educational Needs) in the District, suggested the following ways of identifying learners with difficulties in learning:

**Under-age: Draw a straight line on a piece of paper and ask the learner to cut along the line with a pair of scissors.**

**Throw a ball to a learner and see if he/she can catch it or not.**

**Eyesight Problems: Make the learner point at the side of a particular object.**

**Hearing Problems: Make unexpected sounds behind the learner to see if he responds to them.**

**Slow-learners: Imbecile or Learner working at a snail’s pace.**

**Speech Problems: Send to a speech therapist.**

The PIDA system was to have operated with the assistance of school psychologists and remedial advisors. These facilities are non-existent in the district.

## 4.9 Teacher Development

### 4.9.1 Improving Qualifications

Of the 33 teachers on the staff, 11 teachers are under-qualified. One has a teaching certificate and 10 have Matriculation + 2 years teacher training (M +2). The rest have Matriculation + 3 years teacher training (M +3) and above. Two members of staff have degrees and 4 have completed their Further Diploma in Education (M +4) in 1997. In 1998, there were 18 teachers who were studying towards a degree or a Further Diploma in Education (M +3 or M +4).

The fourth term at school was severely disrupted because teachers were out on study and examination leave. Although it caused disruptions in the education of learners in 1998, it is the opinion of the staff that the upgrading of teaching qualifications will benefit the school in the future.

### 4.9.2 In-Service Teacher Development Programmes

In the Maphumulo District, little help is given to teachers in the form of ongoing professional development.

The Mathematics Subject Advisor provides workshops for primary school teachers. Teachers decide the contents of workshops. In 1998 the following workshops were held: Calculator Skills, Problem Solving and Maths 24 Competition. At the school, no in-school training was carried out in Mathematics.

A Non-Government Organization, known as 'Maths Centre for Professional Teachers' has been providing a service for Mathematics teachers in the district, in the area of Cluster Workshops and Intensive classroom facilitation. During these sessions they assist teachers in the use of their Mathematics kits. The organization donated a few kits per school. The balance needs to be bought by the school. Although the kit is a valuable teaching aid, the school cannot afford to buy more of them.

The Education Department provides workshops to teachers on Outcomes Based Education (OBE). A teacher from the school is a departmental facilitator. She is very enthusiastic and, therefore, the Grade 1 teachers at the school are capacitated. Teachers say that in OBE no learner fails and that each learner progresses at his/her own pace but they are not taught how to cater for learners who experience difficulties in learning. When a teacher was asked how she would cater for a learner who is experiencing difficulties in learning she replied:

**I will give him some paint or crayons to draw while I work with the rest of the class.**

The Education Department provides no professional development in the other subjects.

#### 4.10 Means of Transport of Teachers

As was mentioned before, many of the teachers are not permanent residents in the area. Only four teachers at the school own cars, the rest use public transport. Taxi operators do not want those who do not have transport to travel in lift clubs and threatened some lift club drivers.

Travelling by public transport means that teachers cannot take exercise books home and therefore all marking has to be done at school, during school hours. Extra-curricular activities are difficult to arrange because the teachers have to rush off home. Some teachers travel about 70 km by public transport to school.

#### 4.11 Learners' Home Environment

In order to determine the home environment of learners experiencing difficulties in learning the researcher sought the assistance of three teachers. They interviewed 3 learners, from each grade, that were experiencing difficulties in learning. They interviewed a total of 21 learners.

The interviews revealed that many of the learners came from very poor homes. Many of them live with their grandparents or close relatives because their parents are working in the urban areas. It is not uncommon to find learners being taken in by another family because their next of kin is deceased.

Most learners saw their parents only on weekends or at the end of the month. During the week they stayed with grandparents, relatives or sometimes with their elder siblings. Many of them had radios at home, only 4 had televisions and 3 had neither radios nor televisions. Magazines, newspaper and library-books were a rare commodity. Most had chores to do after school. Some cleaned the home and fetched water and wood. Most of them slept on beds that were made on the floor. The daily meals that learners had were very disturbing. The most frequently served meals were rice, phutu, beans and cabbage.

Meat was a rarity. Breakfast for learners were the leftovers from the night before. Some attended school without have anything to eat. All learners used either candles or paraffin lamps at home. Most of them cooked food on fires made inside or outside the hut. No one had electricity or generators and it can therefore be assumed that most of them did not own refrigerators. Although there is piped water in the district, learners cannot afford the installation costs and therefore, relied on water from the rivers. As mentioned before, the most common diseases among the school going children was bilharzia and roundworms. Both diseases are contracted from unclean water.

Teachers said that many families relied on the pensions that the grandparents collected or on maintenance grants. Poverty is a major problem in the area as is evident from the way learners dress to school. A number of learners cannot afford to buy shoes and come to school barefooted. Many of those who have shoes do not wear them on rainy days because it would mean coming to school barefooted for the rest of the week because their shoes would be wet. Many learners come to school without a jersey, even on cold days. More than half the learner population carry their books in a plastic bag. On rainy days the books get wet and the writing smudges. This is another reason for learners' books being untidy.

#### 4.12 Learners' Views on Schooling

A sample of twenty-one learners experiencing difficulties in learning was interviewed about school. They all liked school. Some of the reasons for liking school were:

**We learn common sense.**  
**Because at the end I want to work.**

**It teaches me to read and write.  
When the bell rings I go out to eat.  
It's near my home.  
Because I like to see Miss Shezi and learn.  
To have better future.**

Most of the learners liked mathematics and some of the reasons were:

**Because you will not get a job without Maths  
It teaches us to count  
It is easy.**

A few liked the Languages. Their reasons were:

**Zulu: Because it's my language.  
I do well in it.  
English: I understand it better than other subjects.  
I like to speak like a white man.**

About half the learners would not ask the teachers if they did not understand and some of the reasons given were:

**I am afraid of my teacher.  
My friends will laugh at me.  
I always know what my teacher teaches.  
I don't want to disturb the teacher because they are always busy.**

All of them enjoyed playing sport like soccer, netball and skipping.

Most of the learners would like to become teachers, police officers or nurses. One learner wanted to become a lawyer and the reason she gave was:

**I'll be the cheapest lawyer to help those who had no enough money for their cases.**



## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 5.1 Introduction

The results of this study confirm that barriers can be located within the learner, within the centre of learning, within the education system and within the broader social, economic and political context as suggested by the NCSNET & NCESS Report (1997). There are possibilities, given the constraints in this context, of increasing participation of learners within the curricular, the school culture and in the community. However, there has to be cooperation between the various role players in Education in order to minimize the barriers to learning and development.

### 5.2 Accessing State Funding

The present state of education in South Africa can be traced back for decades and is the outcome of apartheid policies. Historically, African schooling was the most neglected. There is stark evidence of this gross neglect over the years in this school context.

If the quality of schooling in African schools, especially rural schools, is to be improved, there has to be transformation and redress. In all education policy documents that have emerged since 1994, it is evident that the State is committed to the redress of the inequalities of the past.

According to the National Norms and Standards for School Funding Bill (1998) provinces will have to rank their schools in five categories ranging from the poorest 20% to the wealthiest 20%. Funds for buildings, repairs, stationery, equipment and hostels

will be channeled to schools with the greatest need (Sunday Times, 1998). The new funding Policy would result in pupils in affluent schools receiving a seventh of the funds provided to those in poor schools. This Bill will be put into effect from April 1999. The criteria to be used will be based on the school's financial needs, measured against the level of poverty in the community and the condition of the school itself (Daily News, 1998).

The school in this study is in urgent need of physical resources such as buildings, amenities, teaching aids and equipment. The parents have contributed as best they could to raise funds to erect a fence around the school. In many instances, the contributions would have been at great cost to families. Good nutrition and basic necessities would have suffered at the expense of supplementing the school budget. They feel that their initiative might result in them being marginalised and excluded from the poorest 20%. The danger of this system of evaluation is that poorer communities might neglect their schools in order to qualify for departmental funding. There is, therefore, the need for the determining criteria to be re-evaluated by the Education Departments.

Hindle and Mdluli (1992) argue that there is no correlation between the availability of resources and school success. Although this might be true, learners have a right to basic resources, which are clearly absent in this school. The lack of basic resources is evident in the shortage of classrooms, poor sanitation, shortage of desks, learning aids and a fully resourced library. One of the major problems with the existing classrooms is that they are in need of renovation, and also need of lighting. This makes them very drab and

unmotivating. This is hardly conducive to the development of a suitable learning environment and may explain why teachers lacked the motivation to teach.

### 5.3 Access to Basic Education

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) states that:

**Everyone has the right –**

**(a) to a basic education, including adult basic education**

Lack of equity in education, especially in the rural communities, continues to be a major barrier to learning and development.

The findings revealed that learners have to walk long distances to school. The reason for this is that the position of the school was not strategically planned. If it were built closer to the main road where most public transport is available, it would have been easier to access. Given the nature of the rural areas in South Africa and the fact that most families are living below the breadline, it may be necessary for the state to subsidize transport to and from school. Access is not just a matter of providing school facilities, but of enabling poor families to make use of these facilities (Hartshorne, 1992).

From statistics obtained at the clinic in this area, it is evident that the number of children with disabilities is small. However, it is likely that many have not been seen at this clinic. Special consideration must also be given to this marginalised group. Since most special schools are located in urban areas, there is a need to explore alternate services and education facilities for these learners. In rural schools, special classes and units for learners with disabilities may be an option but should be reflective of an inclusive ethos.

It is evident in the mission statement of the school in this study, that the school is committed to accommodating diversity in the learner population. No learner has been refused admission on the grounds of his/her disability.

The ordinary learning context at the school should be transformed to respond to the diverse needs of learners as well as provide specialized “high need” support to those learners who require it. It is expected, given international and national estimates, that only a small percentage of learners would require to be accommodated in specialized learning contexts. These contexts would not be defined by category of disability but by the curriculum and the support offered. Emphasis should be on functioning as a resource base providing consultative support to teachers and withdrawal for small group learning opportunities (Department of Education Reports, 1997, p. 56).

It was evident in the findings that parents are unaware of legislature on compulsory schooling. The South African Schools Act (November 1996) states in Section 3(1):

**Subject to this Act and any applicable provincial law, every parent must cause every learner for whom he or she is responsible, to attend a school from the first school day of the year in which such learner reaches the age of seven years, until the last day of the year in which the learner reaches the age of fifteen years or the ninth grade, whichever occurs first.**

This problem can be addressed through forums facilitated by regional education departments, schools and the community. In this way learners will not be “unintentionally excluded”. As stated in the findings, learners have also been excluded through absenteeism and late coming. In order to overcome these problems the school needs to formulate a sound policy on issues such as absenteeism, late coming and

discipline. This should be carried out jointly by learners, teachers, management and the community, as suggested by the South African Schools Act (1996).

Another problem at the school in the study is the large number of over-aged learners. A question that arises is whether it is beneficial to have learners, in a primary school, who are in their late adolescence. It might be better for such learners to be involved in the community's Reconstruction and Development Programmes and attend Adult Education Classes, based at a rural school serving a cluster of schools in the area. The focus of these classes should be on literacy, job training, communication and lifeskills.

#### 5.4 Issue of Medium of Instruction

In many South African schools, learners' own language and culture are being devalued and marginalised (Armstrong, 1995). According to Trueba (cited in Sleeter & Grant, 1994), use of first language is best because critical thinking skills and cognitive structuring are conditioned in linguistic and cultural knowledge and experiences that children usually obtain in the home and bring with them to school.

One of the major problems at the school is the disparity between the English proficiency of our learners and the proficiency required of them in order to master all school subjects through the medium of English. There is urgent need for school policy to be developed around the language issue. This should be a collaborative effort between the school and parents, with assistance and guidance from the Education Department and Non-Governmental Organizations. Teacher development of language teaching would have to be an important part of this process. Research on, critical literacy (Muthukrishna, 1995),

bilingual education (Nieto, 1996) and multilingualism (Edwards, 1994) will have to be explored. Together with this, Alfery & Murray (1994), suggest communicative language teaching (CLT). This emphasizes the need to practise real communication in the classroom as opposed to the meaningless drills that dominated language classes previously.

The need to constantly affirm the learners' first language and to use it as a rich resource to support the learning of the second language is an important principle. If the teacher allows learners to discuss concepts in their mother tongue during group discussion, it would help those learners who are having difficulty. The teacher should also feel free to switch from English to Zulu if he/she feels the concept would be better explained in the mother tongue.

Armstrong (1995) argues that language is best learnt in an environment that is shared, relevant and collaborative, and which accepts the cultural and linguistic background of all learners. Although the school in the study is an English medium school, the learners gain access to the curriculum through their mother tongue (Zulu). The teachers speak to the learners in Zulu or speak English, and then switch to Zulu. This can be said to be an inclusionary practice. However, the teachers then exclude learners by conducting all tests and examinations through the medium of English.

Teachers, at the school in this study, complained that learners could not solve math word-problems. The reason for this may be that the learners have not acquired cognitive

academic language proficiency (CALP). CALP refers to the language of learning, which is necessary for higher cognitive functioning, that is, language that is abstract and cognitively demanding (Alfers & Murray, 1994). It is important for children to develop CALP skills in their first language as these skills are then more easily transferred to a second language (ibid.). In the school in this study, learners are not even acquiring English proficiency required for social situations which is easier to acquire than the cognitively demanding English used in academic situations (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993). The reason for this is that, English is not used for social purposes in the school, home and community. Teachers should, therefore, emphasize communicative language rather than structural English.

It is apparent in this school, that language is a major barrier to learning. Instead of using English as a medium of instruction, a bilingual education programme may be more suitable to the school. Bilingual education is generally defined as an educational programme that involves the use of two languages of instruction at some point in a students school career (Nieto, 1996). In the case of the school in this study, the main language would be Zulu, and English would be the second language. The culture the learners bring to school, as well as the culture of the second language, needs to be part of the curriculum. This approach, sometimes called bilingual/bicultural, emphasizes that the language and culture that learners bring to school should be seen as assets that must be used in their education. Therefore, at the school in this study, learners may receive instruction in the content areas in Zulu while at the same time learning English as a second language. It is important for both teachers and parents to be aware that successful

bilingual programmes have demonstrated that learners can learn in their native language while also learning English, and achieving academically (ibid.).

Similarly, the critical literacy approach affirms that learning should be linked with the dreams, experiences, histories and languages that learners bring to school. Critical literacy stresses that the role of schooling in a democracy should be to redistribute useful social and academic knowledge equally in order to prepare students for life (Muthukrishna, 1995). It is, therefore, also imperative that authors take into account the cultural diversity when writing books for primary school learners.

### 5.5 Improving Curriculum Access

When exploring the issue of improving curriculum access, an important factor to look at is the relevance of the present curriculum. The business world has criticized the present primary school system because of its failure to prepare African youngsters for the modern industrial and technological economy (Department of Education, 1997).

Current teaching approaches can present barriers to access. Teachers persist on using the transmission method of teaching. It is likely that teachers were exposed to this method in their initial teacher education programmes.

The fact that they have had no ongoing professional development since then is a barrier to the teachers' professional development. They need to be given opportunities to challenge their knowledge and beliefs about how learners learn best. It is evident that teachers do not have a philosophy to guide their practice.



Many teachers at the school in this study consider small group work to be irrelevant and impossible to conduct in the present poor teaching conditions. The teachers should see themselves as facilitators and organize their classes in such a way that this can be achieved. Lessons should be planned so that all learners participate in activities. Each learner has his/her own unique learning style. Teachers should build on this learning style when teaching, but also help learners discover their own particular style of learning. According to Lemmer & Squelch (1993), in the African culture, cooperation in work and play is considered more important than competition. This was evident during the researcher's observation of lessons. For example, when teachers asked individual learners for answers and if their peers saw that they were hesitant, they very quickly come to their assistance. Teachers should capitalize on this. Group work encourages collaboration and scaffolding of learning (Love & Wenger, 1996). If speech lays the foundation for thinking, then talking, discussing and sharing ideas in groups should be an integral part of any classroom methodology (Alfers & Murray, 1994).

At present the emphasis at the school is on the academic subjects. Subjects such as handwork, needlework, agriculture, art and sport have been partially excluded from our curriculum. The teachers do not see the importance of these subjects. One of the main reasons for this is the lack of resources. It is positive to note that teachers are willing to concentrate more on these subjects should equipment and resource material become available.

At the school in this study, one of the concerns that emerged is the teaching of reading. Emphasis is placed on the mechanical learning of reading skills, and learners are not given the opportunity to interact with the text. According to UNESCO (1993, p. 136), reading is a strategy to learn. It is not a matter of teaching reading in isolation, so that a pupil can use the mechanical skill, rather it is a question of purposely using reading activities to facilitate learning. The reading-for-learning process involves decoding the text, making sense of what is said and comparing this with the knowledge and experience one brings to the text. As a result, one forms judgements, revises one's knowledge, modifies or adjusts one's thoughts, and as a consequence, "learning takes place" (ibid.). It is felt that the teaching of reading across the curriculum, in particular knowledge of the nature of reading and how it develops, needs to be an important focus.

The findings reveal that many of the textbooks used at the school are outdated, especially in subjects such as History and English. History books at the school in this study need to be replaced by new books that have been more recently published and that reflect the ethos of the new South Africa. The content needs to be representative of the people of this country. African writers' perspectives in documenting the history of this country need to be included. There are certain new History textbooks that have been released, which give prominence to women. For example, these textbooks show the important role San women played in the history of the San people. Many women today are playing an important role in the history of this country and this should be highlighted.

Outcomes Based Education (OBE) emphasizes that there are great differences between learners in the same grade. A learner's abilities should be recognized. Different abilities should be recognized and understood (Department of Education, 1997). There will also be a shift away from formal examinations to a continuous and developmental process of assessment. OBE allows learners to progress at their own rate. The curriculum avoids unnecessary competition between learners and encourages group work and cooperation. It encourages learners to participate in the curriculum at their own ability level. This caters for diversity and affords greater access to the curriculum. Again, all teacher development programmes have to develop teachers' knowledge and skills in OBE.

The findings also reveal that the school has moved away from using test and examinations to assess learners. Farman & Muthukrishna (1998) state that effective and informative assessment practice should involve teachers using a variety of assessment strategies that give students multiple opportunities, in varying contexts, to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do in relation to, the learning programme outcomes. Continuous Assessment lends itself to this and is a comprehensive technique because it evaluates the learner on an ongoing basis, evaluating the learner's ability to work alone or in groups on assignments, projects, homework, test and examinations. Although continuous assessment is a better assessment technique, currently at this school, the weighting is still strongly in favour of the final examinations.

The school should also bear in mind that some learners may become professionals while others may become self-employed as farmers or start their own home industries. The

curriculum, therefore, needs to be adapted to cater for the different needs of the learners. It should also equip learners with the appropriate entrepreneurial skills to make them business-oriented.

#### 5.6 Poverty and Education

The study reveals that the majority of the learners in this school context live in poverty – below the breadline. The Report of NCSNET & NCESS (Department of Education, 1997) cites sustained poverty and underdevelopment as a factor that can negatively affect the learning process. The inability of families to meet the basic needs of nutrition, health care and shelter is common in South Africa. Such conditions lead to increased emotional stress, and adversely affect the learners learning and development. Undernourishment may lead to the lack of concentration, which in turn may affect the learners' ability to engage effectively in the learning process. In poverty-stricken areas, the lack of physical and human resources gives rise to learning breakdown and the inability of the system to sustain effective teaching and learning.

Many of the learners are not exposed to the media such as television, radio, magazines and books that could help to extend their learning experiences. The learners from these backgrounds are further disadvantaged because they have chores such as fetching water and collecting firewood to take care of when they get home. By the time they finish their chores, it is dark and they are tired. These might be the some of the reasons why many learners do not do their homework.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), in Chapter 2 refers to the Bill of Rights, which states that:

**Everyone has the right to have access to-**  
**(a) health care services, including reproductive health care;**  
**(b) sufficient food and water (clause 27:1)**

It is evident from the findings of the study that the rights of learners have been violated. It was hoped that by the implementation of the said Constitution, the rights of learners would be protected.

At the school in this study, attempts to invite school health nurses were unsuccessful because of heavy workloads. These nurses serve a vast area. According to the sister-in-charge of the local clinic, the most common diseases among children were roundworms, bilharzia and malnutrition. It is difficult to identify learners suffering from these diseases because they have not been tested. However, learners display symptoms related to these diseases. Some of the symptoms are fatigue, drowsiness, wheezing and lack of concentration. In a discussion with Dr. D. Moodliar, a medical practitioner, the researcher learned that, learners showing these symptoms cannot learn effectively.

Most of the learners have a diet high in carbohydrates. According to MacKeown, a dietician and researcher, rural African children were deficient in most nutrients (Daily News, 1998). She goes on to say that calcium, iron, zinc and nicotinic acid are most commonly deficient in South African pre-school children, with the African rural group most at risk. According to Professor Griesel, from the University of Natal – Pietermaritzburg, a negative recurring repercussion of poor nutrition, was a low level of

physical stamina and an inability to concentrate (Daily News, 1998). This is clearly evident in many learners at school. Therefore, it is important that the schools' feeding scheme is not discontinued as a result of the lack of funds. If the feeding scheme can provide fortified food, particularly a cereal, it would go a long way in supplementing the learners' diet. The quality of the water that learners drink should be improved. The addition of fluoride to the water would help strengthen teeth and prevent tooth decay.

These initiatives, as explained above, have to be supported by the Department of National Education and the Provincial Educational Department in collaboration with other sectors such as the Department of Health & Welfare, and there has to be maximum community involvement. Despite the fact that policy documents and government reports allude to such services, the feeding scheme is the only initiative currently impacting on the school in this study.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa also states that:

**Every child has the right-**  
**(c) to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation**

The findings reveal that the learners have been maltreated, neglected and degraded in this rural school. For many years, cleaning in rural schools were done by the learners. It has been done for so many years that some people think it is part of African culture to get young children to clean up their schools. Society has to evaluate to what extent having learners clean the school is a preparation for life, and to what extent it may be regarded as abuse of learners. For example, cleaning toilets when sanitation is so poor and where there is inadequate piped-water result in exposing learners to disease.

### 5.7 Parents as Partners

It would be impossible for the school in this study to try to eradicate poverty but it could try to develop a partnership with the parents or caregivers. The main link between the school and the home is the school governing body, the majority of which are parents. In the past its only duty was to raise funds for the construction of new classrooms. The role function of this body has changed since the passing of the South African Schools Act (1996). According to this Act in section 20 (1), the functions of the Governing Body have been enhanced. It plays a major role in non-professional matters and a supportive role in professional matters. Parents at this school are not, as yet, adequately empowered to participate in these processes. The school needs to explore creative ways to increase community involvement. Therefore, it can be seen that parental participation is viewed as fundamental to the success of a school. The Schools Act allows the community to be involved in budgetary procedures, the selection of school personnel, and curriculum development (ibid.).

### 5.8 Ongoing Professional Development

It is evident that rural schools have been neglected and that teachers lack motivation because of these poor working conditions. In spite of this, many teachers at the school are studying towards higher degrees and diplomas. What is quite evident is that although teachers are upgrading their qualifications, this is not translating into effective teaching. Therefore, teacher-training colleges, which are offering further diplomas in education, should rethink the relevance of their curriculum. The findings indicate that teachers at the school receive very little support and on-going professional development. At the

school in this study, the only department that was given support was the Mathematics department.

Although in-service training programmes initiated by the Education Department are important, teachers at the school need to empower themselves. School-based staff development programmes can do this. These programmes should emanate from the needs experienced by teachers in the particular school context. It will be through these programmes that teachers will develop the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to enable them to respond to challenges they face.

The school tried to initiate professional development programmes after school. Teachers attended, but showed no enthusiasm as the programmes were conducted after school hours. According to Rouse & Florian (1996), the school should explore creative ways to provide opportunities within the school day for teachers and other adults to meet, and should set aside time for teachers to work on curriculum development. At this school staff development programmes could easily be incorporated within the school day.

### 5.9 School-Based Support Team

It is well known that specialized support services such as psychologists and social workers are not available in rural contexts. The report of the NCSNET & NCESS (1997) calls for a move away from a highly specialized model of support, to developing support through a structured community-based approach, to all schools. Each area should have a team of teachers with specialized competencies in lifeskills and counselling, and in



learning support. Its' primary function would be to support the learning process by identifying and addressing barriers to learning and development. Whenever necessary, this team will have access to local government structures, relevant NGO's and other community organizations, and support personnel in primary health care and other relevant structures. Schools will also have to share expertise, materials and human resources.

In addition, the school should establish a school based support team to identify and prevent the barriers to learning and development as recommended by the Report of NCSNET & NCESS (ibid.). The Report also recommends District Learning Support Teams. The role of this team would be to build the capacity of school based teams, engage in staff development initiatives, get involved in whole school development, community awareness projects and so on (ibid.).

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 Limitations and Strengths of the Study

As a member of staff, the researcher had easy access to the school. The principal was pleased that the challenges, faced by both teachers and learners, at the school were being documented. Access and acceptance for someone from outside the community would have been difficult. Although permission was granted to carry out the study at the school, it was initially difficult to interview teachers about the school, as they were reluctant to answer questions. Once the researcher was accepted as part of the group and mutual trust was developed, all initial insecurities were overcome and the staff was willing to cooperate in the study.

Some teachers felt intimidated when the researcher asked to observe a lesson-in-progress. They may have felt insecure because the researcher was part of management. Others did not mind being interviewed, or observed while they were teaching. However, they were not keen to have their lessons and comments audio taped. The reason was that they were not confident of their spoken English. Certain teachers were confident and had no problem being taped. Apart from this, the staff was very cooperative and helped in every way they could. The researcher is certain that he would not have had access to confidential information were he an outsider.

The learners had difficulty in communicating in English, and the researcher was not proficient in Zulu. It was, therefore, difficult to question learners. The assistance of teachers was sought to question learners. If the researcher had been fluent in Zulu he

would have been able to ask the questions directly and probe for details, wherever necessary. The teachers were not able to do this.

Two teachers stated that they helped learners who experience difficulties in learning. The researcher tried to verify this by examining their lesson preparation books for some evidence. Their preparation was not written in detail and he, therefore, found it difficult to verify their statements.

It would have been more informative to evaluate the teaching of Zulu but the researcher's limited knowledge of the Zulu language prevented this. It would also have been interesting to see whether learners were more actively involved than in English lessons.

A visit to learners' homes would have enabled the exploration of the conditions under which they lived. This was not possible because of the rough terrain, safety, or the fact that their parents lived away from home.

At times, the researcher found it difficult to be both a researcher and a member of the staff. During this study, the members of staff requested his advice on certain issues as member of the school's management. He had no alternative but to intervene.

The researcher used participant observation in this study. Being part of the group helped him understand the challenges experienced by the participants. It is only with first-hand

experiences, that one understands the barriers faced by the people at this school on a daily basis.

## 6.2 Implications of the Study

6.2.1 The study reveals that many children come from very poor socio-economic backgrounds. Early childhood development programmes targeting the 0-5 years age group is critical in this rural context. Early intervention may prevent barriers to learning and development.

6.2.2 In the past, and even today, rural school communities have been neglected. This is clearly illustrated in the study. It is critical that the number of learners per teacher is lowered in rural schools until some equity in the quality of education between advantaged and disadvantaged schools is reached. The education department should therefore include a weighting on learner/teacher ratios for rural schools, so that there is a manageable number of learners per teacher, because there are many learners there that are experiencing barriers to learning and development.

6.2.3 The building of partnerships between NGO's, and schools must be facilitated by the Education Department. Organizations such as Lotto-“Operation Jump Start” are willing to build classrooms and toilets, if the school can raise 10% of the cost to show its commitment to the project. Many schools, including the school in the study, are hoping to have access to this support. It is imperative that the education

department reintroduces the procedure of funding, on a “Rand for Rand basis”. This would ensure that at least some of the backlogs are alleviated.

As estimated by Sapere and Mills (1992), it would cost R85 000 to build a classroom taking into account administrative and managerial facilities to ensure its effective operation. If rural communities were taught to integrate indigenous building skills with some modern methods, they would be able to build classrooms at less than half the cost. For example, the school in the study has asbestos roofs, which are very hot inside and leak on rainy days. Thatch-roofed classrooms could be built. The thatch grass is available locally. Local people with the necessary skills could undertake the building of the classrooms. Thatch roofs provide better protection from the elements.

6.2.4 From statistics provided by the local clinic, it is evident that there are many out-of-school learners, including those with disabilities. The challenge for the education department is to enrol these children at a school, and to provide them with the necessary support to make their integration into the school environment as comfortable as possible.

6.2.5 An area clearly neglected at this rural school is ongoing professional development. In-service teacher development courses should be designed, in collaboration with the school. This will ensure that the needs of the school are met, and that they address challenges in the particular context in which teachers

work. Courses should also include skills on how to identify barriers to learning and make the school more responsive to learner needs.

6.2.6 In the rural areas of Kwa-Zulu Natal access to schooling must be seen as a priority. The challenge is therefore not only to expand schooling, but also to address the low standards of existing schooling for rural communities. Equity and redress has to become a reality so we move beyond the rhetoric of policy documents.

6.2.7 Numerous policy documents have stressed that the Departments of Education, Health and Welfare should develop a partnership, and engage in intersectoral collaboration. In this rural context, there is little evidence of this. The departments, mentioned above, need to realize the need for them to work collaboratively around a number of specific issues, many of which could be addressed through preventative health care. These departments need to provide comprehensive support to learners.

### 6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

6.3.1 The present study has highlighted some of the challenges faced by a rural school. It is likely that many other schools in the province face similar problems. It may be useful to undertake in-depth studies in other rural schools, in particular those considered 20% “poorest of the poor”. Such research may help to assess what

teachers, learners, parents and the community see as priorities in their particular contexts.

- 6.3.2 There is a need to begin school-based and community-based initiatives to address some of the challenges documented in this study, for example, school-based support teams, school-based teacher development programmes, the inclusion of out-of-school learners with disabilities, and the “health-promoting” school. Action research to document and facilitate such development projects will be extremely useful.

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## Appendix 1

### QUESTIONNAIRE ON HOME BACKGROUND

AGE: \_\_\_\_\_ GRADE: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Where do you live? \_\_\_\_\_

2. With whom do you live?  FATHER  MOTHER  GRANDMOTHER

GRANDFATHER  UNCLE  AUNT

3. Do you have a father?  YES  NO

4. Does your father come home daily?  YES  NO

5. Do you have a mother?  YES  NO

6. Does your mother come home daily?  YES  NO

7. Do you have the following at home?

Television:  YES  NO

Radio:  YES  NO

8. Do you buy the newspaper daily?  YES  NO

9. Do you buy magazines?  YES  NO

10. Do you have storybooks at home?  YES  NO

11. What are your daily chores (jobs) at home?

SWEEPING THE YARD ;  SWEEPING THE HOUSE ;  COOKING

WASHING CLOTHES ;  WASHING DISHES ;  FETCHING WATER ;

FETCHING WOOD

10. Does your family use the following at home?

Lights:  YES  NO

Candles:  YES  NO

Lamps:  YES  NO

11. Which ones do you use?

**TAP WATER**   **TANK WATER**   **RIVER WATER**   **BOREHOLE WATER**

12. What do you sleep on? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Where is the fire for cooking lit? **INSIDE**   **OUTSIDE**

14. What do you use to make the fire? **WOOD**   **COAL**   **CHARCOAL**

15. What did you have to eat?

	<b>Morning</b>	<b>Afternoon</b>	<b>Evening</b>
<b>Monday</b>			
<b>Tuesday</b>			
<b>Wednesday</b>			
<b>Thursday</b>			
<b>Friday</b>			
<b>Saturday</b>			
<b>Sunday</b>			

**Appendix 2**

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. What Grade are you in? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What subject do you like best? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Why do you like this subject the best?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Who is your favourite teacher? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Why do you like him/her?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. If you do not understand something in class, do you ask your teachers? \_\_\_\_\_
7. If not, why not?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Do you ask your friends to help you? \_\_\_\_\_
9. If not, why not?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. In which language would you like to write your tests?  ENGLISH  ZULU
11. Do you have many friends at school?  YES  NO
12. Which sport do you like best? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Do you play the sport at school?  YES  NO
14. Do you play for the school team?  YES  NO
15. Do you like school?  YES  NO
16. Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. What would you like to become when you grow up?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Core Questions Teachers Answered during Unstructured Interviews.**

1. What is your most frequently used method of teaching?
2. Do you find time, during your lesson, to give individual attention to learners?
3. Are children actively involved in all your class lessons?
4. In what ways do they participate?
5. In your opinion, what might the reasons be for some learners not participating in your lessons?
6. Would you be able to recognize a child with a learning problem?
7. How would you know this?
8. Do you have children with learning problems in any of your classes?
9. In your opinion, how many children in your grade require specialized attention?
10. Do you help these children?
11. How do you help? or Why don't you help?
12. During your teacher training, were you given any training to equip you to cater for children with learning difficulties?
13. Are slow learners in your classes benefiting from the present curriculum?
14. If not, how do you think they can benefit from the curriculum?
15. Do you think OBE would cater for them?
16. Do children do their homework?
17. If not, why?
18. What medium of instruction do you use in class?
19. What medium of instruction would you like to use?
20. Do you think English is important in South Africa?

21. Why?
22. Do you think that if the school were to become a Zulu medium school, many children would move away to English medium schools?
23. Do children have a problem answering tests in English?
24. If yes, why don't you use Zulu, if children would be comfortable with it?
25. In your opinion why do children come late to school?
26. How can this problem be solved?
27. Why do more children come late to school on a Tuesday?
28. Is the attendance in your class good or poor?
29. Why do you think this is so?
30. What do you understand by the committee known as PIDA?
31. What can, and what do they do for the child?
32. How did the psychologist say you should identify pupils experiencing problems?
33. What does the psychologist then do to help this child?