

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE METHODS USED BY TEACHERS TO GROUP PUPILS
ACCORDING TO THEIR ASSUMED LEARNING ABILITIES IN SUB-STANDARD A.**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my independent work. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Education (Curriculum Studies) in the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.


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ABSTRACT

The practice of ability grouping, its effect and underlying assumptions have been investigated and debated. There seems to be conflicting evidence on the educational advantages and disadvantages of ability grouping although there appears to be agreement that in the permanent and unchanging grouping of pupils, the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. Research also reveals that teacher expectations are self-fulfilling prophecies and can have negative effects on pupils' self-concept.

In Black Education in KwaZulu Lower Primary Schools, there is in operation a system of grouping pupils' according to their assumed abilities. This system is implemented and functioning in many schools.

The researcher's purpose of this study was

- (a) to investigate and analyze the current methods used by teachers to group pupils according to their assumed learning abilities in SSA in KwaZulu,
- (b) to investigate whether teachers had received any training in assessment procedures and group techniques, and
- (c) to find out how ability grouping is administered in schools and, if necessary, to make suggestions that could assist all concerned in early primary education with regard to the implementation and use of small groupwork and to seek ways of promoting effective teaching and meaningful learning which would be relevant to the child's needs.

A pilot and, consequently, a revised modified questionnaire, specifically designed to gather data about current practice in KwaZulu Lower Primary Schools, were administered to a randomly selected group of teachers across a geographical area covering urban, semi-urban and rural schools in the area of KwaZulu, Natal.

The overall results indicate that the overwhelming majority of SSA teachers group pupils according to their assumed learning abilities; the methods used vary and are largely based on subjective and intuitive opinions of teachers.

Furthermore, these methods seem not to be justified by an educational rationale, thereby indicating rather uninformed methods of grouping. It was also indicated that the methods being used are mainly based on instructions by the principals and school inspectors.

The study suggests that teachers should be educated to apply and understand current methods and purposes for groupwork in the classroom. This could be achieved through appropriate training where possibly the expertise of the education colleges can be utilized. This could be arranged by the education department.

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CHAPTER ONE

AN OUTLINE OF THE FIELD OF STUDY

1.1 Purpose of the study

Groupwork is a generally accepted practice in education but researchers argue that the use of groupwork depends on the activity and the purpose for which it is used (Marland 1982, Don White 1983, Elliot 1984, Good and Brophy 1984). Several researchers have investigated the effects of ability grouping and its underlying assumptions. There seems to be conflicting evidence on the educational advantages and disadvantages of ability grouping although there appears to be wide agreement that the **permanent** and **unchanging** grouping of pupils has a detrimental effect on pupils placed in "low ability" groups.

It is generally observed that the existing curricula at KwaZulu Colleges do not provide teacher trainees with the skills to effect appropriate ability grouping. (Observation substantiated by Umbumbulu colleagues J. Chiliza 1990, B.P. Khawula 1988-1990).

There seems to be a common consensus that some individuals possess certain qualities and manifest certain behaviours that are exceptional when compared with others. However, there are difficulties encountered in identifying learning needs, potentials and abilities in all learners since such abilities do not readily lend themselves to a specific form of assessment. It is, therefore, stressed that these problems call for innovation in the fields of identification and assessment of pupils' capabilities.

Furthermore, no in-service training is undergone by school teachers with regard to the practice of ability grouping. This would imply that, even if ability grouping is practised in some of the schools, it is very likely not to be based on sound educational grounds.

In the light of the research which highlights the disadvantages of ability grouping, it would appear that in the current situation in SSA in KwaZulu many pupils fail to receive appropriate diagnoses of their learning needs and potentials. Teachers are also inadequately trained to assess pupils' learning needs.

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the current situation in a number of SSA classes selected in KwaZulu with regard to the implementation and use of groupwork. In this study, the researcher wishes to investigate the methods used by teachers to group pupils according to their assumed learning abilities in SSA in KwaZulu schools; and if so, what methods of assessment are used and in which subjects pupils are grouped.

A pilot group of SSA teachers was randomly selected in urban, semi-urban and rural schools and given a questionnaire designed to gather evidence about current practice in KwaZulu Lower Primary Schools. On the basis of the pilot questionnaire, a revised and modified questionnaire was administered to a different but also randomly selected group of teachers working in the same geographical areas. The responses were analyzed to:

- i) Ascertain the kinds of assessments used by the teachers of SSA pupils before entry into school and to discover how these assessments were made.
- ii) Analyze the frequency and kind of contact teachers have with parents of SSA pupils.
- iii) Ascertain whether teachers group pupils according to their abilities in SSA classes and if so in which subjects.
- iv) Discover why teachers group pupils in SSA.
- v) Analyze the problems expressed by teachers when

they group pupils in SSA according to assumed ability levels.

- vi) Discover whether teachers have received training in assessment procedures and group teaching techniques.

1.2 Background to the study

In KwaZulu Lower Primary Schools, there are a number of systems of grouping pupils according to their assumed abilities. The Practice Teaching Conference Proceedings at Umbumbulu College of Education in 1988 revealed that individual schools use their own discretion as to when and how to introduce some form of ability grouping. This largely depends on the sub-standard A (SSA) teachers, the school principal, and the local inspector.

Various systems of ability grouping have been frequently observed since 1987 when Umbumbulu lecturing staff went with the teacher trainees for practice teaching in the neighbouring Lower Primary Schools. (Discussions with Umbumbulu colleagues J. Chiliza 1988, L. Goba 1990, B.P. Khawula 1988-1990.)

From the Practice Teaching Conference Proceedings (1988) it appeared that, currently, there are mainly two systems of ability grouping observed in sub-standard A (SSA) and sub-standard B (SSB).

The first system of ability grouping is by a double session organization whereby the so-called "very able" attend morning sessions while the alleged "average or dull" attend the afternoon sessions or visa versa. In 1982, 3243 teachers and 265498 pupils were involved in double sessions in SSA and SSB (Smolar 1986:87).

The second system of ability grouping is within a full-day classroom when different groups are put into different classrooms having labels such as SSA Section A, designated

"bright" pupils; SSA Section C, designated "dull" pupils.

These systems of ability grouping assume that:

- * It is educationally desirable to group children according to their currently perceived abilities

- * The teacher's notions of "intelligence" or "ability" are quantifiable and thus measurable

- * Children can be identified at an early stage in their education as being "very able" or "bright" or "dull".

These assumptions arise from the prolonged and pervading dominance of the psychometric school of thought initiated by early writers such as Binet (1905), Terman (1928), and sustained by current writers e.g. Cattell (1968) who measured children's abilities across a range of school-based skills which were considered to be age-related. These measurements were then called intelligent quotients (I.Q.) and taken as reliable indications of children's "intelligence". There was little, if any, discussion of a wider concept of intelligence, pupil potential or of changing rates of growth and development. The tests were also seen as reliable predictions of pupils' future performances in that the ratio between the children's age and score was perceived to be relatively permanent.

However, the psychometric paradigm is being questioned by recent researchers who maintain that the construct labelled "intelligence" is a process of growth which is not easily quantifiable nor even easily defined (Piaget 1959, Sternberg 1985, Borkowski 1985, Vygotsky 1985). These theorists are discussed in more detail later.

1.3 Lower primary education

In order to understand the issues discussed in this dissertation it is necessary to discuss the curriculum currently in practice at the SSA level.

The schooling system for Blacks is divided into four components i.e. Lower Primary, Higher Primary, Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary Schools.

This study is mainly concerned with the Lower Primary (L.P.) School, particularly sub-standard A (SSA) which is the first year of Lower Primary Education.

The curriculum for SSA has the following subjects: The official language, **English**, co-exists with the mother tongue **Zulu**, (in the case of KwaZulu). Zulu is learnt extensively mainly because in 1980 it was decided that the medium of instruction in L.P. Schools should be the mother tongue (Human Science Research Council - HSRC; 1981:22).

Here, the primary aim should be focused on the extension of the children's vocabulary and on equipping pupils with the knowledge of the standardized form of his home language. **Mathematics** deals with basic mathematical operations. **Handwriting** is another subject - the main emphasis being on teaching legible handwriting. **Religious Education** is taught, through which the primary purpose is to lead the pupil by instruction "to know God". **Health Education** is mainly concerned with personal hygiene and how to keep the surroundings clean and in some schools **Physical Education**, **Music** and **Citizenship** are also taught.

The Department of Education and Training syllabus for SSA (1983) requires all Lower Primary Schools to write "end-of-year" examinations. In SSA, pupils are expected to achieve a pass in Zulu, Mathematics and Handwriting to qualify for promotion to

SSB. Various kinds of "ability" grouping are taking place in the subjects which are examined and thus regarded as important by teachers.

1.4 A historical perspective on teacher education

This study aims at investigating the variety of methods of grouping SSA pupils, therefore, it is necessary to look briefly at the history of teacher education in Black Colleges. This will provide a background to the issues encountered due to the different qualifications that teachers hold.

Themabela (1986:76) reports that there is an alarming number of unqualified teachers currently in posts. He states that in 1983 the KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture had a total of 22 041 teachers out of which 20 613 teachers had an academic qualification of not more than a Standard 10 Certificate; only 5 primary school teachers had a degree. There is some contradiction to this statement since the KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture contends that such statements are popular but no longer represent a true reflection of the situation. KwaZulu Education Journal (1990:2) states that 21% of KwaZulu teachers gained certificates before they obtained matriculation and 12% hold teachers' certificates without matriculation. Nevertheless there remains an acute shortage of well qualified teachers with little opportunity for in-service education.

Christie's Report (1986:78) reveals that before 1953 mission schools provided almost all the education for Black pupils. When apartheid education was introduced in 1953, missionaries gradually withdrew from the teaching field. A number of measures which made it extremely difficult for the mission schools to function were passed by the then Minister of Native Affairs. The first pressure was placed on teacher training institutions where the government stipulated that teacher training could only take place in Department Training Centres. Teachers trained elsewhere would not have their qualifications

recognized by the Department. This came very unexpectedly because of sudden political changes that took place and affected the education system (ibid). As a result, the supply of competent teachers was inadequate.

This deterioration was exacerbated by the Bantu Education Act of 1953 which also stipulated that the Department of Education could only buy buildings inside the Native Reserves and this inevitably was one way of ensuring that all teacher training would take place in the reserve; thus promoting the idea that Africans were merely sojourners in the White urban areas. All the permanent educational structures would be in the reserves.

The Reports of the Human Sciences Research Council 1972 and 1981 recommended that the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB) should control the entrance of students to all the universities so that entrance became uniform in South Africa. As a result, students are sifted at matric level by the JMB. A small percentage of students manage to get a Matriculation Exemption i.e. a pass that could enable them to be enrolled at a University.

Thembele (1986:9) reports that in 1984, 19 397 candidates wrote the Standard 10 examinations and out of these only 1 203 passed with matric exemption and 5 426 passed with a school leaving certificate. Though the actual number of passes has gradually increased, the percentage of passes has gradually decreased suggesting that the quality of performance in Black schools is deteriorating (ibid).

Those students who gain entrance to the University become interested in careers other than teaching which are regarded as of higher status. The result is a small percentage of teachers with university degrees e.g. 8% of KwaZulu teachers hold university degrees (KwaZulu Education Journal 1990).

Xaba (1990:8) notes that what has aggravated matters is that many teachers with university degrees apply their learnt skills

in the classroom for a year or two and then they are promoted to Inspectorships and/or Principalships.

A research conducted by Sibisi (1989) reveals that many students who apply and are admitted to the KwaZulu Colleges of Education seek admission not because they feel they have a calling and a genuine love for the teaching profession, but because they feel they have no other option.

Other professions or fields of study demand high examination results as an entrance qualification. It seems that matric students who obtain lower grades which cannot be accepted as university entrance i.e. school leaving certificates, are currently being trained as future teachers. It is ironical that these teachers in training will be expected to enlighten the African Nation in the "New South Africa".

The above mentioned problems have contributed to a steep decline in the quality of teacher training and a decline in standards in the Black Education System in general. It could be argued that many teachers currently in the Primary Schools are:

- * the unqualified who have been employed because of the rapid increase in school enrollment
- * those who were trained for 2 years after having passed standard VI (T4); their training course was known as Teachers' Training Course (T.T.C.). Later, it was referred to as the Lower Primary Teachers' Course
- * those who passed standard 8 and have a two year teacher training i.e. Primary Teachers Certificate (P.T.C.). Many teachers in this category have studied part time and have obtained matric certificates
- * those who have passed standard 10 and have been teaching for more than 3 years without a professional certification.

They are trained for a year (PTC)

* those teachers who passed matric either with matric exemption or school leaving certificate and have been trained for three years thus obtaining a Primary Teachers' Diploma (PTD).

There are many other issues that could be raised about teacher training in Black Colleges of Education which will not be discussed in detail in this paper, for example:

- * reduced overall training (Special Course 1 year)
- * distance education leading to rote learning from manuals and lack of interactive tutorship and role models
- * lack of mastery of school subject content (teacher training after standard 8 and 9).

The writer will concentrate on the problems of uninformed classroom methodologies resulting from inadequate teacher qualifications. This consequently results in the grouping of pupils haphazardly.

As a result of the varying levels of qualifications described above, it is inevitable that teachers have different and frequently inadequate teaching methodologies. These methodologies range from those that are used by graduate teachers who have spent many years in the education field to those used by unqualified young teachers.

In a study conducted by Sibisi (1988) on practice teaching in KwaZulu Colleges of Education, 34% of respondents stated that the modern methods of teaching which they implement during their practice teaching period were not readily accepted by existing primary school teachers.

The varying methods of teaching in primary schools confuse

students trainees. Zungu (1987:38) reports that student trainees tend to think that methods used by teachers in service are more important than those taught at college. He cites a student-trainee as saying:

"you get a lot of useless information and theory while at the college and then learn about teaching when you get out on the job."

Xaba (1990:10) reports that the Department of Education and Culture tries to help teachers to bridge the gap by sending them to in-service centres and seminars. This proves to be inadequate because the time spent in these courses is insufficient.

In view of the above-mentioned situation, Sibisi (1989:135) recommends that colleges of education should assist teachers who are already teaching in the primary schools by organizing in-service teacher education programmes in areas where many new methods of teaching are being introduced. This may help to create a link between the colleges and the primary schools.

These different methods affect pupils more than is realized because pupils have to learn to adjust to varying teaching styles and methods every year. However, it does not imply that teachers have to adhere strictly to a number of set methods of teaching but there should be some degree of uniformity. In some schools, subject specialization starts at sub-standard A (SSA). At this early stage, pupils may be totally confused if the methods of teaching or approaches change from one subject to another (Personal Observation:Umbumbulu Colleges 1990).

1.5 Other factors affecting sub-standard A

In addition to the problems mentioned above, there are a number of other factors which affect pupils' development in SSA.

* Age of admission

Educamus (1990:11) reports that many Black schools are experiencing problems caused by the varying ages of school beginners which may extend from 4 years to as high as 13 years. Behr (1984:208) states that the official age of admission in 1979 was 6 1/2 years but this was lowered to six years in 1981. Presently, the accepted age for school beginners is 6 years though pupils aged 5 years are admitted if they will turn 6 years during the course of the first semester.

Educamus (1990:10) recommends that the entrance age of school beginners should be standardized in order to avoid possible negative influences that may be caused by the varying school entrance age.

The problem of a wide age range is compounded by factors within the curriculum itself. The curriculum is narrow and prescriptive. It is designed by curriculum planners with little, if any experience of pre-primary education.

The SSA curriculum expects all children to develop at the same rate. It does not consider the background experiences of the children and does not link the home and the school. The curriculum requires and encourages rote-learning and repetition of facts. Other factors include lack of equipment and materials, rigid authority structures and a system of frequent testing.

*** Drop out rate at sub-standard A**

According to the Race Relations 1985 survey, the number of Black pupils who drop out of school is alarming. 24 100 pupils left schools not having passed SSA and 40 000 dropped out of school before being literate.

It could be argued that as well as socio-economic factors, inadequate teacher training, contradictory methodologies, a prescriptive curriculum and the varying entrance age of admission have all contributed to the high drop out rate in SSA.

Themabela (1986:78) argues that unless changes are urgently made, at least at the SSA level, there will continue to be a large proportion of uneducated and undereducated people in South Africa. Engelbrecht and Verster (1984:192) state that teachers in general, and especially in SSA, need to nurture the child's talent and help to instill a positive attitude towards school work since the first years of infancy have a very marked effect on a child's future development.

There is also a need to examine the preparation stage for school beginners because it is estimated that 30% of the pupils are repeating a standard and that some are repeating a standard for the second or third time. The number of school dropouts and "repeaters" at SSA level indicates that many school beginners have a bad start at school. Such a beginning not only discourages the child but can block future learning processes.

Educamus (1990:10) reports that school readiness programmes of 12 weeks have been introduced in an effort to deal with the current high failure rate in SSA. The aim of the programme is to accommodate pupils who did not have an opportunity to attend pre-schools. It is hoped that these bridging programmes will be fully implemented by the end of 1992.

1.6 The geographic scope of the study

The study was conducted in the Lower Primary Schools which are under the KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture. The study was confined to the sub-standard A classes. Since the schools were situated far apart and their number was large, the questionnaire was used as a research instrument.

In order to collect data from a large radius, student teachers of Umbumbulu College of Education who had to do Practice Teaching for two weeks in their home schools were used to distribute and collect the questionnaires. The researcher had the advantage of working with student teachers whose geographical areas spread throughout KwaZulu which represented a sample of schools representing urban, semi-urban and rural schools under the KwaZulu Department of Education.

The Pilot Study was administered to SSA teachers from 23 school circuits. There were 40 respondents from a total of 60 questionnaires.

In addition, a revised and modified questionnaires was also designed, which was limited to schools in Durban and surrounding areas. This area was chosen because the reseacher had made previous observations on ability grouping.

1.7 Definition of terms

The Lower Primary School refers to those schools in which pupils spend their first four years of schooling. The classes involved are at present sub-standard A, sub-standard B, standard 1 and standard 2.

The Platoon system

is a system whereby two teachers have two classes to teach in

the same room.

Double session

refers to a system whereby a teacher teaches two sets of class per day. One class may be taught during the morning session while another class may be taught in the afternoon.

In this study **ability grouping** refers to a system whereby pupils are categorized into 2 or 3 groups of varying learning abilities.

Group A: refers to a group assumed to be "very intelligent" or "clever" or "bright" or even "gifted."

Group B: refers to a group assumed to be "average"

Group C: refers to a group assumed to be "dull" or "not bright."

The system of grouping children makes varying assumptions about the concept of "intelligence" and implies that "intelligence" can be quantified and thus measured in some way.

sub-standard A (SSA)

refers to the first year formal schooling, the reception class.

sub-standard B (SSB)

refers to the second year of formal schooling.

KwaZulu means the place of the Zulus and refers to the geographical area in the province of Natal which consists of scattered spots which have been set aside for exclusive occupation by the Zulus who form the largest ethnic group among the eight other groups of the South African Blacks.

1.8 Conclusion

In this discussion of the background to the study it is obvious that there are many factors which need to be scrutinized in order to investigate the methods of teaching and grouping SSA pupils.

There are many contributory factors which are causes of poor performance by pupils. With closer scrutiny many of the problems are intricately traced back to the level of teacher's qualifications, the age of admission of pupils and the effect this has on the pupils and teachers.

CHAPTER TWO

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND INTELLECTUAL ABILITIES AT SSA

2.1 Introduction

It is generally accepted that pupils vary greatly in their levels of development even by the time they arrive at the reception class or sub-standard A (SSA). The School Council Working Paper (1983:116) states that pupil differences include differences in physique, general abilities, achievement and personality traits.

It could be argued that parents should have primary responsibility for raising their young children. In present day society, however, this traditional responsibility is shared with resources outside the home. A primary supplement to the home is the nursery school, the kindergarten or other child-development centre, each of which helps to promote the development of the child. Many parents are limited in what they can give in the way of space, variety of equipment, educational materials and experiences. Some parents are so burdened with their own concerns that they are unable to provide the guidance that a child needs as s/he faces problems and frustrations in life.

Heffernan and Todd (1977:60) maintain that one of the most important influences in a child's life is the peer group in which s/he plays or engages in any learning activity.

It is generally recognized that a child is a unique individual. Children pass through a succession of developmental stages and will solve a series of problems, each in their own way, and in their own time. Sometimes, the child may progress so slowly that s/he may seem to be making little or no progress in developing skills which others consider to be important.

In the reception class (SSA), pupils undoubtedly bring with them a wide range of experiences from their homes, general environment and pre-schools. The family circle in which the child develops from birth is obviously highly influential in the child's progress. Mialaret (1976:30) maintains that the richness and coherence of each personality depends on the quality of the home environment and, above all, on the social relations established by the parents. The stimulation of all kinds received by a child is essential to foster the development of language.

2.2 The development of language

Mialaret (1976:30) also asserts that language development is an important variable in discussion of individual differences and intellectual abilities. Language acquisition varies with the way of life of the family, relations between parents and children and the time the parents devote to their children.

The family background inevitably has an effect on any child's development. Some children come from middle-class families and Don White (1983:25) writes that most of these children have rich experiences because of the wide and varied kinds of exposure to the environment. Hence, it becomes easier for them to engage in wide conversation with peers and adults and they usually acquire extended knowledge and vocabulary. By contrast, poor families cannot afford to provide extended experiences and are not likely to have easy access to the mass media. Their experience and vocabulary will obviously revolve around home activities.

Therefore, it could be argued that children from middle-class families will outshine children from poor families due to the experiences acquired.

Mialaret (1976:284) argues:

"Environmental differences lead to differences in

linguistic levels, often interpreted as differences in intellectual levels. A child whose language development is not very advanced does not always follow clearly what is going on at school, and so behaves like a relatively backward child. As a result, children from poor families generally have less chance of success than children from wealthy families."

Anselmo (1987:284) echoes Mialaret's viewpoint.

Don White (1983:25) also asserts:

"It is easy to see how different upbringing can lead to widespread differences in command of language and extent of knowledge by the time children come to school.

Some parents consciously spend time with their children and they value formal education; as a result they encourage their children to explore, to inquire and to engage in problem-solving strategies at an early stage. Consequently, these children will be better prepared for pre-school and school entry and there is likely to be a greater continuity between home and school activities and expectations.

Children from poor families, by contrast, are usually totally absorbed with problems of day-to-day survival. They have little or no time for wide-ranging conversation and discussion. These conditions may hinder the full development of a child's reasoning capacity and can lead to cultural discontinuity in that when a child enters school, s/he is expected to have acquired a certain knowledge and is denigrated by some teachers if s/he appears not to have done so".

2.3 Transition between home and school

Johnson and Roopnarine (1987:180) suggest:

"Acceptance of the child and his experience are crucial to developing a strong self-concept."

The attitudes and behaviors of pupils are influenced by the home background, home upbringing, culture and societal norms and values. In South Africa, for instance, the traditional African culture promotes unquestioning obedience to the senior members of the family, the community and those in authority. Reasoning and debate with adults is discouraged unless it covers topics approved by the elders. Pupils are expected to listen and to conform to whatever is being said by the elders. This limits the process of critical thinking on the part of the pupils. Their skills of critical analysis are not developed, they may have little or no experience in thought-provoking discussion because of cultural constraints.

Adams and Wallace (1990:4) write;

" The traditional Zulu culture promotes deep respect for senior members...young people are not encouraged to question their elders and it is considered impolite to push oneself forward as an individual"

These conditions and influences may have an adverse educational effect on school beginners (SSA) since the best schools aim to encourage the habits that have been discouraged in their early development. Children face a problem of being required to respond actively to the teacher, yet, in contrast, the home institution expects submission.

Apart from the influences of cultural constraints it could further be argued that the education provided in South Africa has little relevance to the life situation of most of the pupils, since the curriculum is based on European traditions and culture with no respect and recognition of the people it purports to serve. Primary schools especially offer a limited

range of subjects to a narrow range of learners and is oriented towards examinations and certificates and not to the learning of concepts and skills.

Heffernan and Todd (1977:165) emphasize the importance of pleasantness and smoothness in transition from home to nursery school, to kindergarten and to formal school.

Mialaret (1976:52) states that the problems raised by the transition from pre-school to primary education obviously vary, depending on the age of transition.

There are different procedures which have been adopted in different countries to try to solve the transition problems.

These include:

- * meetings between teachers of pre-primary and primary schools especially in the reception classes
- * Taking young children of pre-school level to see their future school where a large-scale welcome is organized for pre-primary pupils
- * integrating the first year of primary school into the pre-primary institution.

Wallace (1982:3) suggests that a teacher must take into account the pre-school experience of the child; she states that:

"A pupil entering school from a home in which s/he has experienced love and security and has had opportunities for enriching, creative and exploratory play will tend to be mature and socially well-adjusted."

Mialaret (1976:75) also argues that by the time the child is ready to enter the reception class, a child should have

developed feelings of safety and security, a sense of belonging and a sense of adequacy and should have begun to capitalize on pre-school experience and develop, during elementary school years, a sense of autonomy.

Unfortunately, teachers frequently experience the problem of having pupils who have attended pre-primary schools together with those who have not attended. The needs, experiences and interests of pupils in such a class may be very different from one another.

The teacher may be faced with pupils whose pre-school experiences have contributed little to their cognitive development, whereas, pupils who have attended pre-school may be more intellectually developed.

2.4 The nature - nurture debate

Sylvia Rimm (1987:23) states that psychologists and educators argue endlessly about the nature/nurture basis of development. Don White (1983:25) echoes the same viewpoint when he states:

"We are far from sure as to how much of the differences in ability we observe in children can be attributed to genetic factors and how much to environmental factors."

Anselmo (1983:6) states that almost all researchers have come to agree that nature and nurture interact with each other in a child's development and that differences in the quality of the environment have a powerful effect upon a child's development.

Anselmo (1987:6) also holds that each child is born with a certain heredity endowment that certainly has a great influence on individual development, although that child is also greatly influenced by diverse environmental factors.

2.5 Measurement of human abilities

Gross (1985:13) asserts that one of the major traditions of twentieth-century psychology that seeks to examine children's intelligence is the standardized measurement of human abilities. This tradition focuses on individual differences, most notably in the realm of intellectually based school abilities. The pervasive idea is that human potentials and abilities can be quantified and measured relatively easily. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon were asked by the French government to identify children who could not benefit from the normal educational system. With a belief in the existence of a general dimension of intellectual ability, they constructed many test items aimed at assessing comprehension and reasoning. They developed items which discriminated amongst children at different age levels. The intelligence test was validated essentially by determining that it was predictive of school success.

Gross (1985:13) states:

The validation procedure was consistent with Binet's purpose in developing the test."

Binet's tests were adapted by Lewis Terman who also adopted the concept of the intelligence quotient (I.Q.) that identified a relationship between a child's chronological and mental age, based on levels of children's performance on specific tasks.

2.6 Concept of excellence and dynamic development

Many researchers have assumed that a person is "intelligent" or has the capacity for "excellence" if s\he has a high level of ability as measured by conventional intelligence tests.

Clarke (1983:9) contends, however, that definitions of excellence or high ability have undergone an evolution. Early

definitions were based almost exclusively upon scores obtained from intelligence tests. Dissatisfaction with the narrow definitions grew when the importance of many abilities, not measured by conventional intelligence tests, was recognized.

The psychometric paradigm has been questioned for its simplistic definition of abilities which characterized very able children.

Current researchers such as Sternberg (1986) and Renzulli (1988) have recognized that each individual develops dynamically and is unique and that individuals have a wide range of abilities which make it difficult to compile a comprehensive list which would include all individual differences. Nevertheless, an attempt to find a broad definition of excellence was propounded by Lawless 1977.

According to Lawless(1977:8) very able children are capable of high performance in any of the following areas, singly or in combination i.e. general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts and psychomotor ability.

Another attempt at defining exceptional ability is proposed by Renzulli who states that no single criterion can be adopted. He argues that an exceptional person possesses a set of three interlocking clusters of traits which are: above average ability, creativity and task commitment.

Wallace(1987:137) argues that in addition to Renzulli's three-ring concept of exceptionality one needs to add sensitivity, intuition and zeal, and that other important considerations include non-intellectual factors such as patience, ego-strength and the ability to maintain long-term goals.

Many writers such as Piaget (1959), Sternberg (1985), Borkowski (1985) also suggest that intelligence is a continuous process of growth which is not easily defined or even easily quantifiable.

Anselmo also (1987:172) asserts that intelligence is developmental, increasing with age and experience. He further states that:

"Children learn through a combination of maturation, social transmission and the result of their actions on the environment"

Piaget argues that intelligence develops with maturation hence his suggestion of the four stages of development: sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete operational and formal operational. Although most writers accept the Piagetian notion of developmental stages, many question his assertion that these stages are related to specific ages. A child at the age of 10 may be in the formal operational stage while some very able children may jump or overlap some of these stages.

Anselmo (1987:10) also asserts that Piaget recognized that children must be helped to organize their environment and must be able to adapt to changes in it if they are to survive.

Piaget identified two major learning principles: the development of **schemata** (organized elements of thought) and the process of **assimilation and accommodation** (the way humans process or adapt to new information). Assimilation is the attempt to make new information fit into existing schemata, while accommodation involves restructuring one's thinking by adding new information.

In discussion of the curriculum of SSA there is little if any evidence that the child is recognized as a unique, dynamic and developing individual.

Vygotsky (in Bruner 1985:25) states that intellectual development goes beyond the mere acquisition of experience and must include the "social transaction of meanings" as the fundamental vehicle of education. Vygotsky uses the term "zone

of proximal development which is the difference between a child's

"actual development as determined by independent problem-solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers"

In education, especially in the reception classes, more capable participants (these may be parents, teachers or any capable people) should structure interactions so that pupils can participate in activities in which they are not yet fully capable. With repeated practice pupils gradually increase their mastery until they can function autonomously.

Vygotsky also stresses the importance of intentional mediation of the child's learning experiences whereby teachers and parents select and construct activities so that individual pupils gradually gain mastery.

Adams and Wallace (1990) state:

"The learner internalizes the concept and thus gains conscious control over his/her actions which s/he then can use as tools for further learning...The new higher concepts transform the meaning of the lower thus it becomes possible to reflect on past experience in order to interpret the new."

Heffernan and Todd (1977:166) particularly stress the need for mediation of the learners' experience in the reception class since the children frequently find themselves in new and strange situations that are only partially understood.

It could be argued that while it is accepted that mediation of learners' experiences should be intentional, it is equally important to add that it should also be appropriate and fit the

needs, interests and the demands of the pupils for which it is intended.

Adams and Wallace (1987:8) emphasize that where the two processes (social transmission and intentional mediation) are inadequate then the learner fails to develop fully effective cognitive functions and this results in the depressed intellectual functioning of the individual.

2.7 Cultural construct of excellence

Wallace (1978:136) argues that the construct of exceptional abilities or talents can only be conceived within the immediate culture or at least just beyond it. She asserts:

"If the culture does not recognize the talent or the giftedness, then it will remain stillborn or be regarded as anachronistic or avant garde."

This seems to be true of the traditional Black culture in South Africa. There were and, to a large extent, still are, culturally acceptable styles which are evident in music, art and in literature. Inevitably, these constantly change with time and changing values. However, these activities tend to be valued only as community activities and are not considered relevant to school achievement. Since the Black society generally values formal school education, the concept of excellence is largely based on school values and emphasis is given to success in school subjects and examinations. Consequently, instruments that measure school related abilities are used to make predictions about KwaZulu children (Personal observation and discussions with colleagues: 1987-1990). This observation is substantiated by the pervasive system of testing and ranking children as a result of group intelligence tests and school tests.

Adams and Wallace (1987:9) suggest that although cognitive

development can be irreversibly impaired as a result of hereditary or organic factors, writers such as Feuerstein (1979, 1980); Campione (1981); Brown and Ferrare (1985) show that underfunctioning resulting from insufficient mediation of learning experiences can be remediated by appropriate intervention.

2.8 The role of the teacher in the reception class

Heffernan and Todd (1977:60) emphasize that teachers working with pupils in the reception class (SSA) need to be very aware of individual differences among children and of the complex and dynamic nature of human development. For instance, simply recognizing a child's place in the family and knowing the whole family background can help the teacher to work more effectively with a child.

In most families, both parents have to work to earn a living. Children are left by themselves, and the first-born takes the responsibility of looking after the young siblings at a very early age and has also to attend school. The teacher should obviously be aware of those children and sensitive to the demands upon them.

Teachers should also recognize that each child has a unique family background and that families have individual patterns. For example, some families keep very much to themselves while others enrich their lives with excursions and social events. Within each family affectional relationships are also unique. The child is emotionally influenced by the characteristics of the home and family and brings this to school. The teacher is challenged to work with a child as an individual, who is a unique member of the reception class.

Teachers in the reception classes need to be aware that pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds and therefore, they need to create varied opportunities for children to acquire wide-

ranging experiences and to display different abilities. Teachers should encourage pupils to reveal the rich experiences within the school context. Each child's own experience should be the basis on which to begin school learning.

Another factors which KwaZulu teachers should consider is the diversity of the school-going population in KwaZulu. Pupils in the reception classes come from rural, semi-urban and urban areas. Hence, there are many issues that could be raised with regard to elementary education.

- * Should pupils from rural and urban areas receive the same curriculum?
- * Do pupils have the same kinds of environmental experiences?
- * Are teachers professionally equipped with the expertise relevant to pupils in the above areas?
- * Does the present curriculum accommodate the varying experiences of the pupils?

Teachers in the reception classes have a great task of accommodating the varying experiences of all the children in their classes. Therefore, teachers need to be versatile and should have been exposed to an effective training which empowers them to understand and cater for the diversity.

Don White (1983:30) states that:

"Differences in the quality of the children's experiences during a lesson are increased by differences in the command of the language the teacher uses and hence in their ability to share in what s/he believes the lesson to consist of."

It is therefore, important for a KwaZulu teacher to remember

that individual differences in previous experience and command of language lead to children having different perceptions of the lesson content.

Teachers, especially of the reception classes, also need to note that differences in levels of ability to handle abstractions undoubtedly exist and that most very young children cannot operate with the realm of abstract thought.

Moreover, teachers need to note that by the time pupils arrive at the reception class, they already have acquired varying experiences; some pupils having had much wider experiences than others (ibid).

Don White (1983:26) also states that teachers need to remind themselves that "school intelligence" is only one of a wide range of abilities possessed by human beings. He, further asserts that human abilities can be generally categorized into three broad areas, namely, cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Sometimes, human abilities can be classified more concretely into musical, artistic, dramatic, linguistic, mathematical or athletic activities but each of these aspects involves cognitive, affective and psychomotor factors. In each of these activities mentioned above, pupils undoubtedly vary widely in their capabilities to develop and perform and there are individuals who in varying modes and degrees excel in some activities far more than other pupils.

Education for Blacks is academically inclined, and pays little or no attention to the artistic inclination of pupils. Pupils with abilities for practical or artistic subjects are at a disadvantage because these subjects are not perceived as part of the foundation of education and hence are accorded lower status. These practical and artistic subjects include: Music, Arts and Craft, Drama, Dance etc. In the current system of education these talents are not encouraged. It could be suggested that many pupils with these talents are roaming the streets with the

school drop outs. If these talents come to the fore in schools, they are seldom recognized, and nurtured. It is also questionable as to whether teachers have the observational skills for recognizing these potentials.

Furthermore, it can be argued that teachers themselves constitute a contributory factor in the 30% drop out rate which is current in the reception classes.

The teacher's role is not only to impart knowledge to the pupils who must listen and memorize, but rather to develop skills that would constitute learning tools for life-long learning. The teacher should not be seen as an authority figure in the learning situation but as a senior learner who tackles problems with the pupils, sometimes, problems which have no definite conclusions. This is not to deny the importance of the teacher's knowledge or mastery of subject material but it is to emphasize the importance of the discovery and individual development of the pupil within the context of co-operative learning.

Teachers should be mediators of pupil's experiences, thus each teacher's role should be that of an organizer, a catalyst and a questioner who encourages and develops pupils' skills so that they become independent and autonomous thinkers and problem-solvers. This task requires teachers of a very high calibre who will be able to create and organize suitable learning environments in which pupils' potential will blossom.

To be able to prepare pupils effectively, the curriculum objectives should be set so that they are skills-based, long-term and future-orientated in that they are not only designed to see the learner through the standard subject content. Developing excellence not only depends on the fostering of skills in literacy and numeracy but also on developing skills of questioning and learning how to learn. (Sternberg 1985, Borkowski 1985, Vygotsky 1985, Adams and Wallace 1990).

To meet these demands, there should be a degree of negotiation between the learners and the tutor. Curriculum objectives should be made known to the learners who in turn, demonstrate various learning needs, so that the teacher can compile a work programme that will meet such needs. At pre-primary levels and in the reception classes, learners would undoubtedly have some difficulty in articulating their needs and the teacher, therefore, needs to diagnose the learners' needs.

In conclusion, teachers need to have:

- * good content knowledge of the subject they teach

- * skills in developing flexible and interesting teaching materials for the reception class

- * profiling and assessment skills and techniques

- * highly developed skills of questioning and explaining to cater for varying needs of the learners and their different cognitive demands

- * willingness to accept the role of catalyst thereby allowing pupils to be involved in structuring their own learning activities

- * skills and techniques in using various forms of groupwork.

2.9 Conclusion

There seems to be a common consensus that some individuals possess certain qualities and manifest certain behaviours that are exceptional when compared with others. However, there appears to be a general difficulty in outlining an all-embracing definition of exceptionality since there is a range of opinions about what actually constitutes excellence. Teachers should therefore be dissuaded from using psychometric tests as the sole indicators of pupils' capabilities. Even Terman who was one of the early designers of psychometric tests warns against the danger of relying solely on these tests as predictors of children's future development.

CHAPTER THREE

3. THE PROBLEMS OF IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND CAPABILITIES:

3.1 Introduction

There are difficulties encountered in identifying learning needs, potentials and abilities in all learners. Clarke (1983:12) states that such abilities do not readily lend themselves to a specific form of assessment. Teachers often meet classes which are new to them, particularly the reception class, and information about children is not always communicated in adequate detail. If pupils are in the reception classes, SSA teachers need information from their Pre-Primary Schools which may not be readily available, therefore, teachers need to know how to observe and recognize different kinds and levels of abilities.

3.2 Identification of pupils' potentials

Fatouros (1986:24) states that in the past it was believed that the third year of schooling was the timeline by which identification of high level capacity had to occur before irretrievable loss would take place. He further states that more recently, the importance of early identification is becoming recognized and methods of identifying pupils' talents and potentials at the Pre-Primary and Infant school levels are being discussed and designed.

Admittedly some exceptionally able pupils can be identified at an early stage but others need to be identified later as their receive exposure to experiences and opportunities. Wallace. (1989:111) argues:

Some children at a very early age manifest a high level of

reasoning, advanced use of language and wide general knowledge that are qualitatively different from other children.

These children should not be ignored and teachers need to identify them and provide appropriate learning experiences which will enhance and encourage the talents to blossom.

In South Africa the H.S.R.C. (De Lange Commission of 1981) proposes that intelligence tests and personal profiles be used in identifying very able pupils and the Human Science Research Council recommended and emphasized that the identification of these children should take place before the fourth school year.

KwaZulu Education Department promotes the identification of exceptionally able pupils during their second school year in preparation for the Olympiad Competition which in the Lower Primary Schools is conducted in Mathematics. This assessment is solely for this competition and is not used for any other diagnostic purposes.

Fatouros (1986:24), however, states that:

"Accuracy in identifying potentially gifted individuals is influenced greatly by chronological age. It is much more difficult to identify four year olds who are potentially gifted in any area than it is to identify gifted individuals in the 18 year old group".

Some of the six or seven year olds entering school may have little experience and even fewer opportunities to develop and demonstrate talents and potentials that they might have. For example, it is not possible to know whether a child is artistic if s/he has not been exposed to artistic experiences or has not even used a pencil.

Certain talents and potentials may be inferred from observing

the behaviour of individuals. However, the behaviour of very young children is less stable and consistent than that of older children. Their personalities are still developing and their behaviour patterns often change. Even while accepting that it is easier to identify exceptional behavior when pupils grow older. Fatouros (1986:24) cautions teachers against relying on these measures to make firm and supposedly accurate predictions based on initial observations of children's behaviour.

Fatouros (1986:24) further states that:

* teacher judgment in the identification of pupils' talents and potential which has been considered to be a very important factor in the identification process has been shown through research to decrease in accuracy as the chronological age of the child increases.

* peer nomination which is also an important contributor to the identification process can not be applied with young children since some children do not understand the task of judging their peers.

However, inspite of the difficulties that might be encountered in the identification process, recent researchers (Clarke 1983, Kerry 1984 Fatouros, 1986 Wallace 1989) strongly feel that there are some gains which might be achieved if pupils' learning potentials and talents are identified early so that appropriate learning experiences can be provided.

Fatouros (1986:25) argues that if pupils' talents are identified at an early stage they will have better opportunities to receive appropriate educational experiences throughout their schooling. Thus, their talents will not be wasted.

He further argues that some pupils' talents and potentials become dormant if they are not identified early. Some pupils learn to "cover up" their capabilities especially if they have

social or peer pressures which promote behaviour which does not allow them to reveal their individual talent as different from the norm.

The problem of underachievers might be overcome to some extent if exceptional pupils are identified early and this may reduce the need for remediation experienced by some underachievers.

As has been mentioned, some talents cannot be easily identified at an early age. Wallace (1989:110) contends that while some children's potential can be identified early, many other children, through lack of appropriate experiences and opportunities, have not had the chance to demonstrate whatever talent they might possess.

Fatouros (1986:24) suggests that it is easier to identify pupils' potentials and talents if they are older. She further states that late identification of pupils' potentials can provide teachers with better indications of pupils' capabilities since such identification can be based on what the individual has actually accomplished.

It has been stated earlier that whether the child's potential blossoms early or late will, to a large extent, depend on the individual, social and family background and other factors which may have an effect on the individual.

However, teachers for both KwaZulu Lower Primary and Higher Primary should concern themselves with developing educational provision which will enable all learners to display their talents, noting pupils with unusual characteristics and seeking to meet their needs. Consequently, they should be less concerned with rigid identification procedures.

3.3 Criteria for identification procedures

Clarke (1983:12) quotes Wynne Harlen's summary of a number of criteria which a good identification procedure should satisfy. These include:

- * it can be used frequently and repeatedly to give feedback
- * it can be used with individual children as necessary without affecting others in the group or class
- * it does not require special equipment or preparation
- * it does not unduly interfere with or take up time from normal learning activities
- * it does not disturb pupils and create anxiety
- * it is valid
- * it gives information about a wide range of abilities

Clarke (1983:12) strongly argues that no single procedure to identify pupils' potential can satisfy all the criteria. She further suggests that what should be considered are pupils' strengths and weaknesses and the advantages and disadvantages of the various instruments available.

Fatouros (1986:25) further suggests that traditional methods can be used with caution once and that group and individual intellectual ability tests can be administered to all pupils in the different grades if the teachers understand the purpose, limitation and strength of such tests.

However, individualized traditional methods of identification

are time-consuming. Furthermore, they are written tests and therefore unsuitable for children in the pre-school age group.

These tests have also been criticized for failing to cover areas such as creative potential, leadership ability and psychomotor skills.

Wallace (1989:107) argues that emphasis on precise definition and measurement fails to take into account:

- * the global and developmental nature of intelligent and creative behaviour
- * the modifiability of a learner in an optimum learning environment
- * the need for all pupils to experience a curriculum that is personally enriching and thus provides opportunities for all pupils to demonstrate "excellence" and "creativity" in many spheres at different times in their development.
- * the need for an education system that emphasizes the growth of all pupils as integrated and fully functioning individuals and as worthwhile, contributing members of the community.

Fatouros (1986:25) cites a study carried out by Renzulli and Reis (1971). The case study method which was used, more efficiently identified 92% of students placed in a special program for gifted children whereas the traditional psychometric method identified in only 79% cases.

Renzulli and Reis' case study method includes:

- * information based on aptitude and achievement test scores

- * information based on ratings by present and/or past teachers
- * information based on parent ratings
- * cumulative record folders
- * information based on student self-ratings.

Tests differ in type and ease of operation since they are designed to measure different attributes. If a decision has been taken to use standardized tests, care must be exercised in their selection. Tests should be suitable for the age group for which they have been designed.

Clarke (1983:15) asserts that most group tests of intelligence are unsuitable for infant-school children. If intelligence tests are used, the interpretation of scores needs to be made very tentatively. Teachers should also be aware that intelligence tests are subject to cultural bias.

The Human Sciences Research Council (H.S.R.C.) (1981:70) includes "exceptional ability" in its investigation of special education and suggests that the identification of exceptional pupils should be on the basis of a personality profile or longitudinal profile.

Appel (1989:97) strongly argues that though the importance of Intelligence Quotient Scores (IQS) was underplayed by the H.S.R.C., identification, particularly in South Africa, depends upon Intelligence Quotient Scores and school marks. He, further states that IQ testing is still practised extensively in South African Schools and has become part of the accepted baggage of education.

SSA teachers in KwaZulu need to be knowledgeable in the use and potential abuse of intelligence tests and what they purport to

measure.

Finally, the starting point before any test can be used should be to clarify the overall purpose in conducting the test. If, for example, the purpose is to improve the learning of individual learners, criterion - referenced tests may be the most appropriate.

Perhaps, what needs to be emphasized is that there is a need for SSA teachers in KwaZulu Lower Primary Schools to develop identification techniques and procedures relevant to their needs which can be used in classrooms.

Wallace (1982:3) summarizes the problem of the identification of pupil needs and capacities in stating that:

"There is no laser beam by which the teacher can be certain that all the abilities, talents, strengths and weaknesses of any child have been identified but by a combination of careful observation, perception, understanding and objective assessment....."

3.4 Identification of pupils' potential through provision

Wallace (1982:3) contends that the most important factor in the identification of pupils' potential is that of educational provision. A child can show abilities and talents only if the opportunity to do so is provided and encouraged. Clarke (1983:34) strongly argues that it is pointless to identify potential abilities if children never have the opportunity to develop them. Wallace (1982:3) further suggests that the quality and sensitivity of methods, practices and experiences initiated in the classroom will inhibit or produce the development of individual differences.

Wallace (1988:108) discusses the concept of "identification through provision"; this means that the educator deliberately

provides opportunities and creates environments in which pupils may show exceptional behaviour. Renzulli in his "school wide enrichment model" (1990) echoes the same viewpoint.

It could be argued that if schools were able to make appropriate provisions, if teachers could provide opportunities for all children to reveal their talent and abilities; some very able children would identify themselves through the quality of their responses and activities in class.

Educational provision largely depends on the quality of the teacher. If s/he plans to make provision for all the learners, s/he must present challenges and opportunities for creative exploration across a range of ability levels.

The preparation and planning of educational provision demands a high quality from the teachers themselves with regard to thinking and questioning skills. The teacher needs to search for alternative solutions and be open to new ideas. This task can only be tackled effectively by teachers who are themselves creative and flexible since traditional routines and methods tend to discourage creativity.

It should be noted that teachers should be mainly concerned with the development of appropriate educational provision for all learners thus enabling exceptionally able individuals to identify themselves through the quality of their responses.

The Initial and In-service teacher training should develop awareness with regard to the issues underlying the development of enriched educational provision for all children.

Wallace (1989:110) suggests that the identification of pupils' abilities should be an on-going process, since not all children develop in the same way at the same time.

3.5. A discussion of assessment procedures which underlie teachers' assessment of pupils' potentials

Schools Council Working Paper (1983:116) reports that assessment in educational settings is a multifaceted process. There are many aspects which are to be considered e.g. the way pupils perform a variety of tasks in a variety of settings, the meaning of their performance in terms of the total functioning of the individual and explanations for these performances.

As has been mentioned earlier, if pupils are provided with extra challenges to demonstrate their potentials to the maximum, the same challenges should be provided when they are assessed. Assessment of children needs to accommodate varying levels of attainment.

Ysseldyke (1988:5) maintains that assessment is a process of collecting data for the purpose of specifying and verifying problems and making decisions about students. When trying to establish the worth of anything, criteria must be decided to provide guidelines against which to judge the information required and the information received. The methods of assessment, whether formal or informal, must match the evaluator's needs as closely as possible. Therefore, the main concern should be to establish purposes and objectives of the assessment. Assessment should aim at measuring to what extent objectives are being achieved.

Frith and Macintosh (1985:6) further suggest six purposes for assessment. These are:

- * to monitor progress and to find out how the pupil is assimilating what is being taught. Specific action may be instituted as a result of diagnostic assessments

- * to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching which

again can lead to specific action

- * to assist pupils in making decisions about the future, whether it concerns choice of a subject or a course, or whether it is to help in choosing a suitable career
- * to discover potential abilities and aptitudes and to predict probable future successes whether in school or outside
- * to determine which are the most suitable candidates for a course, a class or university
- * to assign pupils to a particular group, to discriminate between the individuals in a group.

The main purpose of assessment is to provide useful feedback which will help the assessor to make decisions about individuals.

Teachers in the Lower Primary Schools in KwaZulu should bear in mind that in order to make decisions about individuals, certain forms of assessment need to be made.

3.6 Assumptions underlying assessment

There are a number of assumptions underlying the assessment of students. Salvia and Ysseldke (1988:35) identified several assumptions which are inherent in assessing students. It is assumed that:

- * the person who gives tests is skilled in doing so
- * error is always present
- * only present behaviour is observed

* that students assessed are like those with whom we compare them.

They further contend that test administration, scoring and interpretation require different degrees of training and expertise depending on the kind of test being administered and the degree of interpretation required to draw meaning from the test.

Obviously, teachers who have to administer assessment tests should be adequately qualified to do so. Salvia and Ysseldyke (1988:12) argue that although most teachers can readily administer group and achievement tests, a person must have considerable training to score and interpret data.

Because tests are so often used to make decisions that will affect children's future, their interpretation is important. Teachers in Initial -and In-Service teacher training should be provided with adequate training which will develop their skills in the administration and interpretation of assessment tests.

3.7 Assessment techniques and procedures

There is a considerable range of techniques by which the abilities and acquired skills of pupils can be assessed. The process of selecting the most appropriate assessment techniques is governed by a number of important considerations, in particular; the purpose for which assessment is to be undertaken, availability of resources and its suitability to the learner.

Frith and Macintosh (1985:18) further argue that it is necessary that the techniques selected relate to the aims and objectives of what is being mastered and are likely to produce reliable indications of the abilities or qualities desired in the pupils.

Bell and Harris (1986:82) also assert that the type of

assessment technique will depend on the purpose of assessment; whether pupils are assessed for mastery, motivation, prediction or for diagnosis of learning needs.

If the assessor has a clear knowledge and understanding of the aim of assessment, then it is more likely that s/he will be able to select appropriate techniques.

Wallace (1989:113) suggests that in many schools, assessment procedures are limited and reduced to the form of written tests and examinations. If teachers concentrate on this narrow form of assessment, many children may be wrongly assessed and thus, given inappropriate "labels". This applies, especially, to those who may not be exceptional in writing skills but may be exceptional in other areas e.g. A child may not be exceptional in handwriting but may possess other important qualities e.g. leadership and initiative. Wallace (1988:131) argues that such qualities are equally important, and all pupils must be given opportunities to develop them and be credited for possessing these qualities.

It seems desirable that teachers in Initial Teacher Training and In-Service Training should be trained not only to assess knowledge acquisition and the ability to take examinations, but also to assess pupils' abilities to learn, to find out, to plan, to take the initiative, to co-operate and to evaluate their own strengths and weakness.

In the case where pupils might be given written tests and examinations, teachers should set open-ended questions which are appropriate vehicles for students to demonstrate argumentative skills, discrimination in the choice of evidence and the power to analyze. Such questions can assess students over a wide ability range and can provide a variety of responses thus accommodating pupil differentiation.

What has been discussed so far is how knowledge and skills

already acquired can be assessed. This should not mean that pupils are assessed only to find out what they have learned but there is a need to assess projected needs of individual pupils.

Bell and Harris (1986:84) suggest that assessment has an important role to play in the diagnosis of learning. They argue that assessment does not necessarily involve formal tests of measurement, teachers need also to subjectively assess the needs of the individual.

The major aim of assessment used in a diagnostic way is to provide information useful in helping learners to learn more effectively. Teachers should be able to diagnose the current level of the child's development, which skills and concepts need to be developed and the pupil's zone of potential development. In this way, assessment will be used to allow individual differences to emerge.

Wallace (1989:18) suggests that assessment should be continuous and that detailed records and samples of work for each child should be kept in order to assess the progress of each child.

3.8 Conclusion

There are many problems encountered in identifying individual needs and capabilities and in assessing pupils' potential. It should be stressed that these problems call for innovation in the fields of identification and assessment.

It is also evident that there is a need for more agreement on the criteria of validity and tests of reliability at all the levels of school examinations.

In conclusion, it is suggested that identification of pupils and the assessment of pupils potentials be an on-going process since some talents become evident only with age and time. It should also be based on a variety of types of information since

individuals differ widely.

CHAPTER FOUR

AN EXPLORATION OF THE JUSTIFICATION OF GROUPING PUPILS IN SUB-STANDARD A ON MEASURED OR PERCEIVED ABILITY

4.1 Introduction

School and classroom organization to a large extent depends upon the principal and the teaching staff. Sometimes, students may be divided into different sections randomly depending on the number of the students in a particular standard. In some cases students are put into separate groups according to the subject package choice. Sometimes, if the group is too large, it is divided alphabetically. In some cases; pupils are grouped according to their assumed learning abilities.

While it is important for learners to work as individuals it is equally important that pupils be given opportunities to learn from each other and exchange the rich experiences they have. It is for this reason amongst others that group work is important and recommended as one organizational device in the classroom.

4.2 Ability grouping

There are different systems of grouping pupils, for example by age and or ability. The system of grouping by ability however, has been questioned and several researchers have investigated the effects of ability grouping and its underlying assumptions.

Kelly (1978:7) suggests that one of the reasons for ability grouping in the primary schools is to prepare pupils for the different streams they will have to choose from in the secondary schools.

The psychometric school of thought has encouraged the idea of the concept of the I.Q. This school of thought had momentum with the work of Binet on intelligence which encouraged the

assumption that "school intelligence" can be quantified and thus measured. The psychometric paradigm regards intelligence as relatively stable, developing in tandem with age with the ratio between chronological age and mental age remaining more or less constant. Kelly (1978:8) also states that it encourages the view that ability can be measured and used as a basis for grouping and that less able pupils, in particular, need to be given special treatment. This view forms the main argument in the case advocating streaming or grouping pupils by learning abilities.

Bailey and Bridges (1978:9) say however, that:

"a child's potential cannot be established by mere mechanical comparison with present achievement"

They further argue that if a child is currently unable to perform a task that does not imply that given more favorable learning experiences, that a child could not achieve mastery.

Elliot (1984:52) maintains that the rigid streaming in both primary and secondary schools is largely based on the idea that intelligence is an inborn characteristic; largely uninfluenced by the environment and able to be quantified as an I.Q. which is age related but constant and that it remains relatively constant throughout life. While it can be argued that intelligence must be influenced by heredity, there is evidence to prove that intelligence is profoundly affected by improved environmental conditions and better educational facilities.

Kelly (1978:8) argues that the psychometric viewpoint no longer enjoys general acceptance. It is being replaced by the developmental viewpoint which sees intelligence more as a process of cognitive growth or intellectual development. Consequently, intelligence is subject to constant modification by environmental factors.

The developmental viewpoint has led to a questioning of the validity of intelligence tests and especially their predictive validity.

Bailey and Bridges (1978:11) state that it has been generally assumed that what was revealed by an IQ test would have significance for all kinds of intellectual activity. On the contrary, some theorists believe that intelligence manifests itself differently in different spheres of life and the notion of "general ability" which is fundamental to streaming, is highly questionable in the light of current research and thinking on the development of human abilities.

Kelly (1978:12) maintains that it is also an unavoidable fact that many irrelevant factors enter into decisions as to what stream a pupil should go into or what kind of primary or secondary education s/he should have. He further insists that entry to the "A" stream depends on such things as the area of the country a child happens to live in, the month of the year in which s/he was born; the childhood illnesses; the professional status of the parents and many other extraneous factors.

It has also become apparent that once placed in a "B" or "C" or "D" stream the child's self-image deteriorates and s/he begins to see the self as intellectual inferior. Low self-esteem is likely to undermine academic performance as well as psychological well-being.

Kelly (1978:12) emphasizes:

"If we put a label such as A; B; C and D teachers will inevitably treat them (children) accordingly, developing those curricula and levels of work that they deem to be appropriate to them and; never expecting more from any of them and; therefore never getting anything more."

Kelly (1978:13) continues:

"What is often noticeable about ability grouping is that if a child is placed in a slow group the inevitability is that s/he remains in that group. If a child is placed in a "bright" group there is a tendency to develop an exaggerated view of the self."

Schmuck and Schmuck (1979:23) stress that students' self-concepts are influenced strongly by the reflections they gather from the reactions of their teachers and their classmates. Students who have negative feelings about themselves tend also to hold negative feelings towards others. Pupils with low levels of self-esteem in the classroom are apt to slip into daydreams or misbehave when they are in school. Thus; students whose self-esteem in school is low; or for whom self-esteem is unrelated to school achievement, could be prime targets for corrective interventions by creative teachers. Otherwise the alternative is possibly an ever-increasing dropout rate.

Brophy and Good (1984:274) cite a study conducted by Mackler (1969) which concludes that initial placement into a low-ability group may pigeon-hole a student permanently. They further maintain that ability grouping is likely to have a positive effect on student achievement in the high-ability classes and a negative effect on the achievement and attitudes of students assigned to low-ability classes.

Bailey and Bridges (1978:12) looking at the effects of ability grouping maintain that in most schools teachers are "streamed" as well as the pupils. "A" stream pupils therefore, usually have the added advantage of working with the best "A" stream teachers, while those pupils placed in the other streams have the corresponding disadvantage of working with the less inspired and inspiring members of staff - a practice that has the same implications for the morale of teachers.

According to Brophy and Good (1984:274) one apparent reason for

the failure of ability grouping is the failure to adjust instrumental material and methods of teaching. Johnson in Brophy and Good (1984:274) report that teachers in schools who practised ability grouping are not provided with new skills or curriculum material aimed specifically for different ability levels. Hence, most teachers do not adjust their content or teaching style to meet the special needs of students at different achievement levels.

Bailey and Bridges (1978:16) suggest, however, that literature reveals that most high-ability students do not receive instruction that meets their needs notably better than they are met in heterogeneously grouped classes; and that low ability students receive a relatively poorer quality of instruction. They further argue that teachers underestimate low groups because the label "low ability" creates a rigid stereotype of student incompetence in the teacher's mind. The quality of instruction in low ability classes also suffers because most teachers do not enjoy teaching the low-groups. In addition, some students are misclassified and suffer as a result of low placement.

Brophy and Good (1984:274) emphasize that even when students are assigned to ability groups with even the best testing instrument currently in use, at least 10% are misclassified.

Douglas in Brophy and Good (1984:275) reports a study in which high ability and low ability students were assigned at age 8 to groups higher or lower than their tested abilities suggested. Three years later both high and low ability students were observed. Those placed into higher sections had improved; and those placed into lower groups had deteriorated.

It could be suggested that such improvement of higher achievement is caused by:

- (i) Exposure to teachers who expect good performance and

who teach accordingly

(ii) Opportunity to mix with brighter peers who model better skills and attitudes

(iii) Improved self-concept and motivation stemming from placement in a higher group.

Green (in Kerry (1984:13) states:

"I have never seen (ability) grouping operate without students feeling that it was discriminatory."

Having identified some pupils as "bright" however inappropriately, the question arises as to whether these pupils should be segregated permanently for educational purposes. Another question which arises is whether they should receive special and separate attention occasionally or be put into mixed ability classes for all their learning experiences.

There is still an on-going debate as to whether high achievers should receive special and separate treatment or not. Bailey and Bridges (1978:9) maintain that there is no real reason to believe that the potential of the child who at present is a low achiever is necessarily less than that of the child who is at present a relatively high achiever.

Elliot (1984:52) proposes that all children should be given equal opportunities to develop their intelligence, talents and abilities to the fullest possible extent. He also suggests that whoever believes in equal opportunities in education will condemn any programme which is designed for a selected number of pupils because it contradicts the principle of equal opportunities for all children.

Bailey and Bridges (1978:9) emphasize that high on the list of human wastefulness is a general reluctance, unreadiness or

inability on the part of teachers to exploit the full richness of our own human talents. This is not to deny that pupils are different and that they have varying needs, interests, weaknesses and strengths.

Wallace (1989:125) asserts that:

"There is a wide range of individual differences in emotional, social and intellectual development but that does not mean that some children must receive a better quality of education than others."

Current writers on ability grouping (Kerry 1984; Wallace 1983) suggest that a system of ability grouping is effective when used temporarily and when pupils are grouped differently for various purposes.

It could be argued that ability grouping is sometimes desirable if it has been designed for a specific purpose; but if designated "high achievers" or "exceptionally able" children and designated 'dull' or "low achievers" are grouped separately and permanently within class then there is the consequent danger of a labelling effect.

However, Wallace (1983:59) argues that "higher achievers" from the time to time should be given opportunities to work together in order to challenge each other and to exchange ideas. Clark (1986:35) echoes the same viewpoint.

Kerry (1984:13) provides the following arguments for some form of ability grouping.

- * Ability grouping allows pupils to advance at their own rate

- * It challenges the pupils to do their best in the group to which they are assigned

* Providing for individual differences within the mixed ability classroom becomes complex and time-consuming with such great variation of individual differences

* When mixed ability grouping is used, the teacher tends to teach to the average or below average students

* Pupils of less ability are able to receive more individual attention from the teacher when they are placed together in a class.

4.3 Mixed ability grouping

Writers who support mixed ability grouping (Kelly 1978; Bailey and Bridges 1979; Kerry 1984) maintain that technological development of the last half century makes it vital to educate everyone to the maximum of his or her potential. A highly complex technological society is voracious of educated people at all levels. Educating all pupils together is likely to lead teachers closer to this goal.

Kelly (1978:18) argues that there is a good need to educate everyone to understand each other; there is a need to produce people who can work with one another. Kelly (1978:18) further argues that education should produce a society in which there is no segregation of classes or groups of people. Again, it would seem probable that educating everyone together in a mixed ability group is more likely to bring about a democratic society. Technological change also requires that people be ready and able to adjust to continuous change; both technological and social.

The Crowther Report (in Kelly 1978:18) states that pupils will need to be flexible and adaptable and should be able to think for themselves, and again, many would want to argue that being taught in mixed-ability classes will contribute to this.

According to Bailey and Bridges (1983:17) one important argument in support of mixed ability grouping is based on the principle of equal respect for each child as an individual. They also stress that many of the comments made by teachers reflect the supposition that when teaching a mixed ability group, teachers cannot help but recognize the range of different individual needs.

Kelly (1978:20) emphasizes that teachers should not regard education as a competitive game, a race with limited number of prizes; since to do so will not be consistent with the idea of treating every child as of equal value.

He further argues emphatically that the intention should not be to conceal the differences, or even the inequalities, that can be discerned between people. It is to say, however, that the differences and inequalities that exist between people's ability to read, to understand Mathematics or write French prose should not be regarded as evidence of membership of a qualitatively inferior class or race. (ibid)

Elliot (1984:53) states that on social grounds, there is certainly a strong case for having mixed ability classes especially in primary schools because such schools improve in tone, spirit and atmosphere. Elliot (1984:53) adds:

"Competition gives way to co-operation and helpfulness, and the school takes on a freer and more friendly atmosphere. With the removal of a highly competitive atmosphere, more work is devoted to music, art and drama."

Kelly (1978:20) stresses that democratic educational goals cannot be achieved by the promotion of competition between pupils.

Some researchers (Kerry 1984; Wallace 1983) suggest that there

are more gains in mixed ability grouping than in ability grouping. Kerry (1984:13) provides the following arguments for mixed ability grouping.

- * Mixed ability classes provide personal contacts similar to those the pupil will encounter as an adult
- * Pupils need the social experience of working with others of different abilities
- * Low achievers benefit from learning experiences in association with those of higher ability
- * Pupils do not all develop at the same rate. Mixed ability classes help pupils cope with different maturation rates.

Teachers will need to decide when it is desirable to keep students of mixed ability working together and when pupils need to be grouped according to current levels of ability.

4.4 Small groupwork within a class

Small group work can occur in addition to any other form of class grouping.

For the purpose of this section the term "group" refers to a collection of interacting persons with some degree of reciprocal influence over one another. Discussion refers to an orderly process involving a group of individuals in informal face-to-face co-operative interaction for the purpose of sharing information, decision-making or problem-solving.

Small groupwork takes place when pupils in a class are divided into small groups and are engaged on a joint project, or if they help each other with their own separate pieces of work. It mainly takes place through group discussion and teaching.

Boydell (1978:90) states:

"Small groupwork occurs when the teacher attends to a small group of children together rather than addressing the whole class or coping with children privately one at a time."

He further states that the distinguishing feature is the interaction which takes place within the group; both with the teacher amongst the children or when the teacher is absent.

Turney (1980:14) suggests that discussion should be encouraged in wide ranging activities, not simply as an outward display of democracy at work, but because this kind of group deliberation can have a number of important values.

Gulley 1968 (in Turney 1980:14) in a convincing analysis proposes that group discussion when compared with deliberation by one person can have a number of general strengths given the right conditions. He also points out, however, that the success of group discussion can vary enormously, depending on such factors as the nature of the task, the quality of leadership, the abilities of members and the availability of information.

According to Turney (1980:14) the values of small group work are as follows:

Groups have more collective resources than individuals. People of varying interests and needs have varying knowledge and experience. They will often have access to more information on an issue than one individual. Furthermore, the combined thinking of group members is likely to produce new insights for all participants.

Turney (1980:15) further maintains that:

* in group discussion members of a group may be motivated

by the social situation to endeavour to make worthwhile contributions and to help the group succeed. Members may feel their contributions will win social approval and they tend to display a high level of interest in the pursuit of the task

* groups may produce better decisions, ideas may be clarified and refined, combined and evaluated through the interaction of members and the end decision or solution tends to be superior

* through their involvement in discussion, group members feel a strong commitment to accept and pursue the resultant decision or plan. They have helped to hammer it out; they are more or less satisfied with it and are willing to work for its implementation

* group interactions amongst members may increase understanding of themselves, of their members and of group processes. Group members may gain insight into their own and others' attitudes, reactions and sensitivities. The individual's ability to contribute rationally and constructively to group deliberation may also be developed.

The above proposition regarding the general strengths of group discussion are attractive especially in the reception classes i.e. sub-standard A, because usually some pupils entering SSA have previously been exposed to small groupwork in their pre-primary education.

Hefferman and Todd (1977:9) assert that in nursery school or kindergarten, pre-school children have a group experience that extends the values of family life, giving them total experience in democratic living in which co-operation is strengthened and competition minimized.

It could be argued that if the pre-school small group experience

is transferred or continued in the reception classes, pupils may produce optimum results or performance.

Gulley (1968) in Turney(1980:15) is a strong proponent of the value of group discussion but suggests a number of limitations such as:

- * group discussion generally requires considerably more time than does decision-making or planning by an individual. The views of all members must be heard, disagreements resolved and agreements reached. The price of better decisions and increased commitment often means longer periods around the table

- * discussion can be wasteful. Without able guidance discussion may wander to the irrelevant, be misled or delayed by the ill-informed; be confused by inept communication; be concerned with the trivial and lack conclusiveness

- * there is a danger in group discussion that some members may conform to the seemingly popular view rather than risk censure from other group members. Anxiety about social disapproval may cause the withholding of convictions, valid objectives and helpful suggestions.

However, researchers in small groupwork (Boydell 1978; Marland 1982; Don White 1983; Elliot 1984) recommend small group teaching within classes although they also state such a division creates its own problems.

Turney (1981:16) cites a study conducted by Adams and Biddle (1970) which reveals that pupil involvement is greater in small groups and promotes pupils' thinking to a greater degree than the large central group. However, conversely and importantly, it was discovered that small groups are more likely to become involved with non-relevant subject matter than a central group.

The above mentioned results have important implications for group discussion especially in elementary classes. They highlight:

- * the value of the small group discussion and group teaching in maximizing pupil involvement and promoting thinking

- * the danger of time wasting if the groups are inadequately or ineptly guided.

In general, these findings support the idea that small group discussion and group teaching should be encouraged, although their activities should be supervised by the teacher so as to keep pupils on target.

Brophy and Good (1984:283) suggest that grouping within classes does not have to be based on student ability especially if the objective is merely to reduce the number of students to be taught together at one time e.g. if pupils are beginning reading. This is usually conducted in small groups because it involves slow paced oral reading with corrections and fast-paced drills on word attack skills.

These two activities are difficult to conduct with the whole class. Thus, even in a classroom composed of students of similar ability, teachers may want to subdivide into smaller groups for more convenient instruction.

Elliot (1984:50) argues that even if a class is divided into groups, there is still the assumption that the class is a fairly homogeneous unit, although there are bound to be some differences in ability, temperament and age. If the differences are great, these differences may hinder class teaching.

Small group teaching can be used for a variety of reasons and

for a number of different purposes and activities. The teacher will have to decide whether groupwork is likely to help in a particular situation by assessing the needs of the class the demands of the activities and the advantages or disadvantages of working in groups.

Don White (1983:91) suggests that small group teaching can be used to provide several children with the opportunity of practising some skills such as reading aloud simultaneously. Richardson and Feldhusen (1988:43) suggest that groupwork can be used to practise both verbal and non-verbal listening and communication skills.

Small group teaching can be used with children in accordance with current attainment, enabling more appropriate exercises to be designed for each group and permitting the teacher to devote more time to the children who need most help.

It could also be argued that a teacher may group pupils according to their learning abilities **temporarily** if the teacher aims at providing exceptionally able children with extension work which will allow those children to explore more complex ideas than their peers could explore.

Clarke (1983:35) argues that exceptionally able children should be given opportunities for contact with children of "like minds" to share ideas and to co-operate with one another. He further suggests that the individual learner should be given an opportunity to learn widely and hence to broaden the base of his/her experience as much as possible.

Wallace (1983:60) suggests that the present curriculum should be enriched to meet the needs of all children, by adding to it greater breadth, depth, pace and complexity in order to make it more challenging for all the learners.

The learning content of a curriculum may be qualitatively

modified to make it more appropriate by providing a background of more complex material and experiences to which pupils can respond at appropriate levels.

Don White (1983:91) suggests:

"Small group teaching well prepared and carefully handled can pass to the children some measure of responsibility for choosing what they will do and how and in what sequence they will do it; and make opportunities for the development of creativity and the exercise of higher order cognitive skills."

There is no fixed minimum or maximum size for small group work. The optimum size for any one group will depend on such variables as the experience, maturity and skill of members; the intensity of their interest in and background knowledge of the topic; the degree of group cohesiveness; and the teacher's understanding of and skill in discussion leadership. The group should be small enough to permit the ready informal participation of members in face-to face interaction and large enough to provide a sufficient diversity of resources and stimulation among members.

Seating arrangements for participants are important. Don White (1983:92) maintains that two of the most obvious difficulties of extensive use of small group teaching in Southern African schools are the size of the classes i.e. the teacher-pupil ratio and the unsuitability of the furniture. If the teacher has a class of 60, the desks are heavy, old-fashioned two-seaters and moving the furniture may be time consuming and difficult.

Don White (1983:92) further states however, that even in the above mentioned circumstances he has seen effective use of groupwork. Some teachers in the elementary classes take their classes to the playgrounds, particularly for group reading lessons. Others have trained their classes to quickly form groups e.g. groups of fours, one pair in each group simply turns

around to face the pair behind them.

Brophey and Good (1984:292) suggest that the teacher needs to:

- * describe the kind of interactions that are expected during group activities and provide any necessary training for the learners
- * identify interesting and appropriate tasks for group assignment
- * arrange for a division of responsibility that assigns each individual in turn a critical role
- * monitor group interaction and assist weaker members to fulfill their role satisfactorily.

Teachers need to be equipped with organizational skills which will be required in groupwork. The initial and in-service teacher centres should help teachers to acquire skills in:

- * how to teach students in the same classroom when there is a wide variety of abilities
- * how to organize the classroom to accommodate a wide variety of instructional materials
- * how to set up a classroom community that obtains the co-operation of all students in maintaining an atmosphere that permits learning.

4.5 The role of the teacher in managing groupwork

A number of important matters should be considered before groupwork takes place. A paramount aspect is the need for the creation of an open classroom climate, a non-threatening, free, informal and friendly group atmosphere. Such a climate

facilitates group interchange and the absence severely restricts group interaction.

Satter and Miller (1955) in Turney (1980:18) reveal that members of discussion groups ranked, as highly important, four needs often associated with a free group atmosphere, namely:

- to be recognized by others
- to be accepted and respected
- to feel secure, and
- to feel free to participate.

Ainsworth (1972) in Turney (1980:18) stresses the need for acceptance, trust and security among group members if they are to contribute freely. They must feel safe to speak their minds; safe from teacher, peer censure and pressure.

The teacher's role in promoting an open classroom climate has many facets. Turney (1980:18) suggests the following:

- (i) relinquishing teacher dominance. When working with the class and especially with its sub-group the teacher should increasingly become a co-ordinator of learning rather than a "dispenser of knowledge".

In co-ordinating learning the teacher becomes a co-planner of tasks, a promoter, a supporter and a guide of pupil activity, a resource person when required and a co-evaluator of progress.

- (ii) increasing pupil responsibility. The teacher should give more responsibility to pupils for planning, executing and evaluating their own learning. When pupils are organized in groups they must be aware of their roles and responsibilities as participants. They should be trained in specific skills and strategies.

4.6 Ability grouping with particular reference to KwaZulu Primary Schools.

Introduction

The problem experienced by SSA pupils during and after they have been admitted to school have already been generally discussed in Chapter One. However, there are further details that need explanation. There are many constraints within KwaZulu Lower Primary Schools which include:

- * overcrowding in schools
- * high teacher-pupil ratio
- * high drop out rates
- * rigid authority structures.

As a result of the constraints mentioned above many KwaZulu Lower Primary Schools, especially the sub-standards, have double session classes. Usually the first session commences at 08H00 until 11H00 hours, and the second session at 11:00 until 14H00 hours.

Classroom organization

KwaZulu Lower Primary classroom organization is very complex due to the size of the classes and lack of adequate facilities such as furniture; floor space and teaching aids. Don White (1983:2) points out that there are difficulties preventing the extensive use of group teaching in Southern African Schools.

If, for instance, the teacher has a class of 60 pupils, the classroom is likely to be so crowded that it becomes difficult for even the teacher to move freely. In some KwaZulu Lower Primary schools the type of furniture that is used consists of benches. In some cases three different classes are taught in one big hall, some with partitions others without. As a result, some students may not perform very well because of lack of

concentration caused by the classroom design. In some schools, the furniture is so inadequate that classes are conducted with pupils sitting under a tree. Nevertheless, some form of ability grouping is in operation. (Personal observation and discussion with lecturing colleagues).

Don White (1983:92) further states that if grouping takes place under such adverse conditions, it requires tight control, careful training of the children and extensive and detailed preparation by the teacher. Adams and Wallace (1990:4) observe that large class sizes and a wide range of pupil ability within any one class cause difficulties which most teachers attempt to resolve by means of a rigid and didactic teaching style aimed at inducing rote learning. It has also been observed that some Lower Primary School teachers use corporal punishment to control their classes.

Ability grouping in KwaZulu Lower Primary Schools is carried out quite early in the year of entry, that is, during the first quarter and consequently SSA pupils are not carefully trained for groupwork. For example, pupils are grouped according to their performance in any newly taught subject matter (see Appendix 3a).

Appendix 3a reflects the planning for three different groups (i.e. A, B and C) to be taught three different areas of subject matter. Group A is designated to be "bright" because they have been taught and have mastered all the vowels (a, e, i, o, u). Group B is designated to be "average" since they were able to master 4 vowels i.e. (a, e, i, and u). The last group is "C" which is designated as the "dull" group because they still have to master two more vowels.

One could question the fundamental educational rationale for three different and labelled groups in the classroom being taught 3 different areas of narrow subject matter in one period. It is very unlikely that classifying pupils on this basis has any correlation with their overall learning potential.

4.7 The self-fulfilling prophecy

Schmuck and Schmuck (1979:66) argue that developing expectations about how other people will behave in particular circumstances is a very natural, human phenomenon. Without predictions and assessments of others, life would be overly complex, seemingly random and perhaps even chaotic.

Brophy and Good (1984:95) suggest that data about students are often misused by teachers. Information about students' previous intellectual performances and their personality characteristics can predispose teachers to expect such students to continue to perform as they have in the past; these teachers' expectations in turn can influence the sorts of interactions that the teacher initiates with the students.

Schmuck and Schmuck (1979:78) state that an early pioneer in social psychology, Thomas, postulated that:

"If man defines situations as real, they are real in their consequences."

Thomas' statement is a reminder that human beings respond not merely to objective features of a situation but also to the meaning the situation has for them.

Schmuck and Schmuck (1979:78) state that Robert Merton 1949 (In Social Theory and Social Structure) introduced the idea of the self fulfilling prophecy. He argues that public predictions or prophecies of a situation can become an integral part of the situation and thus affect subsequent developments.

Schumck and Schmuck (1979:78) say:

"The self-fulfilling prophecy is an invalid definition of the situation evoking a new cluster of behaviours which

makes the originally false conception come true."

Boydell (1979:108) states that there is a great deal of evidence from social psychology which indicates that consciously or not people bring all kind of expectations into human encounters.

Brophy and Good (1984:97) cite a research conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson where they presented false information about their students to a sample of teachers. The experimenters told the experimental teachers that some of their youngsters were assessed to be "academic spurters" these "spurters" would show great progress in their academic achievement during the school year. Other youngsters were given no special designation by the experimenters. In actuality, tests of academic potential were never really administered and the students who were described as "spurters" were chosen randomly. Data collected after the year of schooling showed that the "spurters" made more significant gains in intelligence test scores, reading test scores and in teachers' ratings about their personal and social adjustment than their non-labelled peers.

Although several reviews of "Pygmalion in the Classroom" severely criticized the research methods employed in the study, nevertheless, researchers (Finn 1972, and Brophy and Good 1972) conclude that the research on the self-fulfilling prophecy in the classroom leaves little doubt that the expectations of teachers have important and real effects on students.

Schmuck and Schmuck (1979:67) state:

"There are teachers, for example, who use reading achievement scores to form permanent reading groups; thus building psychological boundaries and distances between students."

They further argue that sometimes ability grouping is implemented on the basis of a single test. Sometimes first

grade teachers have very little data on children at their disposal and therefore use informal and intuitive means to estimate students' I.Q.s before any testing takes place.

Doyle; Hancock and Kifer (in Schmuck and Schmuck 1979:67) conducted a research where the first grade teachers were asked to estimate their students' I.Q.s before formal testing. Then later in the school year, they found that those students whose I.Q.'s have been overestimated by the teacher had achieved more in reading than would have been predicted from the student's actual I.Q. score. Those students who had been underestimated achieved less. Further, the research shows that teachers who generally underestimated the I.Q.s for their entire class had more students who were achieving less at the end of the school year compared to the students of teachers who had been prone to do more overestimating.

Two studies are cited by Schumuck and Schmuck (1979:69). In one study, Rist (1970) documented how first grade teachers perpetuated a social class hierarchy within their classroom by assigning students to reading according to their socio-economic background. Teachers placed middle-class children in higher level reading groups than the lower-class children. In another study; Finn (1972) reveals that teachers in urban schools held higher expectations for the academic performances of their students than teachers in rural schools.

Brophy and Good (1984:104) say that there is a variety of ways in which teachers sometimes vary their behaviour towards high and low-achieving students. They mention some behaviors that sometimes indicate differential teacher treatment of high and low achievers which include:

- * giving low achievers answers or calling on someone else rather than trying to improve their responses by giving clues or repeating or rephrasing questions

- * calling on low achievers less often to respond to questions and criticizing them more often for failure
- * generally paying less attention to low achievers or interacting with them less frequently with less smiling and fewer other non-verbal indicators of support
- * less use of effective but time-consuming instructional methods with low achievers when time is limited.

There is growing evidence (Marland 1982, Don White 1983, Elliot 1984, Good and Brophy 1984) that students may be permanently affected by group placement. Physical separation of students into rigid streams increases the probability that high and low students receive differential opportunities and status and that low-achieving students are treated less appropriately.

Brophy and Good (1984:106) assert that grouping of students can also result in differential instruction. They cite a research conducted by Comfrey and Good where seventh-grade English and Mathematics classes were observed during teacher instruction and interviewed some students in high and low groups in each class. They found that content presentation to low-achieving students resulted in content fragmentation, mystification, repetition, low quantities of theory and limited exposure to integrating concepts. Students in low groups, in classes grouped by ability spent much of their time on repetitive drill activities that were inadequately presented and discussed and inadequately related to relevant integrating concepts; so that students were unlikely to receive the intended benefit from these activities even if they did them correctly. The researchers believe that the intended curriculum is especially likely to be distorted because of the ways that teachers interact with low group students and the kinds of tasks they assign them.

It could be argued that ability grouping in KwaZulu Lower Primary is a self-fulfilling prophecy in that pupils in Group

"A" designated to be "bright" are taught subject matter different from Group B and C. As a result, teacher' instruction differs greatly from Group A to Group C, since the teacher has already categorized SSA pupils and teaches them according the their assumed learning abilities.

It could also be argued that this system of ability grouping is a self-fulfilling prophecy in that if these children are given the same tests, pupils who are in group B or C cannot possibly score as highly as those pupils in Group A. The teachers' lesson guides indicate that the same test is given to all pupils and that some pupils are promoted to the next standard without having completed the syllabus of the previous standard SSA (see Appendix 3b).

4.8 Conclusion

Current writers on groupwork (Don White 1983, Wallace 1983, Elliot 1984) are in agreement that groupwork is a generally accepted practice in education and can help teachers to provide opportunities for all children to work together whether they are exceptionally able or not.

Teachers often state that they are interested in helping pupils develop skills in initiative, creativity and higher level cognitive skills such as to analyze, to synthesize and to evaluate. Small group teaching, well prepared and carefully handled can help and promote some measure of responsibility for choosing what they will do, how and what sequence they will do it and make opportunities for the development of creativity and the exercise of higher cognitive skills.

CHAPTER FIVE

A DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT AND ITS APPLICATION

5.1 Introduction

Empirical science depends upon data collection procedures in order to obtain valid and reliable measurements. Data sometimes lie buried deep within the mind or within the attitudes and feelings of people. It is, therefore, important to devise a tool to probe below the surface.

In this study, the researcher wished to investigate the methods used by teachers to group pupils according to their assumed learning abilities in SSA in KwaZulu schools. A group of 60 SSA teachers who were randomly selected from urban and rural areas were given a pilot questionnaire (Appendix 1) specifically designed to ascertain the extent to which ability grouping is used in SSA and to gather evidence about current practices which are being carried out in KwaZulu Lower Primary Schools.

The Pilot Questionnaire responses were analyzed to obtain a clear indication of those aspects which respondents may have difficulty in understanding or those which may not ask exactly what the researcher is seeking to ascertain.

On the basis of the Pilot Questionnaire, a revised and Modified Questionnaire (Appendix II) was administered to a different but also randomly selected group of teachers working in the same geographical areas in Durban. The responses were analyzed to:

- i) ascertain the kinds of assessments used by the teachers of SSA pupils before entry into school and to discover how these assessments were made
- ii) analyze the frequency and kind of contact teachers

have with parents of SSA pupils

iii) ascertain whether teachers group pupils according to their abilities in SSA and if so, in which subjects

iv) discover why teachers group pupils in SSA

v) analyze the problems expressed by teachers when they group pupils in SSA according to assumed ability levels.

vi) discover whether teachers have received training in assessment procedures and group techniques.

5.2 The use of questionnaires

According to Harris and Bell (1986:58) a questionnaire is:

" A collection of written questions which are generally answered in the absence of the person who is collecting the information."

Leedy (1958:142) further states that a questionnaire is:

"A common instrument for observing data beyond the physical reach of the observer"

It may be that a questionnaire is the only feasible way of collecting information in certain circumstances e.g. where very large numbers are involved or where respondents wish to remain anonymous.

The questionnaire aims at translating the research objectives into specific questions whereby answers provide the information that is necessary for exploring the area under investigation. The questionnaire, therefore, is structured on the basis of the research objectives.

Types of questionnaires

A questionnaire may be either open-ended (unstructured) or closed (structured) allowing the respondent varying degrees of latitude.

The choice between using open or closed questions depends upon what information is required, the audience, and the time available to write, answer and analyze the questionnaire.

Harris and Bell (1986:60) suggest that open-ended questionnaires allow the respondents more freedom in the way they respond and in what information they give.

They further state that open-ended questionnaires are quicker and easier to respond to than closed questions. They can also collect more information which would not be obtained with closed questions. Whereas these questionnaires have the advantage of providing relevant information, the analysis in open ended questions is more difficult and more time consuming to summarize than in closed questionnaires.

In the structured or closed questionnaire the respondent is expected to choose an answer that best suits his position from the given alternatives. According to Harris and Bell (1986:60) a closed questionnaire is often considered easy to answer but many people become frustrated because sometimes the choice of answers available do not fit with ideas of the respondent.

Generally, closed questions are presented first in order to draw the attention of the respondents to certain points. However, this may affect their answers to the questions that follow. Harris and Bell (1986:60) argue:

"If open questions precede closed questions the respondents are given freedom to express themselves before having their ideas focused by the questionnaire writer."

The advantage of the closed questionnaire that is the information given by the respondent is always relevant to the purpose of the inquiry. It is a standardized method, simple and quick to administer and also inexpensive to analyze. However, it has the disadvantage of restricting the respondent's answers to the questions when s/he wants to give more information.

It may be advantageous to use both closed questions and open questions in the same questionnaire in order to permit the respondents to express themselves freely as well as to provide specific information.

Disadvantages/limitations of questionnaires

Since the questions are on paper and the interaction is impersonal, the questionnaire has both advantages and disadvantages. Mahlangu (1987:85) discusses some of the disadvantages of a questionnaire which are as follows:

- * there is usually a high percentage of questionnaires which are not returned. If the response is poor the validity of the results may be affected
- * bias may arise from the respondent's lack of understanding of the questions or resentment may be felt towards the presumed interference in his personal affairs
- * the ability or willingness of the respondent to provide information may affect the validity of the results
- * the respondent may have little interest in a particular problem and therefore may answer the questionnaire indiscriminately
- * the questions may be misinterpreted and such misinterpretation may be almost impossible to detect
- * the completion of a long questionnaire is time-consuming.

*** Criteria for a good questionnaire**

There are certain criteria which a researcher should take into consideration during the preparation of a questionnaire.

Leedy (1989:143) states that the writer of a good questionnaire should never forget that s/he is asking the addressee for a gift of time, effort and the favour of a reply.

This brings up several important considerations in questionnaire construction. These considerations make the questionnaire more valid and reliable. One of the major objectives when formulating a question is to state each question as clearly as possible. The language used by the researcher should be familiar to the respondents. Leedy (1989:142) echoes the same view point when he says:

"Communication is a deceptive skill. What may be crystal clear to you may be so much meaningless jargon to another person."

It is for this reason that a questionnaire should be as clear and as short as possible and the researcher should avoid using vaguely defined words. A questionnaire should be simple and abbreviations and slang should be avoided. The questionnaire should be accompanied by a covering letter clearly stating the objectives of the questionnaire and the importance of the study being undertaken. The letter should be brief, polite, tactful, courteous and must appeal to the respondent.

It should be well structured and stress the concerns of the respondent rather than the interests of the researcher. This will persuade the respondent of the worthiness of the study and encourage him/her to co-operate willingly.

In this study a covering letter (see page 130) together with the two questionnaires (Appendix 1 and 2) were sent to a sample of

teachers who are teaching sub-standard A at Lower Primary Schools in the KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture.

In order for a questionnaire to succeed and produce good results, planning is of vital importance. The instructions should be simple and clearly stated. The researcher when structuring the questionnaire must put him/herself in the respondents' shoes to ensure that the questionnaire will be understood. The items in the questionnaire should be arranged in a definite pattern which will not confuse the respondent. A questionnaire should have a clear and a good layout in order to assist the respondent in answering and should be conducive to later analysis.

The researcher should bear the objectives of the investigation in mind whenever s/he formulates a questionnaire. The questionnaire should be precise, relevant and seek the information that will be beneficial to the researcher. Dullman (1978:80) also stresses the importance of keeping in mind the kind of information that is being sought.

Harris and Bell (1986:61) further state that questions should be tested on a small sample of people similar to those who will ultimately answer the questionnaire. In the light of the trials and pre-test, the questionnaire should be edited and redrafted to ensure that it probes for the information required.

When actually writing the questionnaire the researcher should remember that the aim is to obtain the information the researcher wants and that which the respondent wishes to give.

The questionnaire should encourage those who are answering to do so easily and accurately. Questions that require a major memory effort should be avoided.

Leedy (1985:144) suggests that in questionnaires dealing with debatable or ⁷opinion-sensitive issues or when the researcher

suspects that the respondents may give answers that are deemed prudent rather than true, the researcher may incorporate countercheck questions to help verify the consistency with which the questionnaire is answered.

5.3 Validity and reliability of a questionnaire

For a research study to be successful a questionnaire should have two important factors without which the research becomes meaningless.

These important factors are validity and reliability. According to Leedy (1985:26)

"Validity is concerned with the soundness and the effectiveness of the measuring instrument. The instrument must comprehensively and accurately measure what it is supposed to measure."

Lawshe and Baslma (1966:268) maintain that:

"For effective use of test results the user needs to know the relationship between the test and what he is trying to accomplish in a particular situation."

The term validity can be used relatively and a test may have degrees of validity. A test is valid to the degree that its measurement correlates with another measure of what it is supposed to measure. When the correlation between the test scores and the criterion score is high the test measures what it is intended to measure, that is, it is valid.

Reliability deals with accuracy, consistency, dependability and stability of the instrument. Thorndike in Lawshe and Bulman. (1966:276) suggests that:

"A measure is reliable to the extent that repeated

measurement gives consistency of results for the individuals. Consistent in that his score remains substantially the same when the measure is repeated or in that his standing in the group shows little change."

This means that no matter how many tests are undertaken under similar conditions for the same study, the instrument will yield the same or similar results. On the scale, reliability may be described as high or low.

5.4 The questionnaire as a research instrument in the present study

In this study the questionnaire was used as a research instrument. It was preferred because Lower Primary Schools in KwaZulu are far apart. The researcher could not easily visit all Lower Primary Schools in person, but decided not to send the questionnaire through the Post Office but to give the questionnaire to Umbumbulu College of Education student teachers who had to do Practice Teaching for two weeks in their home schools. The researcher had the advantage of working with student teachers whose geographical areas spread throughout South Africa but for the purpose of this study only students who live in KwaZulu areas were given questionnaires.

The aim of the questionnaire was to find out to what extent the practice of ability grouping is used. It was limited to Durban and surrounding areas where the researcher has frequently observed its practice.

The Pilot Study (See Appendix 1)

Questions in (A) of the Pilot Study required the respondents to provide information about their location of work or region. The purpose was to determine the extent to which ability grouping is used and whether it is found in rural or urban areas or in both areas.

Questions in (B) of the Pilot Study was used to ascertain teachers' qualifications and teaching experience in SSA. Questions in (C) of the Pilot Study were used to find out further details about ability grouping. They required teachers to provide information about their criteria for ability grouping and the problems encountered by this system of grouping. Section 1(C) incorporated questions which evoked no response from many respondents. This might have been caused either by ambiguity of the questions or because the questions required the teachers not to choose or tick from the given possibilities but to explain in detail.

The Modified Questionnaire (See Appendix 2)

The questions in the Modified Questionnaire (A) and (B) remain the same as those in the Pilot Study (A) and (B). The three questions ((iv) How did you discover them. (viii) In which subject are they grouped. For each subject how do you group the children. (xiv) If yes, briefly state those problems.), which initially had evoked inadequate information were restructured in the Modified Questionnaire (C). Otherwise the rest of the questions remained as they were in the Pilot Study. The aim was to persuade teachers to give responses readily and to obtain more detailed information than the Pilot Study.

There were 40 respondents from a total of 60 questionnaires. Eight out the 20 who did not return the questionnaire were from supposedly "urban" schools while 12 were from supposedly "rural" schools. The response rate of 66.7% therefore gave an acceptable indication of the situation under investigation.

A questionnaire incorporating both closed and open questions was used as the research instrument in this study. It was preferred because of the reasons stated earlier.

5.5 The selection and suitability of a questionnaire in this study

The questions which were asked aimed at gathering information about the current practice of ability grouping in Lower Primary Schools. The researcher tried to structure the questions in accordance with the accepted criteria that are discussed earlier in this section.

In the Pilot study the researcher wanted to establish the location of the schools in question and the relevant Department of Education.

In the Pilot study the question selected dealt specifically with teachers' qualifications and teaching experience. The researcher wanted to ascertain whether SSA teachers who group pupils according to their assumed learning abilities have specific professional or academic qualifications. The length of teaching experience was considered in order to examine whether this correlated with the practice of using groupwork. This is an important aspect because there are teachers who may assume that their years of experience in teaching SSA has enabled them to know exactly how to deal with SSA pupils as compared with the teachers who have just started in the teaching field.

The questionnaire items in the Pilot study dealt specifically with the current practice of ability grouping. The intention was to find out how many teachers are involved in ability grouping and also the criteria used in the selection and assessment of SSA pupils' learning abilities. The researcher assumed that there were measurement instruments which SSA teachers used in categorizing pupils according to their assumed learning abilities. The aim was to find out what measures were actually used and how effective those measuring instruments were.

The questionnaire was found to be suitable because it enabled the researcher to obtain information from a large number of

Lower Primary Schools in KwaZulu. The researcher could not easily contact SSA teachers in KwaZulu within the period of two weeks prescribed for Practice Teaching at Umbumbulu College of Education.

The questionnaire gave the respondents enough time to respond freely without being intimidated by the presence of the researcher. In the questions that required the respondent to express opinions, they responded freely without fear of being identified as being critical of the present practices, the education system and the methods of teaching SSA pupils. An interview would, for example, be unsuitable as teachers may not want to be identified as being critical. The questionnaire was, therefore, found to be the most suitable instrument of research.

5.6. Conclusion

A questionnaire is appropriate for those research problems where the information sought is sufficiently structured that it can be explained in writing. The respondents should also be able to read and write to be able to answer the questionnaire. The researcher also needs to try to maximize the likelihood that a respondent will answer the questions and return the questionnaire.

CHAPTER SIX

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

6.1 Introduction

In this Chapter the data that were collected were analysed in order to assess the method used by SSA teachers in grouping SSA pupils according to their assumed learning abilities. The analysis of the responses also indicated whether SSA teachers did have specific or standardized methods of how to conduct groupwork. The analysis further indicated what, if any, assessment procedures were used by the teachers.

6.2 Responses to the Pilot Study

Responses were analyzed to enable the researcher to draw conclusions as to whether the methods used to group pupils according to their abilities are based on any educational theory or specific training.

6.2.1 Pupils Assessment Procedure entry

Table 1

SSA pupils assessment before entry	Number	%
No tests administered	37	92.5
Teacher set aptitude test	2	5
Standardized aptitude test	1	2.5
Total	40	100%

It could be argued that pupils who have an advantage are those that have had more opportunities to practise writing than the others. It would appear that if pupils have Pre-Primary School experience, they will have an advantage over those who lack this experience. The study did not elaborate on the type of tests teachers use, what these tests really measure or the purpose for

which they were intended. 2.5% stated that Standardized Aptitude Tests (SAT) are used in assessing pupils' learning potentials. However, the researcher failed to identify the type of SAT being used. It is not known whether SSA teachers are trained to use such tests or whether they are administered by guidance counselors.

Conclusion

A significant number of 92,5% teachers do not administer any tests before pupils are enrolled for school entry.

6.2.2 Responses with regard to pre-primary education

Table 2

Information about Pre-Primary Education	Number	%
None has Pre-School Education	14	35
Few received Pre-School Education	22	55
Half received Pre-School Education	4	10
Total	40	100%

65% of SSA teachers acknowledged that there are some pupils who have attended Pre-School Education (Table 2). How beneficial the information is in terms of the management of ability grouping is not known since 35% of the respondents stated that their pupils did not receive Pre-primary education and have little or no chance of obtaining pupils' previous profiles.

6.2.3 Breakdown of kinds of teacher/parent contact

Table 3.

Means of Contact	Number	%
Letter only	10	25
Personal contact only	14	35
Verbal message only	2	5
Verbal and personal contact only	3	7,5
Letter, personal contact and verbal message only	2	2
Letter verbal message	3	7,5
No answer given	6	15
All of the above	-	-
Total	40	100

25% of the respondents stated that they communicate with the parents by letter only (Table 3). However, letter contact can be merely a notice of a parents' meeting where individual cases of the pupils are not elaborated on, or the letter contact can be school reports which are usually available at the end of the year though in some cases they are available to the parents after mid-year examinations. However, it is not known how the parents respond to such reports.

35% of the respondents stated that they have personal contact with the parents (Table 3). Personal contact can be a parents' meeting, church meetings or by appointment whereby parents visit the school and discuss individual problems. 15% of teachers did not respond presumably because they had already stated that they had no contact with the parents. None of the respondents use all the possible methods of parental contact stated i.e. letter, verbal message (oral message via the pupil) only, personal contact and telephone. 7,5% use letter and verbal message only.

Conclusion

In general there is some form of contact between parents and teachers. The study, however, did not reveal who initiates most of the contact whether the teacher or the parents. In addition, the responses to this question may have been affected by environmental factors because the research was conducted during a period of political up-risings which involved school boycotts in some of the areas in KwaZulu.

6.2.4 Responses of teachers on grouping pupils according to ability.

Table 4

Subjects in which pupils are grouped by ability	Number	%
Zulu only	9	22.5
Mathematics only	1	2.5
Zulu and Mathematics only	15	37.5
English and Mathematics only	6	15.0
English, Zulu and Mathematics only	9	22.5
Total	40	100%

100% of the respondents stated that they group pupils according to their assumed learning abilities in various subjects and that they use the terms "bright", "average" and "low" abilities (Table 4). 75% of the respondents revealed that ability grouping is mainly practised in Zulu and Mathematics. However, the study did not elaborate on why teachers choose to use groupwork in the two subjects stated above.

Some respondents group pupils according to their assumed learning abilities in English (Table 4). It is noteworthy that in the reception class in KwaZulu, English is taught as an oral subject and no written class work and examinations are conducted.

Conclusion

SSA teachers agree that they categorize pupils according to their assumed learning abilities and that they are mainly in three groups, i.e. "bright," "average" and "low", though in the teachers' daily preparation books it appears as Group A, B and C (see Appendix 3). It could be strongly argued that "ability grouping" in English is a futile exercise since pupils in SSA do not read or write any thing in English. They are just taught basic sentences.

6.2.5. Information regarding ability grouping

Table 5(a)

Method of ability grouping	Number	%
Method derived by the teacher	27	67.5
Method suggested by officials	12	30
No response	1	2.5
Total	40	100%

67.5% of the respondents stated that ability grouping is a method they have derived for themselves as teachers (Table 5(a)). If asked how they derived this method, 55% stated that their years of experience in teaching led to their method of ability grouping and 30% stated that they had been instructed to do so by educational officials.

Source of knowledge about ability grouping

Table 5(b).

Method derived through experience	22	55
Method taught at the College	4	10
Instructed by inspector and principal	13	32.5
No response	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Conclusion

From the above response the researcher concluded that in total 87.5% of the respondents use arbitrary methods when grouping pupils according their assumed learning abilities (Table 5(b)).

These methods are apparently not justified by any educational rationale and seem to be intuitive.

32.5% of the respondents were either instructed by the inspector or principal or other member of staff, therefore they are carrying out instructions when they group pupils according to their learning abilities, but could not offer any educational rationale for doing so.

10% of the respondents say they were taught methods and purposes of ability grouping at the College (Table 5b). However, there are merely two paragraphs referring to the uses of grouping in the book called "Education II" which is prescribed for the Primary Teachers Diploma II and it seems that some teachers try to apply what they learnt at College. However, the researcher questions the adequacy of the information found in the textbook unless the lecturers responsible have provided supplementary information on the methods and purposes of ability grouping.

Although teachers group pupils according to their learning abilities in SSA, generally they seem not to have a justifiable educational reason as to why they use the method of ability grouping.

6.2.6 Information regarding In-Service Training

Table 6.a

In-service training in groupwork	Number	%
Number receiving training in groupwork	11	27.5
Number that received no training for groupwork	28	70
No response	1	2.5
Total	40	100%

It is significant that 70% of the respondents do not receive any In-Service Training courses in groupwork and ability grouping and it is significant that while ability grouping operates in schools, teachers stated that they do not receive training in how or why to use ability groups (Table 6(a)).

6.2.7 Attendance in In-Service Training

Table 6(b)

Attendance in in-service training	Number	%
Once a year	4	10
Twice a year	3	7.5
No response	33	82.5
Total	40	100

82,5% teachers did not respond when asked how often they attend seminars, workshops and in-service courses in ability grouping (Table 6.(b)). 17,5% of the respondents either attend once a year or twice a year. This study did not ask in depth about the kinds of courses teachers attend and by whom those courses are conducted.

Conclusion

A significant number of teachers stated that they group pupils according to their abilities but do not attend any seminars, workshops or in-service training on the purposes and methods for ability grouping. It could be concluded that even if teachers are experiencing problems they do not find opportunities to discuss those problems.

6.3 Responses to the Modified Questionnaire

Section C of the Pilot Study incorporated questions which for some reasons were not answered by many respondents. Inadequate responses might have been caused either by the ambiguity of the questions or because the questions required teachers not to choose or tick from the given possibilities but to explain in detail. The three questions which initially had provided inadequate information were restructured in the Modified Questionnaire. Alternative methods were suggested to the respondents and they were asked to choose and tick the information relevant in their situation.

In the Modified Questionnaire the respondents verified to a large extent what the Pilot Study had revealed. In this section an endeavour is made to interpret the differences or the deviations that have been revealed by the Modified Study in comparison with the Pilot Study. If the responses of the Modified Questionnaire were similar to those of the Pilot Questionnaire, a general comment will be made. Should there be a significant change between the Modified Study and the Pilot Study - discussions and further explanations will be made with regard to the change.

6.3.1 Responses to the kinds of assessments used by teachers of SSA pupils before school entry

Table 7

Information about Pre-primary education	Number	%
No tests administered	33	82.5
Teacher set aptitude test	4	10
Standardized aptitude test	3	7.5
Total	40	100%

82,5% of the respondents stated that there were not administering any tests before school entry (Table 7). In comparing the Modified Questionnaire and the Pilot Questionnaire there is a difference of 10% but it does not affect the general view that SSA pupils are not assessed before school entry.

6.3.2 Responses with regard to Pre-Primary Education

Table 8(a)

Information about Pre-Primary Education	Number	%
None received Pre-School Education	11	27.5
Half received Pre-School Education	7	17.5
Few received Pre-School Education	20	50
Do not know	2	5
Total	40	100%

In the Pilot Questionnaire teachers were asked whether they obtained Pre-Primary information about their pupils and how they discovered this information. The pilot answers revealed that although the teachers were able to state whether their pupils did or did not receive Pre-Primary education, there were no responses as to how they discovered this information. Consequently, in the Modified Questionnaire, alternative methods were suggested to the teachers and they were asked to choose and

tick the information relevant in their situation. The responses were as in Table 8(a).

6.3.3. Responses with regard to Pre-Primary Education

Table 8(b)

Source of information about Pre-Primary Education	Number	%
Received from Pre-School certificates	14	35
Stated in the admission forms	1	2,5
Pupils asked by teachers in class	16	40
Pupils promoted from the existing pre-schools	5	12,5
No response	4	10
Total	40	100%

The responses in the above revealed how the teachers discovered the information about pupils' Pre-Primary education. 35% of the respondents stated that SSA pupils brought Pre-Primary certificates on admission (Table 8(b)). 40% of the respondents stated that teachers verbally asked pupils in class. 12,5% stated that pupils were promoted from the existing Pre-Primary schools. 10% did not respond and the reasons for failing to respond were not stated by the respondents. 2,5% of the respondents stated that pupils were asked this information when they filled in admission forms.

6.3.4. Responses about teacher parent contact

Table 9(a)

Contact with parents	Number	%
Teachers contacting parents	35	87,5
No parental contact	5	12,5
Total	40	100%

The results of the Modified Questionnaire support the Pilot

Questionnaire in that there is some degree of teacher parent contact at SSA level (Table 9(a)). 40% of the respondents stated that they communicate with the parents by letter only. 20% of the respondents used personal contact with the parents (Table 9(b)). 15% of the respondents stated that they were communicating by letter and personal contact while 7,5% of the respondents communicated by letter and verbal message only. 12,5% did not respond to this question while 2,5% stated that they communicated with parents by verbal message only.

6.3.4. Breakdown of the kinds of parent-teacher contact

Table 9(b)

Kinds of Parent-teacher contact	Number	%
Letter only	16	40
Personal contact only	8	20
Verbal message only	1	2,5
Letter and personal contact only	6	15
Letter and verbal message only	3	7,5
Letter, personal contact ,verbal message and telephone	1	2,5
No response	5	12,5
Total	40	100%

6.3.5 Responses on whether teachers group pupils according to their ability.

Table 10

Information about ability grouping	Number	%
Teachers that use grouping	39	97,5
Teachers that do not use grouping	1	2,5
TOTAL	40	100

The responses of the Modified Questionnaire verify the responses of the Pilot Questionnaires in that teachers do group pupils according to their assumed abilities. In both studies, the Modified and the Pilot studies, only one teacher did not use ability grouping at SSA (Table 10)

6.3.6 Responses of teachers on grouping pupils according to ability

Table 11

Subjects in which pupils are grouped	Number	%
Zulu only	18	45
English and Mathematics only	1	2,5
Zulu, Mathematics, Writing and English	1	2,5
Zulu and Mathematics only	11	27,5
Zulu, Mathematics and English	1	2,5
No responses	8	20
Total	40	100%

The responses of the Modified Questionnaire verify that teachers regard Zulu and Mathematics as the most important subjects in which pupils should be grouped (Table 11). It is noteworthy that the Modified Questionnaire revealed that in addition to Zulu, Mathematics and English, SSA pupils are also grouped according to their abilities in Handwriting. The study does not reveal how pupils are categorized in Handwriting since in the reception class Handwriting mainly deals with the skill of forming letters.

6.3.7. Reasons for using ability grouping

Table 12.

Sources of knowledge about ability grouping	Number	%
Instructed by principal and staff	10	25
Method taught at the college	7	17,5
Instructed by inspector	18	45
No response	5	12,5
Total	40	100%

Unlike the Pilot Study where a significant number of teachers stated that it was the method they discovered through experience, the respondents in the Modified study revealed that ability grouping was not the method discovered by the teachers themselves, but it was the result of instruction emanating from either the local inspector or the school principal and staff (Table 12).

6.3.8. Responses regarding in-service training

Table 13

Information regarding in-service training	Number	%
No in-service courses attended	20	50
In-service courses attended	15	37,5
No responses	5	12,5
Total	40	100%

The responses of the Modified Study verify the responses of the Pilot Study in stating that in some areas there are no seminars, workshops or in-service training in ability grouping (Table 13). 37,5% of the respondents stated that they attended courses in ability grouping, but they failed to state what type of In-Service Courses. Only 7,5% of the respondents were able to

explain the type of course attended in ability grouping. 5% of the respondents stated that they attended "day by day " courses. 2,5% stated that they attended "specialization in remedial education". The study did not ask in detail who were conducting these courses or whether they were approved by the Department of Education and Culture.

6.3.9 Problems expressed by teachers in ability grouping

Table 14

Problems	Number of respondents
It is confusing to teach and manage many groups at the same time	20
Pupils do not receive equal attention because of time	28
While attending one group, other groups are not supervised	17
Working pace for all groups becomes slow because the teacher has to alternate groups while teaching	20
There is no spirit of competition within the groups	11
It develops hatred amongst different groups in class	13
Groups do not receive equal attention from the teacher	23
The teacher ends up with more than one group in class	21

In the Pilot Study the respondents were asked whether they were encountering problems in ability grouping. 50% of the respondents stated that they had no problems. The respondents who stated that they were experiencing problems in ability grouping were further asked to articulate and explain them. There was a poor response to this question. Consequently the researcher restructured this question in the Modified Study and

supplied a list of possible answers. The respondents were asked to tick the problems they had encountered and thereafter to make suggestions.

It is significant that all respondents from a sample of 40 teachers stated that they experienced the above mentioned problems.

6.3.10 Suggestions about ability grouping

In both the Pilot Study and the Modified Study the respondents made the following suggestions:

i) "Group leaders should assist teachers in class" which could mean that each group in class should assist the teacher while s/he is still busy working with another group.

ii) There should be an assistant to attend to other groups while the subject teacher is busy with one group. They also suggested that pupils have a role to play in their own education. The respondents, however, did not elaborate on how they would organize groupwork and whether teachers need to develop organizational skills.

iii) Pupils should be grouped according to their abilities after obtaining their mid year results and that ability grouping should be according to whole class groups and not within class grouping.

iv) Slow learners should be grouped together and teachers should have special training to cope with slow learners.

iv) Ability grouping is good and it should be continued. The respondents showed little or no understanding of educational developmental processes. No reasons were given to support their recommendation for the continuation of ability grouping.

6.4 Critique of the questionnaire

The researcher chose to use a questionnaire as the research instrument; however, although questionnaires probe teachers to respond, the researcher felt that the questionnaire limited teachers from exposing some information. This was highlighted in question (xvi) of the Pilot Study, namely:

"Are there in-service courses, seminars or workshops in ability grouping?"

Some respondents stated that they attend "day by day" courses. This answer needed follow up questions, for example:

- are these courses approved by the Department of Education and Culture?
- how long are the courses?
- are teachers taught to group pupils only in English or in other subjects?

The limitations of the study arose from a number of inter-related factors. The questionnaire was designed in English and teachers who were expected to respond to it, teach all subjects in Zulu. Although most teachers have a basic command of English this may have been a constraint. The researcher foresaw the possible problem of receiving minimum information from teachers who might try to avoid long explanations and discussion.

The researcher considered designing a questionnaire in two languages i.e. Zulu and English. However, firstly, the problem of translating may have led to distortion of the meaning. Secondly, there may have been no equivalent words in Zulu. Thirdly, teachers may have felt that they were being undermined if the questionnaire was designed in Zulu since the research was being conducted in English.

Some people, especially Blacks, have a negative attitude towards research since the current focus of research is mainly in Black

areas and frequently highlights the deficient system of education and general instability in the country.

Research is now often viewed with suspicion and regarded as a money-making exercise for personal benefit. This may have affected responses to the questionnaires.

The researcher might have been seen as an authority figure since she accompanies teacher trainees for practice teaching. Teachers may not have given the correct information for fear of exposing themselves as inadequate, or they may have tried to impress the researcher by giving the answers they think the researcher wanted.

However, despite the problems mentioned above, the researcher decided to use questionnaires in English to investigate the practice of ability grouping. These questionnaires were sent to a random sample of teachers in various schools in rural and urban areas in Durban. No interviews were conducted as the schools were situated too far apart and personal contact with the researcher, was impractical.

The study was confined to teachers who are teaching sub-standard A pupils only. The study was limited to an investigation of the methods used by teachers to group pupils according to their assumed abilities.

If both interviews and questionnaires had been used, the researcher might have gained more information from the teachers' responses and could have further clarified and extended the responses of some questions.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

The analysis of the information supplied by SSA teachers in KwaZulu Lower Primary Schools led to the following findings.

7.1.1 Assessment procedures

In SSA there are no uniform entry assessment procedures conducted by teachers when admitting and subsequently grouping pupils according to their assumed abilities. Also it appears that teachers are not familiar with a range of assessment techniques because nowhere in the problems expressed or in their suggestions about grouping did teachers mention or comment about their lack of knowledge of assessment instruments or use of specific assessment techniques.

The study suggested that the majority of teachers use their intuitive discretion as to how to assess pupils' potential. The methods used by the teachers vary from one individual teacher to another and seem to be random. The researcher discovered that some teachers use teacher-set aptitude tests to group pupils' according to their abilities but the nature of these tests was not specified. The type of test used depends on the school concerned, and are not obtained officially from the KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture.

7.1.2 Pre-Primary education

The study revealed that 98% of the sample of SSA teachers are aware that there are pupils who have Pre-Primary Education. Certain SSA teachers ask pupils to produce Pre-Primary Certificates. Seemingly this information is kept for record purposes only. There is no indication that this information is used to help with grouping pupils for various purposes.

7.1.3 Teacher-parent contact

The study also indicated that there is some form of contact between parents and teachers. Apparently the contact mentioned by teachers is on a general basis and is not specifically related to ability grouping.

Nowhere in this study did the teachers indicate that contact with the parents helped them in forming ability groups. The study showed that parents play little or no role with regard to providing information that would help teachers to group pupils.

7.1.4 Management and use of group work (class and small group)

The investigation revealed that KwaZulu SSA pupils are grouped according to their assumed learning abilities, but SSA teachers do not have specific methods which they use to diagnose pupils' current learning needs. The study confirms that SSA pupils are grouped according to two systems, namely:

- a) ability grouping within a class.
- b) ability grouping class by class.

The study provides an indication of the general criteria used to group pupils which is indicated by evidence from the teachers' daily preparation. (See Appendices 3A and B) The study would also indicate that the understanding of Zulu and Mathematics is regarded by KwaZulu SSA teachers as the most important criteria by which pupils are grouped although the art of hand-writing is also used as a basis for deciding upon ability groups.

The study suggested that most teachers are not grouping pupils because they believe it would help pupils to learn more efficiently or that it would make their teaching easier but because they are instructed to do so by the inspectors and the

principals of the KwaZulu SSA schools.

A small proportion of SSA teachers stated that the system of ability grouping they were applying, was taught to them at the Colleges of Education during their Initial Training.

The study suggests, however, that there are many teachers who do not know why they have to group pupils according to their abilities. The Pilot Study indicated that teachers did not recognize that there may be problems with the actual formation of ability groups. However in the Modified Study where a number of possible problems were suggested for the teachers to identify, almost all teachers indicated problems they encountered in teaching and managing groupwork. This suggests that teachers are not readily able to express their problems without some guidance.

The study also suggests that the use of ability grouping of pupils can cause strong feelings among the pupils because the "clever pupils" start to denigrate the "dull ones".

There would appear to be an indication that not all pupils are given equal attention by the teachers, possibly some becoming unmanageable and consequently lowering the working pace of both the teachers and the pupils.

7.1.5 In-service training

The study also reveals that few, if any, seminars, workshops or In-Service Training Courses are conducted with regard to the rationale, possible methods and uses for grouping pupils. The investigation suggests that teachers are not equipped with knowledge of research about groupwork in general. This appears to have resulted in teachers using their own initiative in deciding how to group SSA pupils.

The study also reveals that from the representative sample used,

50% of KwaZulu SSA teachers who admit that they group pupils according to their abilities have never attended a seminar, workshop or in-service training course on pupil grouping. There are, however, a minority of teachers in the sample who have attended courses on ability grouping, either once a year or twice a year. These are called "Day by Day" courses and are used by these teachers as a basis for their organization and methodology with regard to pupil grouping.

7.2 Suggestions derived as a result of the analysis of the questionnaires:

7.2.1 Assessment procedures

Taking into consideration the findings indicated by the study, the researcher makes the following recommendations. It would appear that teachers are not clear about assessment procedures in general nor with methods of ability grouping in particular. It therefore seems highly desirable that teachers should receive training in a variety of appropriate assessment techniques. It would also seem appropriate that training should be conducted circuit by circuit so as to systematically cover the large number of Lower Primary School teachers in KwaZulu.

These courses could possibly focus on helping teachers to develop assessment procedures which are holistic, diagnostic and far more meaningful than the conventional recording of marks.

These procedures could include:

- . ratings by present and past teachers.
- . aptitude and/or achievement test scores.
- . parent interviews
- . teacher observation over a period of time
- . Cumulative record folders containing children's work with detailed teacher comment.

7.2.2 Teacher-parent contact

It is suggested that the SSA teachers work in conjunction with the Pre-Primary School teachers in order to obtain more information about previous records and experiences. These records could provide valuable background information which would help pupils, parents and teachers.

It is also suggested that parents of Pre-School children be given guidance by the teachers on how to promote rich experiences and opportunities for their children to learn and prepare for formal schooling.

In view of the fact that parents have important information about their children which can be used by teachers in their initial assessment of pupils' needs, it is suggested that in the KwaZulu Lower Primary Schools, any available means of contact should be used to ensure that better relationships and understanding are established between parents and teachers.

Parents are probably the best source of information for the teachers who are teaching SSA. For the infant child, in order to obtain information with regard to the skills and abilities of each individual, all available sources of information from both inside and outside the school should be accumulated, since children spend a relatively short period of their time in class.

7.2.3 Use of group work

Generally it would appear that group work is regarded as educationally desirable where teachers understand their purposes and goals in grouping pupils. It is suggested that informed use of small group work can stimulate the minds of the pupils and allow for differing rates of growth and development. At the same time pupils can learn from each other.

From the literature review, it transpires that:

* there is a range of opinions about what actually constitutes excellence although there is a generally agreement that some individuals possess certain qualities that are exceptional when compared with others

* there is no one method by which the teacher can be certain that all the abilities and capabilities of any child have been measured

* assessment of pupils should be an on-going process since not all pupils develop at the same time

It is suggested that KwaZulu Lower Primary teachers be encouraged to use a variety of group work methods in teaching but it is also suggested that teachers in KwaZulu schools should refrain from using ability grouping which is regarded as a permanent and unchanging since labelling pupils has many long-term disadvantages.

7.2.4 Teacher-training curriculum

It is suggested that the Curriculum of the KwaZulu Colleges of Education should be reviewed to check whether it meets the real demands, needs and interests of the parents and children.

Possibly teacher trainers or lecturing staff should be encouraged to analyze the qualities teachers need and seek to foster those qualities during initial teacher education.

Another possibility is that extension courses could be provided for the teacher-trainers themselves so that their skills are extended in understanding the following:

* profiling and assessment procedures, questioning and explaining techniques

- * developing classroom procedures to allow for the recognition and nurturing of diverse human potential and needs
- * skills and techniques in classroom organization: in particular the flexible use of group work which will not benefit some pupils at the expense of others as has been revealed by the current system of ability grouping conducted in some KwaZulu Lower Primary Schools
- * skills in becoming a facilitator encouraging pupils to develop independent thinking
- * good content knowledge of the subjects they teach.

7.2.5 In-service teacher education

It is suggested that KwaZulu SSA teachers attend In-Service Training education not once or twice a year but for a series of regular courses, particularly in the use of group work, throughout the year.

In-Service Teacher Education should be an on-going process where teachers are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills which will be required in the classroom. Teachers should be able to apply the knowledge gained and be able to give feedback to lecturers about their practical experiences.

The researcher is aware of the practical problems that might be encountered because of the shortage of In-Service Teacher Training centres in KwaZulu. It is, however, suggested that the KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture employs the services of KwaZulu Colleges of Education, using the equipment and the expertise of lecturing staff to organize courses, workshops and seminars for discussion of important issues affecting teaching practice. This should be an on-going process to update teachers on new trends and research in the field of Education.

7.3. Concluding remarks

The study revealed that Black teachers in KwaZulu do group pupils according to their assumed learning abilities in the early stages of their development in SSA.

The literature survey shows that there is a general difficulty in outlining an all-embracing strategy for identifying learning potentials and abilities in all the learners since such abilities do not readily lend themselves to one form of assessment. As a result some researchers suggest that identification of pupils' capabilities and assessment procedures should be an on-going process since some talents become evident with time and age.

Small group work is also a generally accepted teaching strategy which can be applied to all students but researchers argue that the use of group work depends on the activity and the purpose for which it is used.

Several researchers (Kelly 1978, Kerry 1981, Brophy & Good 1984, Wallace 1989) have investigated the effects of ability grouping although there appears to be wide agreement that in the permanent and unchanging grouping of pupils, the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. Research also reveals that teacher expectations are self-fulfilling prophecies and can have negative effects on pupils' self concepts.

In the light of the research which highlights the disadvantages of ability grouping, it would appear that in the current situation in SSA in KwaZulu many pupils fail to receive appropriate diagnoses of their learning needs and potentials. Furthermore, teachers are inadequately equipped to assess pupils' learning needs.

The adequate preparation of teachers is a challenge to KwaZulu Colleges of Education. There are a number of areas that need to

be improved in order to make teacher training more effective. Most importantly, it must be realized that the skills that teachers are apparently equipped with while in initial teacher training are not necessarily transferred to actual teaching in the classroom. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the whole process of teacher education.

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APPENDIX 1
THE PILOT STUDY

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE METHODS USED BY TEACHERS TO GROUP PUPILS
ACCORDING TO THEIR ASSUMED LEARNING ABILITIES IN
SUB-STANDARD A.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SUB-A TEACHERS.

ALL ANSWERS ARE CONFIDENTIAL.

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING BY PUTTING A TICK IN THE RELEVANT
SPACES OR FILLING IN THE SPACES PROVIDED.

A. LOCATION OF WORK :

(i) Name the district where you teach.

.....

(ii) Is it urban or rural?

.....

(iii) Is the school controlled by D.E.T. or KwaZulu

.....

B. TEACHER QUALIFICATION AND EXPERIENCE:

(i) What is your teaching experience?

.....

(ii) What is the enrollment of your class?

.....

PROFESSIONAL

PLEASE MARK ALL YOUR QUALIFICATIONS WITH A TICK (✓).

NONE	T3	T4	LPTC	PTD	STD	SSTD	JSTC	UED	HED
------	----	----	------	-----	-----	------	------	-----	-----

ACADEMIC

STD 8	STD 10	B.A.	B.A.HONS	ANY OTHER
-------	--------	------	----------	-----------

C. INFORMATION ABOUT ABILITY GROUPING

Which subjects do you teach?

- (i) All Mathematics & Zulu
- Oral Subjects Mathematics
- Zulu Other specify

(ii) State the type of test/assessment procedure that was done before pupils were enrolled.

- None Teacher set test.
- Aptitude test? If yes, which one?.....

(iii) How many pupils did receive Pre-Primary Education in your class?

- None Half
- All in class Do not know
- Few

(iv) How did you discover that pupils have received Pre-Primary Education.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

(v) Do you have any contact with the parents of the pupils?

Yes No

(vi) If Yes what means of contact do you use?

Letter Personal Contact

Telephone Verbal message through the child

(vii) Do you group pupils according to their ability in your class?

Yes No

(viii) In which subjects are they grouped? For each subject how do

you group the children?

SUBJECT

.....
.....

In which way do you group them?

.....
.....
.....
.....

(ix) Is this the method you have discovered as a teacher?

Yes No

(x) If yes, how did you discover it? If no, by whom were you instructed to group pupils according to their abilities.

.....

.....
.....

(xi) Does the syllabus require that pupils be grouped?

Yes No

(xii) How do you find ability grouping?

Easy Slightly difficult

Manageable Very difficult

(xiii) Have you encountered problems in this system of grouping?

Yes No

(xiv) If yes, state the problems you have encountered

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

(xv) If no, how can you recommend the system of ability grouping to other SSA teachers.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

(xvi) Are there in-service courses, seminars workshops in

ability grouping?

Yes No

(xvii) If yes, how often do you attend?

.....
.....
.....

(xviii) State any suggestions you may have about this system of grouping pupils.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

APPENDIX 2

A MODIFIED QUESTIONNAIRE

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE METHODS USED BY TEACHERS TO GROUP PUPILS
ACCORDING TO THEIR ASSUMED LEARNING ABILITIES IN
SUB-STANDARD A

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SUB-A TEACHERS

ALL ANSWERS ARE CONFIDENTIAL

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING BY PUTTING A TICK IN THE SPACES OR
FILLING IN THE SPACES PROVIDED.

A. LOCATION OF WORK:

(i) Name the district where you teach
.....

(ii) Is it urban or rural?
.....

(iii) Is the school controlled by D.E.T. or KwaZulu
.....

B. TEACHER QUALIFICATION AND EXPERIENCE

(i) What is your teaching experience
.....

(ii) What is the enrollment of your class?
.....

PROFESSIONAL

PLEASE MARK ALL QUALIFICATIONS WITH A TICK

NONE OTHER	T3	T4	LPTC	PTD	STD	SSTD	JSTC	UED	HED
---------------	----	----	------	-----	-----	------	------	-----	-----

ACADEMIC

STD 8	STD 10	B.A.	B.A.HONS.	ANY OTHER
-------	--------	------	-----------	-----------

C. INFORMATION ABOUT ABILITY GROUPING

(i) Which subject/s do you teach?

All Mathematics & Zulu

Oral Subjects Mathematics

Zulu Other specify

(ii) State the type of test/assessment procedure that was done before pupils were enrolled.

None Teacher set test

Aptitude test? If yes, which one?

(iii) How many pupils received Pre-Primary Education in your school?

None Half

All in class Do not know

Few

(iv) How did you discover that pupils have received Pre-Primary Education?

They brought pre-school certificate

They stated in the admission forms.

They were asked by teachers in class

They were promoted from the existing Pre-School

Any other way

(v) Do you have any contact with the parents of the pupils?

Yes

No

(vi) If "yes" what means of contact do you use?

Letter

Personal contact

Telephone
child

Verbal message through the

(vii) Do you group pupils according to their ability in your class?

Yes

No

(viii) In which subjects are they grouped? For each subject how do you group the children?

SUBJECT

HOW ARE THEY GROUPED IN EACH SUBJECT

.....
.....
.....

(ix) Is this the method you have discovered as a teacher?

Yes No

(x) If yes, how did you discover it? If no, by whom were you instructed to group pupils according to their abilities.

.....
.....
.....

(xi) Does the syllabus require that pupils be grouped?

Yes No

(xii) How do you find ability grouping?

Easy Slightly difficult

Manageable Very difficult

(xiii) Have you encountered problems in this system grouping?

Yes No

(xiv) If yes, tick the problems that you have encountered.

It is confusing to teach and manage too many groups at the same time.

They don't receive equal attention because of time.

While attending to one group, other groups are not supervised

Working pace for all groups becomes slow because the teacher has to alternate groups while teaching.

There is no spirit of competition within the groups

It develops hatred amongst different groups in class.

Groups do not receive equal attention from the teacher

The teacher ends up with more than three groups in Class.

Any other

.....
.....
.....

(xv) Are there in-service courses, seminars, workshops in ability grouping?

Yes

No

(xvi) Name the kinds of courses or training attended.

.....
.....
.....

(xvii) State any suggestions you may have about this system of grouping pupils.

.....
.....
.....

Method Kuyaxoxwa (discussion)
Teaching Aid Isihlahla soqobo (actual tree)

14:00 - 14:30 SUBJECT ART
 Matter

bamthengise.

2. Bavumelana bathengisa ngaye.

APPENDIX 4

A COPY OF COVERING LETTER TO THE TEACHERS OF THE KWAZULU LOWER
PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

Umbumbulu College of Education
Private Bag X20012
Amanzimtoti 4125
6 August 1990

The Teacher

.....
.....
.....
.....

REQUEST FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

I humbly request to have the enclosed questionnaire completed and returned before 31 August 1990.

I am pursuing my Masters of Education Degree and need to complete questionnaire for my dissertation.

I have been granted permission by the KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture.

Please be assured that every information will be treated confidentially.

Your cooperation will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

.....

T.P. Sithole.

REJOINDER TO THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTERS OF EDUCATION (UNIVERSITY OF NATAL)

NAME OF CANDIDATE: THOKOZANI PATRICIA SITHOLE

TITLE OF DISSERTATION: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE METHODS USED
BY TEACHERS TO GROUP PUPILS ACCORDING TO THEIR ASSUMED LEARNING
ABILITIES IN SUB-STANDARD A.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURE, NATURE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE
DISSERTATION IN ANSWER TO THE REJOINDER REQUESTED.

There are a number of important points which have been raised with regard to the structure, nature and organization of the dissertation. With regard to the external examiner's report I would like to make the following points.

CHAPTER 1

This study is an initial investigation of the methods of ability grouping in a random selection of urban and rural schools. Major problems emanate from the general paucity of relevant and current South African research, a situation which is exacerbated in Kwa-Zulu.

Seemingly, in school situations, there is little or no awareness of the reasons behind the existing systems of grouping pupils which makes the initial investigation more urgent so that the current situation can be examined on sound educational grounds.

The writer is aware that certain questions raised in the dissertation are underdeveloped. However, it must be realized that the dissertation is a partial fulfilment of the degree and consequently limited aspects have been selected for the purpose of exemplifying and provoking the interest of various educationists to take the study further. It is also the writer's intention to pursue this study in greater depth, exploring some

of the complexities revealed by the present study.

Some of these complexities have been already highlighted, for example, pp. 99/100 discuss the difficulty of using questionnaires at all. Many teachers are threatened by questionnaires and research in general because research highlights the major discrepancies in the education sphere. It has been recognized that teacher interviews might have yielded more information, but such interviews would have been time-consuming and beyond the scope of this initial exploration.

The term "ability grouping" has been used throughout the dissertation to refer to the practice of permanent and rigid streaming of pupils; a practice widely used, as evidenced by the teachers preparation books and by their response both in the pilot and modified questionnaires. The writer has confined herself to this use of the term "ability grouping" because there is no evidence of any other method of flexible grouping i.e. subject grouping, remedial grouping or grouping for extension purposes.

In the writer's experience there is no evidence of mixed ability class grouping or, consequently, sub-groups within mixed ability classes.

In both the pilot and modified questionnaires teachers were asked what criteria they had used for grouping pupils. There was no evidence suggested by teachers' responses that they used any particular educational criteria for establishing groups of pupils for specific learning purposes. In the responses only one teacher mentioned using an aptitude test, yet in the Kwa-Zulu Department of Education and Culture there are no aptitude tests for Sub-Standard A and Sub-Standard B pupils. Most of the teachers responded that the principal or inspectors expected them to group pupils, implying that they uncritically followed the practice suggested by the education authorities. The official instructions are based on the pupils' demonstration of

early mastery of simple techniques. However, 55% of the teachers in the sample responded by saying that they intuitively grouped pupils according to their own "experience" which might be "by sight". "By sight" refers to the common practice of looking at the pupils' outward appearance and designating them "bright", "average" or "dull". Grouping pupils according to the teachers' own "experience" may be for different purposes, e.g. for purposes of class management due to the large number or for the convenience of teaching or sometimes for the purpose of seeing the chalkboard.

Lorton and Walley (1979:92) mentioned that the variety of names under which early education programmes exist, for example, nursery schools, kindergartens, day-care centres, play groups and Head-Start programmes make them sound different in purpose and function, but in fact, there is often little real difference in practice.

Mphahlele 1988:81) in Sibisi (1989:34) maintains that, in general, pre-school for the black child is a new concept in South Africa with no historical background. Blacks have problems of establishing pre-schools without trained personnel or adequate funding.

In the Kwa-Zulu culture, pre-school education can mean a formal creche, a kindergarten run by professionals, or most commonly provision of care by any individual who has basic accommodation. Only very recently have a few teachers obtained diplomas in pre-primary education. The writer would argue that the sub-classification of pre-schools in a questionnaire would confuse teachers who would not be familiar with any distinction between the kinds of pre-school experience received. This issue alone could form the basis of a separate study. In addition pre-school education in Kwa-Zulu has never been given the necessary attention it deserves when compared with other racial groups in South Africa.

With respect to the classification of rural and urban pupils and teachers, there are no clear cut distinctions between rural and urban areas, particularly in the greater Durban area, because of the migration tendencies of pupils from rural to urban or vice versa. There are difficulties in describing discrete groups and this alone could form a major study.

Pages 23-25 of this study discuss the importance of the role of mediation of the learners' experiences especially in reception classes and the role of the teacher as the facilitator of learning processes. While the writer acknowledges that Heffernan and Todd (1977) do not reflect wider studies, it was felt that it was sufficient to acknowledge the importance of teacher-pupil interaction and the key role of the development of language without diverting from the main issue of the dissertation.

The writer is fully aware of Gardener's theory of multiple intelligences, according to which intelligence is not a unitary construct but rather a plurality. He maintains that there are seven independent forms of intelligence : linguistic, musical, logical, mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intra-personal. However, Gardener's classification of intelligence is just one classification amongst many others. One might just as easily defend Sternberg's triarchic theory of intelligence which consists of contextual, experiential and componential sub-theories or Borkowski's general model of intelligence which consists of architectural and executive systems. However, it was not the intention of the study to discuss theories of intelligence in detail. The term "intelligence" was used in its most common context, that of "school-based learning", however inadequate that might be in an academic discussion of the nature of intelligence.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 ends with a discussion of exceptional children because the method of group-teaching used by teachers is based on the

notion of exceptionality with some pupils being labelled "bright" or "gifted", other "average" or "dull". Teachers perceive children as bright or gifted on the basis of school tests. The writer feels it is necessary to discuss the concept of exceptionality because it is dominant in the Lower Primary School in Kwa-Zulu. Group-teaching is based on the fact that most teachers believe that there are exceptional or very able children who must be permanently grouped for the purposes of learning.

CHAPTER 3

To clarify the quote from Fatouros on page 35 one could add "Even while accepting that it is easier to identify exceptional behaviour when pupils grow older, Fatouros (1986:24) cautions teachers against relying on these measures to make firm and supposedly accurate predictions based on initial observations of children's behaviour".

CHAPTER 4

The writer feels that the chapter on groupwork is adequate for this dissertation since the purpose was to highlight the current situation and not to discuss in depth all aspects of small groupwork although some aspects of groupwork need to be the basis for further study.

CHAPTER 5

It was an oversight not to include the covering letter which was sent together with appendix I and II in this dissertation and this will be added. Furthermore, 8 out the 20 respondents who did not return the questionnaire were from supposedly "urban" schools while 12 were from supposedly "rural" schools. This will be added to the dissertation in Chapter 5, although as mentioned earlier, it is difficult to classify schools as "urban" or

"rural" in the very mixed and constantly changing schools in the wider Durban area. The writer does not know the reasons why all questionnaires were not returned and she would need to have investigated this further in order to ascertain reasons.

CHAPTER 6

Certainly, it would have been beneficial to compare some of the methods of pupil grouping used as a result of teachers' experience and to examine more closely what aspects of groupwork are taught at colleges. However, it would require more detailed contact on a one to one basis and prolonged observation of Sub-Standard A teachers.

CHAPTER 7

The researcher agrees that there are no "quick fix solutions" to the problems of lack of teacher expertise, but on the basis of this initial investigation, sees some possible long-term solutions to the problems which could be the focus of further study. The findings of this paper are an initial breakthrough in promoting discussion of the purposes and practice of ability-grouping in Kwa-Zulu Primary Schools. The writer concentrated on exploring some aspects of the problems of ability-grouping and feels that prolonged team-research is needed to unfold other contributory factors which might not have been revealed in this dissertation.

The findings of this study concern the current practices of the Kwa-Zulu Department of Education, therefore some suggestions were made to the Department. The study's aim was to arouse and challenge the Kwa-Zulu Department of Education and Culture to attend to this existing problem and to work towards finding possible solutions.

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