

PROBLEMS FACED BY EDUCATORS TEACHING LEARNERS  
EXPERIENCING LEARNING PROBLEMS IN MIXED ABILITY  
CLASSES: THE CASE OF LION'S RIVER CIRCUIT.

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION,  
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## DECLARATION

THIS DISSERTATION, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY INDICATED TO THE CONTRARY, IS MY OWN ORIGINAL WORK.

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2001

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine and explain the problems faced by educators teaching learners experiencing learning problems in mixed ability classes.

A qualitative research technique, which aimed at studying educators in their natural settings, was used. To achieve this aim the study was conceived as a case study of grade one educators from three Primary Schools at Mpophomeni Township.

A self-designed interview schedule that was supplemented by observation schedule was used to collect data. The interview schedule included questions relating to mixed ability classes, learners with learning problems, outcomes-based education, problems experienced by educators in their classroom practices and the ways of coping with such problems. School, educator and classroom resource profiles were also used in the study to gather information that might be useful in the discussion of the findings.

The research sites were three Primary Schools at Mpophomeni Township. In these schools there were eleven grade one educators who formed the population from which a sample of six educators was randomly selected. Three of the six educators who formed the sample were interviewed and observed while the other three were only interviewed.

Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for data analysis, which was done descriptively.

The Findings of the study revealed that educators had problems when they were dealing with the content, assignments, assessment and resources and when they discipline learners. It also revealed that most of the problems were due to the introduction of curriculum 2005 in grade one in 1998, and the fact that educators were not trained to teach learners experiencing learning barriers.

The study concluded that insufficient in-service training and the introduction of curriculum 2005 were the main causes of educators' problems, and a call to recontextualise the learning environment, which includes educators and the context in which they teach, was made.

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# CHAPTER 1

## BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

Ability grouping has been practised in schools for a long period of time. During the days of streaming, ability was one of the factors used. Learners were put into classes or streamed according to their assumed abilities. The paragraphs below capture the views of some researchers on ability grouping and highlight its advantages and disadvantages.

Kelly (1974:7) argues that ability grouping resulted to learners being moved from one standard to the next when they were deemed to have reached a certain level of attainment. Those who did not reach the necessary level remained where they were until they either improved sufficiently or reached an age at which they could leave school.

According to Smoller (1986:87) doubled session organisation, which is a form of ability grouping led to the so called 'very able' learners attending the morning session while the alleged 'average or dull' learners attending the afternoon session.

Sithole (1992:3) points out that grouping within full-day classroom was when different groups were put into different classrooms having labels such as grade 1A for brighter learners, grade 1B for average and grade 1C for dull learners.

Streaming learners according to their abilities had disadvantages as far as educators were concerned. Some of these were:

Educators themselves were streamed. There were stream A educators and stream B educators. Those who worked with lower streams were less inspired and less inspiring.

According to Kelly (1978:12), educators treated learners with learning problems according to their assumed abilities and they interpreted characteristics of learners with learning problems in the light of what they knew about those learners. (Jones, 1977:12) confirms this point by saying that when we form impressions of another person, we see the whole person not each part of that person.

However, there was also the self-fulfilling prophecy that educators also did not expect more from themselves. They felt that they could teach these learners and in the end they were not able. Jones (1977:4) defines self-fulfilling prophecy as “false definition of a situation evoking a new behaviour which makes the originally false conception come true”, thus confirming the educators’ behaviour described above.

Because of the above mentioned disadvantages of streaming learners according to their assumed abilities, mixed ability grouping was introduced in schools. Brophy and Good (1978:292) define mixed ability grouping as placing learners from varying achievement levels in the same room so it is possible for low or higher ability learners to be grouped together or separated when it is advantageous to do so.

The advantage of mixed ability grouping is that it gives learners an opportunity to learn from each other. When learners with learning problems are grouped with highly gifted learners, they will be motivated to learn as

they will not only be learning from an educator. Kaabwe in Kaabwe and Thody (2000:100) supports this idea by arguing that student-student learning is more effective than teacher-student learning as peers sometimes exert more pressure to conform than teachers.

Mixed ability grouping has its own disadvantages. Brighter learners may get bored when the educator is presenting work that suits learners with learning problems. Educators have to prepare for different learning materials which, is not only difficult, but it is also time-consuming and inherently inefficient in terms of class management.

According to Kelly ( 1978:45), the understanding of teaching and learning has progressed considerably since the days of mixed ability grouping. Policy designers and educators are now aware that the most effective teaching methods are those that recognise the uniqueness of every learner. The South African government further strengthened the recognition of every learner's uniqueness by introducing outcomes-based education OBE in mixed ability classes. This new approach to teaching emphasises that learners are not progressing at the same pace at the same time even though they are in the same class.

## 1.2. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

It is now apparent that in mixed ability classrooms there is far greater informality as each learner is doing his own work at his own pace. It is also true that a curriculum change has brought with it a need for educators to be more aware of the social and emotional development of their learners rather than concentrating on intellectual development. The Department of Education

tried to help educators by selling them to workshops. This has proved to be insufficient as educators are still experiencing problems when they teach by using OBE principles in mixed ability classes.

The research problem therefore is that there are problems experienced by educators when they teach mixed ability classes using OBE principles. The result of these problems may lead to unsuccessful implementation of the policy that the government wishes to adopt. A study highlighting these problems is therefore important.

### 1.3. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine and explain the problems faced by educators teaching learners with learning problems in mixed ability classes. Arising from the purpose of the study, the following critical research questions will form the basis of data collection tools.

### 1.4. CRITICAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What do educators understand by mixed ability classes?
2. What do educators understand by learners with learning problems?
3. What does OBE say about teaching in general?
4. How do educators teach mixed ability classes using OBE principles?
5. What problems do educators experience when teaching learners with learning problems in mixed ability classes?
6. What influence do these problems (in 5 above) have on educators' classroom practices, when they:
  - 6.1. explain the content;



6.2. give assignments;

6.3. assess learners;

6.4. discipline learners and

6.5. use teaching resources?

7. How do educators cope with the problems of teaching learners with learning problems in mixed ability classes?

8. What do educators suggest to be a better way to teach in these classes?

## 1.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is informed by behavioural theory. Jordaan and Jordaan (1989:20) define behaviourism as an indication of the observable behaviour called responses of humans and animals and the relationship between responses and the events in the environment called stimuli. Behavioural view of learning is based on stimulus and the response made to such stimuli.

In a classroom situation, the educator provides stimulus when he or she gives learners the task to be learnt. Learners respond to the educator's stimulus by showing whether they have learnt or not.

The presence of some form of reinforcement is also necessary. According to Mwamwenda (1990:12), reinforcement is stimulus that increases the probability of a response re-occurring. In order for learners to learn, the educator provides reinforcements. These reinforcements may be presented as rewards. Usually, rewards are given to highly gifted learners to encourage them to keep up the good work they are doing. Learners experiencing

learning problems are also given rewards if they have done well. This is done to encourage them to perform better than they used to.

In mixed ability classes, learners are not progressing at the same pace and at the same time frame. This is inline with behaviourism, which states that organisms do not respond to the same stimulus in the same way and same time frame.

Under behaviourism, there is a form of learning which is called operant conditioning. Feldman (1997:160) defines operant conditioning as learning in which voluntary response is strengthened or weakened depending on its positive or negative consequences. He further extends this definition by pointing out that organism operates on its environment in order to produce a particular results. Operant conditioning does occur in mixed ability classes. In these classes, educators use different styles of teaching. The style that results in to learning is strengthened and repeated. Because the environment in which educators work consists of learners of mixed abilities, one style of teaching may bot be suitable for all learners. In such a situation, educators have to try a variety of teaching styles until they find the most suitable method.

Kerry (1982) argues that learners experiencing learning problems do not carry over things learnt in one lesson to the next, so much repetition and reinforcement of learning is needed. This view is supported by Meyer, Moore and Viljoen (1989:194). They mention that Skinner favoured teaching styles that entail material to be learnt being divided into a number of small steps. These smaller steps reinforce the learner as he or she successfully completes

each consecutive step. According to the behavioural view of learning, this technique is called shaping and it does happen in mixed ability classes.

Du Toit (1997:11) mentions that in behaviourism, judgement is based on what is perceived and measured. This is in line with OBE, where educators have exit outcomes that are observable.

However, evidence from empirical research shows that the more one needs to measure something the more one moves away from it. To measure an outcome variable one needs to devise an operational definition of it.

According to Vockell and Asher (1983:10), the operational definition states the observable events precisely. In the case of learning, one needs to devise an operational definition of it as it cannot be observed directly. What can be done in OBE is to collect evidence by observing the external behaviour exhibited by each learner. One example is when an educator wants to find out how much the learner has learnt, he or she uses indicators for that particular skill. These indicators take him or her away from what he or she is measuring.

In conclusion, behaviourism provides a good theoretical framework on which to base the study.

## 1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study determined and explained the problems faced by educators teaching learners with learning problems in mixed ability classes. The OBE approach supports individual teaching, which is supposed to be done in mixed ability classes.

The point is, it appears that teaching using OBE principles exacerbates the problems of teaching learners experiencing learning problems in mixed ability classes because of the requirement that every learner should proceed at his or her own pace. In classrooms with more than 40 learners, educators have failed to handle mixed ability learners. This has worsened with curriculum 2005.

Considering the theoretical framework that informed this study, and the requirement that every learner should proceed at his own pace, one may say that educators experience problems in teaching mixed ability classes. To provide multiple stimuli for one learner to achieve a specific outcome while at the same time extending another's who may have acquired the outcome the first time around is difficult. There is a need to address the problems experienced by educators in such a situation, which is what this study sets out to do. The results could also help in other ways.

The study highlighted experiences of different educators in their classrooms and this could help educators in general to develop classroom procedures that allow the recognition and nurturing of diverse human potential needs.

The study highlighted perceptions of educators towards inservice-training they received. This could help trainers of educators, especially OBE facilitators, to be aware of what needs to be included in workshops designed to help educators to teach mixed ability classes more effectively using OBE principles.

This study highlighted different manifestations of learning problems. It could help material development specialist to develop learning material that will cater for all learners' abilities in mixed ability classes.

The findings of the study will reveal the real classroom situation. These findings could help policy makers to be aware of what is really happening inside the classrooms. This could allow them to modify their own expectations for the OBE and mixed ability classes.

## 1.7. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The study begins with a brief outline, which introduces the reader to the whole research and presents a background to the research problem. The second chapter reviews the relevant literature applied to the study.

The third chapter covers the methodological aspect of the study, which outlines the procedure and the strategies applied to it. The findings are presented in chapter four and discussion of results with reference to related research done is presented in chapter five. Chapter six serves to draw conclusions and make recommendations based on the findings.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

The literature review in this study attempts to show that educators are experiencing problems when they teach learners with learning problems in mixed ability classes. Available research done on mixed ability classes was found to be very limited and old. The literature, therefore, does not only focus on the South African context, but goes beyond in order to highlight that mixed ability classes need more from educators

Literature on learners experiencing learning problems is included because these learners influence the way in which educators teach. Literature also goes further to cover outcomes-based education OBE, which is a new approach to curriculum design and teaching in South Africa.

#### 2.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review of this study was from two areas, covering mixed ability grouping, learners' socio-economic backgrounds and OBE.

##### 2.2.1. MIXED ABILITY GROUPING

Before mixed ability grouping was introduced in schools, learners were grouped according to their assumed abilities. Sithole (1992) investigated methods used by educators to group learners according to their assumed learning abilities in Sub-standard A (SSA). The participants of this study were 60 Sub-standard A educators who were randomly selected from the

population of educators from urban, semi-rural and rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal. Data were collected by sending questionnaires to the participants.

The results of the study indicated that the methods used by educators to group learners according to their assumed abilities vary and were largely based on objective and intuitive opinions of educators. Further more, the results indicated that these methods seemed not to be justified by an educational rationale, thereby indicating uninformed methods of grouping.

The study concluded that there was a general difficulty in outlining an all-embracing strategy for identifying all learners' potentials and abilities. This was because abilities do not readily lend themselves to one form of identification of learners' capabilities and assessment procedures. Taking this conclusion into consideration, one may safely assume that this method of grouping learners has disadvantages.

The present study looked at mixed ability grouping, as it is the method introduced when that of grouping learners according to their assumed abilities was found to have weaknesses. Sithole study was influenced by traditional teaching, which was content-based, and this study is influenced by OBE, which is learner-based.

Most literature on mixed ability grouping shows that educators experience problems when dealing with such groups. The National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) study conducted by Reid, Clunies-Ross, Goacher and Ville in (1981) dealt with mixed ability grouping. The focus of the study was on educators' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages

of this pattern of organisation rather than on any attempt to test independently its consequences. The study was in the form of a survey in which 29 schools participated.

Headteachers who were also teaching certain subjects were included in the sample of educators to be interviewed because they were the ones who decided how to organise a school so that each class contains a full spectrum of ability, and also decide how to teach and how to organise the group within the classroom. The findings of the study revealed that headteachers felt that inflexibility in teaching methods represents the major constraint on the effectiveness of mixed ability classes. It further revealed that headteachers felt that although they were teaching mixed ability classes, they were not doing mixed ability teaching.

This study showed that educators themselves were not confident in the way they were teaching mixed ability classes. This was supported by Prodromou (1992), who argues that educators experienced problems in teaching mixed ability classes. Prodromou further argues that the results is that educators lose faith in their students' desire to learn and in their own ability to motivate learners. In the end, it will be the unmotivated or insecure learner in the group who will inevitable suffer most.

The present study tried to determine the problems experienced by educators which may then result in them not doing mixed ability teaching as they are expected to.

Chalfants (1974) was of the opinion that in too many cases class teachers undervalue themselves or their potential for making an effective contribution



In assisting children with learning problems. This has led to a tendency to abdicate their rightful position as the 'ultimate responsible educational professional' in relation to most learners who experience learning problems. Van der Schans (1980) felt that there is a need for the recognition and reinstatement of the class teacher in this regard. Such an orientation is seen as likely to bring about rediscovery of the existing potential capabilities and personal resources of many educators, some of which remains essentially untapped.

The present study tried to determine the problems experienced by educators in their classes so that recognition and reinstatement of class teachers, called for by Van der Schans, will be based on the suggestions for coping with these problems.

Kerry (cited in Sands and Kerry, 1982) reported the research results of a study carried out by Teacher Education Project between 1978 and 1980 in Nottingham. This was known as the Sherwood Project and its purpose was to carry out extensive observations on the thought levels exhibited in the first five years of mixed ability classes. A sample of 36 educators who were selected according to the subjects they were teaching was selected in five schools of good reputation in mixed ability teaching. Educators were selected according to the subjects they were teaching because the study also focused on mixed ability teaching of certain subjects. These educators were interviewed and observed.

The project concluded that mixed ability teaching requires a lot of hard work from educators. It also concluded that mixed ability teaching is difficult,

taxing and makes severe mental and physical demands upon the teacher concerned.

The present study aimed at determining and explaining the demands placed upon educators teaching mixed ability classes. These demands need to be highlighted so that ways of meeting them can be suggested, and this is what this study has tried to do.

In view of the increasing practice of mixed ability grouping in England, it was felt that Her Majesty's Inspectorate should conduct a survey that would assess the effects and implications of this type of grouping in comprehensive secondary schools. The Findings of this survey is reported by in the discussion paper for the Department of Education and Science (1978), by the working party of Her Majesty's Inspectorate. This survey was conducted between 1970 and 1977 by 15 inspectors who visited 22 schools. The schools which were studied were comprehensive secondary schools in which mixed ability teaching had been practised for at least three years. The inspectors believed that good practice in the implementation of mixed ability teaching would be found as this type of organisation was practised it the longest.

As far as educators were concerned, the study revealed that educators of high quality in terms of [professional and personal qualities, experience and commitment were successful in handling mixed ability grouping. It also revealed that there were some educators who had difficulties in extending the 'very able' learner, lifting up the average and below average learners, and encouraging and helping the 'less able' learner to progress.

The present study tried to determine the problems experienced by educators of mixed ability classes when they try to extend 'very able' learners and at the same time lift up the 'less able' learners. It also tried to discover how educators who are successful in handling mixed ability groups cope with the problems they experience with such groups.

Kelly (1974) was also interested in mixed ability grouping. He argues that the aspect of mixed ability grouping most worrying to educators is the presence of slow learners in the classes. Kelly mentioned that educators base their arguments on the need to group such learners separately in order to make it easier to provide for them, and concluded that slow learners do provide problems for educators in mixed ability classes.

The present study tried to highlight the problems that make educators feel that it is better if slow learners are grouped separately. Ways of coping with the problems could be found which may help educators in general.

Kelly's arguments were supported by Bell and Kerry (1982) when they looked simultaneously at learners experiencing learning problems and mixed ability classes. They give educators the strategies and suggestions to improve their skills in dealing with the challenges of mixed ability classes. They argue that educators tend to give more attention to slow and highly gifted learners and neglect average learners. They emphasise that the educator should give equal attention to all learners in their classes irrespective of their abilities. The researcher of the present study felt that to give equal attention to all learners, in a class that has more than 40 learners, is difficult. The present study looked at the problems experienced by educators when they tried to

give equal attention to learners of different abilities and suggests ways of coping even if there are problems.

### 2.2.2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS

In mixed ability classes, learners experiencing learning problems inevitably demand more from educators. Research showed that most of them come from low socio-economic backgrounds. This is supported by Watson (1993), who argues that poverty causes educational disadvantages and that the educational system merely registers the effect.

The present study was conducted in schools where the majority of learners come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Its aim was to determine the problems created for educators by such learners.

Research conducted by Mncwabe (2000) on academic achievements of learners living under one roof with their families found that such learners have poor academic achievements. Qualitative data collected through structured interviews in which ten educators, ten learners and ten parents of participating learners were randomly selected from the population of these stakeholders from schools at Clermont.

Educators' responses revealed that some of these learners were rude and lacked discipline which resulted in educators being negative about them. Some educators indicated that they did their best to accommodate these learners though it was not easy because of the problems accompanying them to the school. This study indicated that learners from low socio-economic

backgrounds experience learning problems and as a result it is difficult for educators to handle them.

Lauer (1995) supports Mncwabe's study when he argues that the relationship between learners from low socio-economic backgrounds and their educators does not create the atmosphere for the educator to impart knowledge and the learner to receive this knowledge.

The present study tried to look at the problems created for educators in mixed ability classes by this unhealthy relationship.

### 2.2.3. OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION (OBE)

In 1998, OBE was introduced as the informing philosophy for curriculum 2005 for the first time in South African schools, and it was introduced in mixed ability classes in which educators had some problems. Therefore, literature relating to OBE was included in literature review.

Lubisi, Wedekind and Parker (1997) assert that educators are role players who influence and shape what happens in the schools, and the state does not have absolute control. Although the state attempts to exert its influence by determining the language of learning, prescribing the structures of the system and setting the syllabuses, it has limited control over what happens inside the classroom. Lubisi et. Al. (1997), argues that it is the educators' own beliefs and behaviour that shape education differently from that planned by the state.

The above discussion shows that curriculum is not only received but is also interpreted by those involved in its implementation.

Carter (1995) argues that the movement towards OBE will help schools to monitor their performances more effectively, but realising this goal will make heavy demands on educators. Lomofsky, cited in Engelbrecht (1999), supported Carter when he argues that although the new curriculum is enabling in many ways, it does make new demands on educators and the experience is understandably stressful.

The present study tried to look at the problems faced by educators as they try to make changes in the way they understand teaching and learning in mixed ability classes.

Educators' feelings towards and experiences of the new curriculum also influence the teaching and learning process. Studies done on the feelings and experiences of educators are discussed below.

Hiralaal (2000) studied attitudes of some grade one educators to the training they received on OBE. The sample in this study consisted of 47 grade one educators who were randomly selected from the population of educators of 18 primary schools in Pietermaritzburg. Questionnaires developed by the researcher from the documentation used in the training, which took the form of various workshop sessions, were used to collect data.

The respondents in this study indicated that the training they received provided them with an understanding of OBE, but lacked information on how to use resources, and where and how to obtain them. This is an

indication that educators were experiencing problems when they use resources in their classes. Christie (cited in Jansen and Christie, 1999) supports Hiralaal's study when she argues that the government provided emergency training for educators, but this has been minimal and resources totally inadequate.

The researcher of the present study felt that educators are experiencing problems when they have to use resources as they are not clear about how to obtain and how to use them. The present study included problems experienced by educators when using resources in mixed ability classes.

Govender (1999) studied perceptions and experiences of grade one educators implementing curriculum 2005. In this study ten grade one educators in six primary schools in the Midlands region of KwaZulu-Natal were interviewed and they completed questionnaires about their perceptions and experiences of implementing curriculum 2005. Nine of those educators were also observed. Another 33 grade one educators from the same region completed the questionnaires to check the validity of the initial findings.

In this study educators indicated that the training they received on OBE failed to give them sufficient practical guidance on actual educators' classroom practices. The findings indicated that shortage of resources, large class sizes (over 35) and unavailability of tried and tested exemplars hindered many educators from implementing curriculum 2005 as policy-makers expected. Curriculum 2005 and OBE were seen as valuable approaches, but only after grade one learners had mastered some basic skills.

Govender's study concluded that educators were not rejecting principles of OBE and curriculum 2005 wholly, but they had problems when implementing these in a teaching and learning situation. The present study determined problems experienced by educators introducing OBE in mixed ability classes. Problems created by unavailability of resources, large class sizes, unavailability of tested and tried exemplars and other factors were explained.

Jansen (1998) conducted a study that sparked the most heated debate about OBE. Jansen's study was conducted in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal, the case study of grade one educators being one of its components. The sample of this study comprised 32 classrooms across the two provinces. The instrumentations used in the study were various questionnaires, educators interviews and classroom observations.

Educators studied strongly expressed the view that OBE was not implementable in the early part of the year with young children. They also felt that their preparation for OBE was inadequate and incomplete.

The researcher of this study felt that these findings indicate that educators are experiencing problems when they teach mixed ability classes using OBE principles especially when teaching young learners. The present study determined the problems experienced by inadequately prepared educators which cause them to feel that OBE is not implementable in the early part of the year with young children. In both Jansen (1998) and Govender (1999), educators felt that OBE is valuable after grade one learners had mastered some skills, and this is the reason why the present study was conducted in grade one.



In conclusion, literature on the studies discussed in this chapter indicated that there was a need for a study that would look at the problems experienced by educators teaching learners experiencing learning problems in mixed ability classes.

Having reviewed the literature, it is now possible to discuss the methodology used in the study. This will be done in chapter three that follows.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the research sites, data collection techniques and research tools are discussed.

#### 3.2. RESEARCH SITES

This study was conducted at three primary schools at Mpophomeni Township situated about 35 km from Pietermaritzburg, which is one of the Provincial capitals of KwaZulu-Natal. Below is the background supporting the selection of the three schools.

Before the 1994 elections, the township was mostly affected by political violence, with many people coming in and living in the township because of violence in their areas. They built small houses or shacks in which all family members lived. The majority of learners in the selected schools come from these homes. Empirical research that has been done shows that learners who lived under such conditions have poor academic performance. The study conducted by Mncwabe (2000) On learners living under one roof with family members have poor academic performance because of living conditions which restrict home study.

Most of the parents were retrenched from Sarmcol Rubber Factory, leading to unemployment and poverty in the township. In school of this township

there are many learners experiencing learning problems, which have resulted from poverty and unemployment. Poverty is a social problem that denies families the ability to provide their children with basic resources needed for studying. In her study (Mncwabe, 2000) points out that poverty exposes children to a wide range of factors that are not conducive to good academic performance.

The three primary schools are under-resourced and under-staffed. There are neither libraries, photocopying nor typing machines in these schools. One of the schools previously had electricity before, but this facility has now been vandalised. In these schools there are no resources such as libraries to promote good performance in learners. (Kaabwe in Thody, 2000:95) argues that availability of modern learning and teaching aids affects learning performance. In these schools, there are some grade two and three learners who cannot read or write at a standard expected in grade one learners. To teach in an OBE approach under such conditions is difficult.

Based on the reasons discussed above, the researcher felt that it will be useful to conduct a study in these schools.

### 3.3. THE POPULATION

For the purpose of this study the population will be all grade one educators in the three primary schools.

### 3.4. THE SAMPLE

From the population of 11 grade one educators in the three primary school, the sample will be randomly selected to ensure that all educators from the population have an equal opportunity of being selected. It will consist of six female grade one educators, two from each school. Names of all grade one educators from each school will be written on separate pieces of paper and two pieces of paper will be picked. Names of educators on the picked pieces of paper will be included in the sample. This method will be used to ensure that all educators from the population have an equal opportunity to being selected.

### 3.5. RESEARCH TECHNIQUE

This research was done using a qualitative approach to research. (Anderson, 1998:119) defines qualitative approach as a form of inquiry that explores phenomena in their natural settings and uses multi-methods to interpret, understand and bring meaning to them. The qualitative approach was suitable for this study because educators were interviewed and observed from their natural settings, which were their schools. Qualitative approach to research assumes that human behaviour is influenced significantly by the context in which it occurs. The qualitative approach, as used in this study, ensured that more problems come from educators' own understanding of the schools than from the researcher and this helped to explain and contextualize remedies suggested by the educators.

(Mncwabe,2000: 28) argues that qualitative study takes pride in discovering and potraying the multiple views of the respondents and the main road to

these relates to the use of interviews. In this study, semi-structured interviews will be used to allow the researcher to probe educators' initial responses and to avoid vague responses. Observations will be used to confirm whether or not what educators said in the interviews is really happening in the classroom.

### 3.6. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Interview and observation schedules were used to collect data. Interviews were preferred because they would give the researcher the opportunity to listen to participants expressing their views. Observation schedules were used to confirm whether or not what educators said in the interview is really happening in class. School profiles, educator profiles and classroom resource profiles were used as supplementary instruments. A brief description of the instruments that were used to collect data is give below.

#### 3.6.1. SCHOOL PROFILES

A form on schools profile were used to get information on the general characteristics of the schools in terms of material and human resources. These characteristics were intended to give the context in which educators teach. This form was to be completed by the principal.

#### 3.6.2. CLASSROOM RESOURCE PROFILES

Classroom resource profiles were used to obtain information used to describe the context in which the teaching and learning take place. It was designed to obtain information about the learners, availability and the condition of

furniture. The forms about classroom resource profiles will be by the researcher before the commencement of an observation.

### 3.6.3. EDUCATOR PROFILES

Educator profiles will be designed to obtain information about educators' qualifications, their teaching experience and number and quality of OBE workshops attended by each educator. Forms about educator profiles were to be completed by the participating educators before they were interviewed.

### 3.6.4. INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Interviews were designed on the basis of critical research questions. The questions were arranged into subsections with headings. This arrangement provided a good method of coding data when analysing it. Jessop, (1997:89) referred to coding as “a complex process by which the researcher labels units of meaning or categories according to systems of codes usually developed through a close reading of data”. The researcher felt that using subheadings was another method of categorising data. The headings were directly taken from critical research questions and an example is shown below.

#### **Educators understanding of mixed ability grouping.**

Under this subheading, there was a question that would show that respondent educators understand what mixed ability classes are. The other question asked educators to give the procedure they use to establish mixed ability classes.

The headings would be introduced to the respondents so they would understand the process.

When designing the questions, the researcher was aware of Cohen and Menion's (1994:82) caution that researchers should not seek responses that support their preconceived notions. The researcher would try to avoid questions that cue for particular responses or lead the respondents to answer in a way that supports a particular view.

### 3.6.5. CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SCHEDULES

Classroom observations were designed to supplement interviews and these were used to confirm what educators said during interviews. The objective was to confirm whether educators are teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principles and to confirm the types of problems experienced by educators.

Classroom observations were also be designed on the basis of some critical research questions. For example, the critical research question, "What do educators understand by mixed ability classes?" read as follows on the classroom observation form;

"Are there any learners who:

Completed the task before the time set?

Did not complete a task at all?

Moved up and down the classroom?

Read poorly?

Read and talked fluently?

Did not do simple tasks?

These were thought by the researcher to be indicators of mixed ability class activities and interactions.

A pilot study was done to pre-test the instruments and modified. All the instruments used and the report of the pilot study are included in the appendix.

### 3.7. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Data were collected by using the instruments described above and following the data collection procedures described below.

Permission to interview and observe educators would be obtained from participating educators to avoid ethical bias and to ensure a willingness to participate. Participating educators would be assured of confidentiality.

Educators would be interviewed and observed at their own schools. This would be done to collect data from educators' own real-life settings as emphasised by the use of qualitative approach.

A tape recorder and audio tapes were used to record the interviews and these were later transcribed. Tape-recording was necessary because it would not be possible for the researcher to write down everything said by the respondents as interviews proceed, and some important information may be missed by the researcher if it is only in writing. It would also help the researcher to capture all necessary information without any interruption to



disrupt the effectiveness of communication between the interviewer and the interviewee, as may happen with note-taking.

In all, there were six transcripts that read to check inaccurate and inconsistent data. Findings obtained from educators' responses were grouped around certain themes and presented.

Each educator was observed for one day. This was intended to allow the researcher to establish rapport with educators and learners early in the morning, while educators and learners may become more relaxed as the day goes by. If only one lesson is observed a day, the educator may prepare and present the best of her lesson. The whole day might force the educator to proceed with her usual presentation, even this includes one or two best-prepared lessons.

In conclusion, the researcher felt that using the instruments described above in collecting data provided useful information for the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

In OBE approach to teaching, educators should provide time to accommodate individual differences in learners' learning rates and their aptitudes. To support this principle an educator needs to create learning opportunities for different learners. Creating different learning opportunities requires more work from educators and leads to more problems for them. The aim of this study was to determine the problem experienced by educators when creating different learning opportunities in mixed ability classes.

This chapter presents the findings of the study done in the three Primary Schools as referred to in chapter three ( Research sites). The aim of the field work was to gather data by interviewing six educators. Three out of six educators were both interviewed and observed and the other three were only interviewed.

Using the instruments discussed in the methodology chapter and included in the appendix, the following findings, presented in the order in which data was collected, were obtained.

#### CASE I : MUHLE PRIMARY SCHOOL

The first school to be visited was Muhle Primary School, situated North of Mpophomeni Township. It forms the boundary between the area known as

Old Township and the newly built houses constructed poor people by the government. Some of this school's come from these houses.

## 4.2. GAINING ACCESS

Measor and Woods (1991:64) state that gaining access involves not only gaining physical entry to the research settings, but also includes issues of building trust and developing relationships. So, the researcher gained access by travelling to the school.

The principal was approached and the need and the purpose of the research were explained. The principal then called all four grade one educators, who all happened to be females. To establish trust and develop the necessary relationship between the researcher and educators, the researcher explained the need and the purpose of the research to them. The educators were assured that the research was only for study purposes as the researcher was a university student.

Although they were busy preparing for the Developmental Appraisal system all educators were willing to participate. Despite most of the schools in the Lion's river circuit being occupied with the Appraisal system, the researcher was granted permission to conduct the research.

## 4.3. SELECTION OF THE SAMPLE

On the day of gaining access, the sample in this school was chosen from the four grade one educators. This allowed participants to choose dates for interviews after they were appraised.

Participants were selected randomly. The researcher explained the selection method of the sample to the educators; that is, names of all four educators were written on separate pieces of paper which were thrown on the table. The researcher picked two pieces of paper and the names of those on the chosen papers were included in the sample. Of the two educators, one was to be observed. In order to do so, one of the names on the previously chosen pieces of paper was picked at random for both interview and observation.

#### 4.4. THE FINDINGS

The findings presented in this section were obtained by using profiles for the school, the educator and the classroom resource as well as interview and observation schedules. These research instruments were described in the methodology chapter and are included in the appendix.

##### 4.4.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL

Detailed information used to describe the school was obtained by using the school profile which was completed by the principal.

At the time of the research, the school had four buildings with 18 classrooms. There was one little office for the principal which was the only room with electricity in the school. There was no staff or store room. There was no telephone service, fax machine, photocopier, typing or duplicating machine. There was tap water, but not inside the classrooms. There was shortage of furniture. Overall, the existing buildings needed minor repairs and painting.

There were 882 learners and 20 educators in the school with 260 grade one learners and four grade one educators. There was no non-educational staff such as cleaning staff.

The school had Life Skills, Numeracy and Literacy Programs without Teachers' guides. It had Policy Documents for the Foundation Phase and Stationery Packages received were not enough for all learners.

The details of the school given above showed that there might be problems experienced by educators in this school. These revealing that the school was under-resourced and that grade one classrooms were overcrowded. In such conditions problems might occur.

Problems of the school as whole might create further problems for its sub-sections such as classrooms. The researcher felt that it would be a good idea to have the classroom resource profile as well with details of the classroom given below.

#### 4.4.2. INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

The information used to describe the classroom was obtained by using a classroom resource profile completed by the researcher on the day of classroom observation.

At the time of the research, there were 65 learners in the classroom, with four learners using a desk made for two learners, so that sitting and writing space was inadequate. Desks were very close to each other and movement between them was not easy. There was a chair, a table and an unlockable

cupboard for the educator. Charts were displayed on the wall which needed painting. Windows were in a reasonable condition and the classroom was a pleasant place for anyone to be in.

In terms of what was studied, problems experienced by educators, the above description of the classroom revealed that there were problems experienced by the educator teaching in this classroom. Descriptions of resources found inside the classroom were sufficient to support the assumption that the educator teaching in this classroom had problems.

The school and classroom resource profiles provided information describing the conditions under which educators were teaching. The next step was to hear the actual voices of educators, so the data presented in the next section were obtained by interviewing two educators and observing one of them.

#### 4.4.3. EDUCATOR ONE

Information about educator one was obtained by using the educator profile described earlier. It was completed by the educator before she was interviewed and observed. The purpose of the interview was to hear the actual voices of educators and to observe them in their real teaching situations in order to answer critical research questions described in chapter one.

Findings from the educator profile revealed that educator one was a Head of Department (H.O.D) in the junior primary phase with 30 years, teaching experience. Year 2000 was her 15th year of teaching grade one and she had taught in Muhle Primary School for 12 years. Her highest academic and

professional qualifications were respectively BA and BED. At the time of the interview, she was not studying and had attended four OBE workshops, which she viewed as useful.

Educator profiles asked the educators to state what was missing and what they gained in the workshops. The educator mentioned that practical classroom demonstrations, coherence between successive workshops and full explanations of answers to some questions were missing from the workshops. She mentioned that different facilitators facilitated different workshops and one workshop was not a continuation of the other. One facilitator said some things contradictory to what was said by another facilitator while to some questions facilitators had no answers. One facilitator explained that facilitators themselves spent little time on training, and did not master everything to be passed on to educators. There was no facilitator who was informed about teaching learners with learning problems in all the workshops she attended.

Educator one said that from the workshops she learnt how to divide learners into groups, how to do continuous assessment and how to record assessments without using numbers.

The educator profile asked the educator about her experience in teaching grade one and number of OBE workshops she attended, as these were thought to influence the way she taught. The educator's experience in teaching grade one and the number of OBE workshops she attended was enough to show that the educator was competent to teach grade one using OBE principles. Her statements concerning what was missing and what she

gained from workshops showed that she understood what OBE style to teaching is about.

After completing the educator profile, the educator was interviewed. Below is the presentation of the findings obtained.

#### 4.4.4. INTERVIEW SESSION

In this study, data were mainly collected by the use of interviews. Interviews were preferred because they enabled the researcher to probe relevant information from educators themselves. Goodson, (1992) states that it is important to listen to the voices of educators as their exact tone and feelings are conveyed by the way they speak.

Educator one was interviewed in her own classroom. The researcher felt that the educator's own classroom would be a comfortable zone for the interviews as it was the place where the educator performs most of her teaching activities. Although it was planned that the interview session would take 30 minutes, it took longer because there was a natural flow of interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Interviews were conducted after the educator and the learners had completed their lessons. At Muhle Primary School, learners were kept in the school even if the lessons were completed, as agreed by parents and the educators. This was done for young learners to enable them to wait for their older brothers and sisters in the neighbouring high school because in most of the homes there was nobody present during the day.



Thomas, (1995) states that power relations between the researcher and the respondent can never be balanced. He states that the researcher usually directs the course of the interview and ultimately imposes patterns, images and meaning on narratives. In this interview, the researcher tried to ease power relations by sitting side by side with the respondent. The researcher felt that face to face sitting might make the respondent feel that she (the researcher) had some power over her.

The researcher started by assuring the participant of confidentiality. It was explained to the participant that the interview session would be tape-recorded and the tape would be used for study purposes only. The first question was then asked.

The researcher decided to present findings from the interview and from the observation schedule simultaneously because the latter was used to supplement what was said by the educator during interviews.

#### 4.4.4.1. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF MIXED ABILITY CLASSES

To answer the critical question, "What do educators understand by mixed ability classes?", definitions of mixed ability classes were given to the respondent. The respondent had to choose the definition that came closest to her understanding of mixed ability classes. The opportunity for the respondent to give her own understanding of such classes was provided.

In her response, the respondent said that "mixed ability classes are classes in which dull, average and highly gifted learners are placed and taught in one

classroom”. She was also asked if she was dealing with such classes, to which she responded positively. She was asked to describe the procedure used to assign different learners to different educators. She responded by saying that she and other educators asked learners to form lines according to gender. The first girl on the line went to grade one A, the second girl went to grade one B and the third girl went to grade one C. She said that the process was reversed by starting from grade one C. Reversal denied learners the opportunity to predetermine the class they would be assigned to. The same was done to boys.

The above responses showed that the educator understood what mixed ability classes are and that she was aware that she was teaching such a class. The procedure used to assign learners to different educators is random enough to produce mixed ability classes.

To supplement what the educator said, a classroom observation schedule was used. During observation the researcher inserted a tally in the appropriate space on the schedule when there were learners who:

- Completed the task before the time set;
- Did not complete a task at all;
- Moved up and down in the classroom;
- Read poorly, or read and talked fluently;
- Did every task neatly and correctly.

Tallies were then made next to all the above-mentioned behaviours, confirming that the educator was indeed teaching a mixed ability class.

#### 4.4.4.2. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNERS EXPERIENCING LEARNING PROBLEMS

For the critical research question, "What do educators understand by learners experiencing learning problems?", the educator was asked if she had learners experiencing learning problems in her class. She responded positively, and was then asked to describe the problems her learners had.

The educator responded by saying that her learners had spelling problems which were reflected in omission of letters, for example, they would write "igane" for "ingane", and reversal of consonants, such as, "ihkala" for "ikhaka" in Zulu.

She also said that some of her learners had reading problems. These were evident in learners counting words or sounds when reading, for example, "u-ya-ha-m-ba" for "uyahamba".

Some learners had problems in mathematics. These were reflected in confusion of subtraction and addition, for example, " $3-2=5$ " for " $3-2=1$ " and confusion of numbers, for example, 12 for 21.

She said that she had slow learners who took long to understand what was learnt. For example, it could takes them three to four lessons to logically tell their classmates how to make tea. She also had learners experiencing behavioural problems. These include learners who are bullies, aggressive or lonely. They demonstrated poor academic performance, which was evident in low marks they were awarded in written tests.

She said that in her class there were two learners who she felt were mentally retarded. They just sat in the class and could not do simple tasks as they did not understand what was learnt, and They could not follow simple instructions. She gave an example of a learner in her class who could not wipe his nose even when the educator asked him to do so.

She also had hyperactive learners who had poor concentration span. They volunteered to do other things instead of doing the given task, and did not sit still in the classroom.

The educator's responses showed that the educator understood what was meant by the term 'learners with learning problems' and that she had such learners in her class. In terms of clarifying the concept being studied, interviewing and observing one educator at Muhle Primary School revealed that the respondent educator understood the concept and was aware of the environment she taught in.

#### 4.4.4.3. TEACHING ACCORDING TO OBE PRINCIPLES

The next critical question researched was , "What do OBE principles say about teaching in general?". To answer this critical research question, the educator was asked to mention what she was doing differently in her teaching since the introduction of curriculum 2005 in grade one in 1998. To this question she responded by saying that she was no longer a content deliverer but a facilitator of learning. She integrated learning areas when teaching unlike in the old style of teaching where she was teaching different subjects. She said that she divided learners into groups and gave different activities to different groups. She said that she no longer uses numbers when recording

assessment; instead, she uses symbols that indicate whether the learner had achieved the outcome or not.

The educator was then asked to mention what has not changed in her teaching since the introduction of curriculum 2005. She responded by saying that she was still using the reading books for learners she had been using before the introduction of curriculum 2005. She still introduced sounds before the whole word was written. That is against OBE principles which say that the word should be introduced as a whole, and not as separate parts. She said that she felt it was better for learners experiencing learning problems to form the whole after the parts were mastered first. The participant said that she still gave learners written tests, but these tests were not used as the only means of assessment.

The educator's response showed that the educator had changed from an old style of teaching to an OBE approach to teaching. These responses also showed that the educator understood OBE principles.

When looking at what had not changed in the educator's way of teaching, it was seen that she had not completely abandoned the old methods of teaching there being some aspects which she found still useful.

In terms of clarifying the principles of OBE, which were being studied, interviewing educator one revealed that she understood the principles of OBE and she was using these principles when teaching. It also revealed that educator one was aware of the fact that there are methods of the old style to teaching which are still helpful in the new style of teaching.

#### 4.4.4.4. TEACHING MIXED ABILITY CLASSES USING OBE PRINCIPLES

The next critical question researched was, “What does OBE principles say about teaching mixed ability classes?”. To answer this critical research question the educator was asked to describe how she taught using OBE principles. She responded by saying that she divided learners into groups and gave different activities to different groups. She taught each group according to learners’ level of understanding. She said that she taught different learning areas to different groups in one lesson, and was doing so without dividing the time into periods.

Integration of learning areas was also observed by the researcher during the observation session. The researcher observed the educator teaching “Life Skills”, “Mathematics” and “Language” in one lesson.

She also said that she assessed learners as she went on with the teaching. She said that she asked questions that led learners to self-discovery.

To supplement the educators' responses, the observation schedule was used. The researcher put a tick, in the appropriate space, on the observation schedule, if any of the following was done:

Learners were organised for group work;

Learning was activity-based;

The educator integrated learning areas;

The educator provided individual attention;

The educator asked questions;

Learners asked questions in class.

On analysing the schedule, it revealed that the area that had fewer ticks on the observation schedule was that of providing individual feedback. The observation schedule also showed that there were few learners who asked questions. The area that had more ticks was related to the issue: 'educator asked questions'. This means that on the whole, the observation schedule showed that the educator knew how to teach mixed ability class using OBE principles and that indeed she was teaching a mixed ability class using these principles.

#### 4.4.4.5. PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY THE EDUCATOR

The critical research question, "What problems do educators experience when teaching learners experiencing learning problems in mixed ability classes?" was the next to be researched. For this critical research question the educator was asked the following questions:

"Are there any problems that you encounter when teaching learners experiencing learning problems in the mixed ability class, using OBE principles? Please explain these problems."

"Are these general problems or are they due to the new approach to teaching?"

To the first question the educator responded positively. She explained the problems as they came to her mind and the researcher decided to categorise them to make data analysis easier. Categorised problems are presented below.

### *General Problems*

The educator felt that time spent in workshops concerning OBE and curriculum 2005 was too short to master all that needed to be implemented in class. When she had to implement what she had learnt in the workshop, she found that she did not master everything to be done in class. She had retarded learners in her class. These learners needed special attention. She found it difficult to teach the class with such learners as she was not trained to teach mentally retarded learners.

In her response, she said that the class she was teaching was too big for the kind of individualised teaching emphasised by the OBE approach to teaching. She said that individualised teaching was not always practical in her class, and felt that most of the problems were created by the introduction of curriculum 2005. She said,

*“Teaching according to OBE principles is not for big classes like ours. How can I prepare eight different learning activities? Where is time to prepare all these activities? Really, teaching in OBE approach is not for us.” (Transcript 1;2000).*

### *Problems with the content*

The educator said that she experienced problems with the content and that OBE principles put more emphasis on assessment. She felt that, this resulted in her spending more time on assessment and little time on explaining the content. She said that it was difficult for her to teach without a syllabus that prescribes the content to be taught. Illustrative learning problems did not provide clear content to be taught.



She further explained that she had learners experiencing learning problems who took too long to understand the content, especially when they had to discover facts for themselves. She had to spend more time helping these learners so that other groups of learners were neglected.

### *Problems with assignments*

The educator said that most of the problems with assignments were created by shortage of resources. Learners did not have basic resources like pencils and crayons. They did not write the given assignments. They did not even tell the educator that they did not have these resources, but sat down doing nothing until the educator found this out herself and provided assistance. This was confirmed during observation. The researcher observed two learners who were not writing until the educator discovered this and gave them pencils.

Some of the learners experiencing learning problems sometimes did not attempt to do the given assignments and others did not complete it. These learners remained behind others with respect to learning.

### *Assessment Problems*

The educator said that assessment recording placed more work than before on her. She said that she had to do progress records and the assessment sheets, and also attend to learners' portfolios. In the old approach to education, assessment work on the educator's part was not demanding.

The educator said that assessment in big classes such as hers was difficult and it was sometimes impractical to assess all learners in one day. As it happened, some learners were not adequately assessed.

The educator added to her response by saying that peer assessment was sometimes discouraging, especially to learners experiencing learning problems. She said that young learners are honest. If one learner is not doing well, they tell him or her so without considering how the subject is going to feel. This was confirmed during observation. The educator asked learners to assess each other's work. When one learner's work was being assessed, they said, "Akazilutho bandla uMntwana", meaning that "Mntwana does not know anything". Learners had nicknamed this learner "Mntwana", meaning "Baby". Mntwana was then discouraged from showing his work to other learners.

### *Disciplinary Problems*

The educator said that the introduction of OBE principles to teaching had resulted in chaos in the classroom. Sometimes the class became uncontrollable. She said that when she had to attend to one group of learners, other groups messed around and played, creating an atmosphere of chaos in the classroom.

She said that some of the disciplinary problems resulted from lack of resources. Learners sometimes fought for books or reading cards. This was also witnessed by the researcher during observation. Learners were fighting for a book, which one learner was reading while another was reading a reading card. When the latter finished reading the card, he wanted the book. The one who was reading the book had not finished, so they ended up fighting for the book.

### *Problems with resources*

The educator said that her classroom was small in size. Learners were overcrowded. There was a shortage of furniture, with inadequate sitting and writing space. This situation encouraged learners, especially learners with learning problems, to copy each other's work. Sometimes it happened that highly gifted learners copied wrong work from less gifted learners. This problem was confirmed by the school and the classroom resource profiles. The school profile revealed that there was a shortage of furniture in this school, while the classroom resource profile revealed that there was inadequate sitting and writing space. The educator certainly recognised a problem in this regard.

In her response, the educator said that the school had a shortage of text books for learners, making it difficult for her to teach learners trying share books. Learners' workbooks were not adequate, while the educator also experienced problems with inadequate worksheets. She experienced the problems of making copies of worksheets when the school had no photocopying machine.

To supplement the educator's responses, a classroom observation schedule was used. The researcher put a tick in a column, on the observation schedule next to each of the followings, if observed:

Content problems,

Assignment problems,

Assessment problems,

Disciplinary problems and

Problems with resources.

Using this approach, analysis revealed that the areas with most ticks related disciplinary problems and problems with resources. The assessment problems' area had few ticks. The observation schedule showed that the educator experienced problems when teaching mixed ability classes.

Interviewing and observing educator one revealed that the respondent understood the context in which she was teaching and she was aware of the problems created by for her as a result.

#### 4.4.4.6. THE INFLUENCE OF THE PROBLEMS ON EDUCATOR'S CLASSROOM PRACTICES

The next critical question researched was, "What influence do problems have on educators' classroom practices?". To answer this critical research question, the question, "What influence do the problems have when you are dealing with the content, assignments, assessment, discipline and resources?" was asked.

The educator responded by saying that she spent little time on explaining the content since much time was spent on assessment. She taught little content over a long period of time, and said that learners experiencing learning problems took too long to understand the content, thus delaying the whole class.

She said that some learners did not do the given assignments. As a result, she spent more time helping those learners, resulting in learners who completed their work delayed.

With respect to assessment , the educator said that assessment-recording demanded more time from her, leading to time that should have been spent on preparation for the next day being spent on writing assessment records.

With respect to discipline, the educator said that it was difficult for her to control and teach the class characterised by chaos.

She said that shortage of resources prevented her from giving assignments as she had planned and would have liked to have given. She said that shortage of books resulted into other learners falling behind in their work, and gave an example of reading. Some learners fell behind because they did not get enough reading practice and presenting an appearance of experiencing learning problems. She said that shortage of furniture prevented her from dividing up as many groups of learners as she would have liked during lessons.

When answering this critical research question, “What influence do the problems have on educators’ classroom practices?, the respondent educator kept on reverting to, answering the previous critical research question, which is, “What problems do educators experience when teaching learners experiencing learning problems in mixed ability classes?. The little she said revealed that the problems had much influence on time, and the result was that the teaching and learning pace slowed appreciably.

#### 4.4.4.7. WAYS OF COPING WITH THE PROBLEMS

To find out how the educator coped with the problems she was asked the question, “How do you cope specifically when you are dealing with the content, assignment, assessment, discipline and resources?”.

With respect to content, the educator said that instead of a scheme of work or syllabus she used illustrative learning programmes that suggested activities for some specific outcomes. Where there were no activities suggested, she and other educators, designed their own activities. She said that she used simple examples from learners’ everyday experiences to explain the content, especially to slow learners.

To cope with assignment problems, the respondent educator said that she provided a second opportunity to write the assignment to learners who did not write it the first time. She helped the learners struggling with the assignment. She kept pencils to give to those who did not have then.

With respect to assessment, the respondent educator said that she did assessment recording at home, during her own time so that time at school was spent on helping learners experiencing learning problems.

The educator said that for informal assessment she does not assess all learners in one day because she has a big class. She said that she avoided peer assessment although she knew that she had to practise it.

The educator said that she kept all learners occupied to avoid chaos in the classroom, and provided highly gifted learners with more challenging

exercises. She had classroom rules that helped her to maintain order in the classroom, such as, “Do not fight in class, Do not shout, talk softly”.

With respect to resources, the educator said that she carried out some of the activities outside the classroom in the open space because the classroom was small in size. Such activities included games.

She said that she encouraged learners to share the few books they had. She supplemented books by using self-designed reading cards with short stories. These cards were shared with other educators. She used her own money to make copies of learners’ worksheets, and borrowed new curriculum material from educators of the neighbouring ex-Model C school.

In terms of the critical question researched, the responses revealed that the respondent did not have solutions to her problems but, she had found some ways of coping with them.

#### 4.4.4.8. EDUCATOR’S SUGGESTIONS

The last critical research question was, “What suggestions can you give an educator who has just started teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principles?”.

The respondent educator said that the new educator should be a life-long learner and should register with Universities or Colleges of education. In these universities or colleges, there are modules or courses that deal with the OBE approach to teaching that may help the educators who are starting their careers in teaching.

The respondent further said that the new educator should be media friendly. She should read papers like “Read Right” from the Sunday Times newspaper. There are TV and radio educational programs, like “Educator Express”, that can help educators. The new educator should use a variety of teaching methods to deal with learners of different abilities, and should involve parents of learners experiencing learning problems as much as possible in their children’s learning process.

The researcher felt that the interview went well and she was confident that it provided enough information for the study.

On the same day the second educator from Muhle Primary School was interviewed. Findings obtained from studying this educator are presented in the next section.

#### 4.4.5. EDUCATOR TWO

Educator two was teaching at the same school as educator one, that is Muhle Primary School. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of the field work was to gather data by interviewing six educators, so educator two was one of the educators who were only interviewed and not observed. The purpose of the interview was to listen to the actual voices of educators as they carry their exact tone and feelings, conveyed in the way they speak.

Educator two started by completing the educator profile instrument. The findings from this profile form revealed that educator two was a post level one educator with teaching experience of 20 years. She had taught grade one



for 11 years. She had 16 years' teaching experience at Muhle Primary School. Her highest academic and professional qualifications were Standard Ten, and BED, respectively. She was not studying at the time of the research. She had attended five OBE workshops and viewed these as useful.

The educator profile instrument asked the educator to state what she had learnt and what she felt was missing from the workshops. The educator said that practical classroom demonstrations were missing from the workshops and very little was said about assessment. She said that she learnt how to divide learners into groups, how to design and select learning activities and how to integrate learning areas.

Findings from the educator profile form revealed that the educator had a great deal of experience in teaching grade one. That experience made her a suitable participant in this study. What she described about what she had learnt from the workshops demonstrated that she understood the OBE principles. Her comments about what was missing from the workshops gave rise to predictions that she had problems with assessment when she was teaching by using OBE principles.

After completing the educator profile form, she was interviewed. Findings from the interview session are presented below.

#### 4.4.6. INTERVIEW SESSION

The interview took place in the educator's classroom after educator one was interviewed, while the learners carried on with work they had been given to do. The researcher explained the purpose and need of the research to the educator for the second time. She assured the participating educator of confidentiality and explained that the interview session would be tape-recorded. The researcher and the educator sat side by side to reduce power relations, as it was done with educator one.

##### 4.4.6.1. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF MIXED ABILITY CLASSES

The first critical question to be researched was, “ What do educators understand by mixed ability classes?”. The educator was given four definitions of mixed ability classes from which she had to choose one that came closer to her understanding of such grouping. Educator two responded by choosing the definition stating that mixed ability classes are classes with learners, who need different styles of teaching, and who learn in different learning styles. She explained that, this was the method which was more suitable for grouping learners for an OBE approach classroom.

When she was asked if she was teaching a mixed ability class. She responded by saying that this was the case.

Thereafter, she was asked to explain the procedure used to assign different learners to different educators. She responded by saying that she and other grade one educators asked learners to form lines according to gender. The S

first boy on the line went to grade one A, the second boy went to grade one B and the third boy went to grade one C. The same was done to girls.

The procedure for assigning learners to different educators was the same as that described by educator one. The responses showed that, like educator one, educator two understood what mixed ability classes are and was aware that she was dealing with such a class.

#### 4.4.6.2. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNERS EXPERIENCING LEARNING PROBLEMS

For the second critical research question, 'What do educators understand by learners experiencing learning problems?', when the respondent educator was asked if she had learners experiencing learning problems in her class, she responded positively. She was then asked to explain the problems her learners had.

Educator two responded by saying that her learners experienced spelling problems which were reflected in omission of letters, such as , "isle" for "isele". Some learners pronounced words incorrectly, such as, "feza" for "veza". Incorrectly pronounced words were incorrectly spelt. She explained that faulty pronunciation sometimes resulted from a deficit in speech organs. She said that two of her learners had this problem.

Educator two said that some of the learners in her class had reading problems which were evident in their reading without comprehension. When she asked learners to tell her what they had learnt, they were not able to.

The educator said that she had slow learners and hyperactive learners. Slow learners took a long time to understand what was learnt and needed more guidance from the educator than normal learners. Hyperactive learners were always restless, moving up and down the classroom and disturbing other learners.

Interviewing educator two revealed that she was aware of the problems learners in her class had. It also revealed that the educator understood what the term 'learners experiencing learning problems' means.

#### 4.4.6.3. TEACHING ACCORDING TO OBE PRINCIPLES

The next critical research question was, "What do OBE principles say about teaching in general?". Therefore, the educator was asked what she was doing differently and what had not changed in her teaching since the introduction of curriculum 2005 in grade one in 1998. In her response, the respondent educator said that she divided learners into groups and taught those groups according to their abilities. She said that she was now a facilitator of learning and no longer a content deliverer. She said that she assessed learners holistically and practised continuous assessment. She integrated learning areas when teaching.

To respond to the question of what had not changed in her teaching, she said that she still introduced sounds before introducing the whole word and she practices whole-class presentation in some learning areas.

The changes the educator mentioned showed that she had changed from the old style of teaching to OBE style. She also mentioned what had not changed

in her teaching, demonstrated that she had not completely abandoned the old ways of teaching.

#### 4.4.5.4. TEACHING MIXED ABILITY CLASSES USING OBE PRINCIPLES

The next critical research question was, “ What does OBE say about teaching mixed ability classes?”. To answer this critical research question the educator was asked to describe how she taught using OBE principles.

The educator responded by saying that she divided learners into groups. She taught each group according to its members’ pace of learning. She gave different activities to different groups, illustrating the point with the example on teaching sounds. She said that, at the time of the research, the fastest group was on ‘ng’ sound, the middle group was on ‘nc’ sound and the slowest was on ‘c’.

The respondent educator said that she asked questions as the lesson went on. The questions helped her to establish how much the learners knew about what was learnt at that time. The questions also helped her to determine in which group each learner should be placed. When teaching, she moved from what the learners knew, to the unknown, using examples from the learners’ own environment. This helped learners experiencing learning problems to understand easily. She said she used flexi-time to help learners who struggled.

In terms of what was studied, interviewing educator two at Muhle Primary School showed that the educator understood how to teach mixed ability

classes using OBE principles and that she was indeed using these principles when teaching.

#### 4.4.6.5. PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY THE EDUCATOR

For the critical research question, “What problems do educators experience when teaching learners experiencing learning problems in mixed ability classes?”, the educator was asked to describe the problems she experienced when teaching mixed ability classes. She was also asked if these were general problems or they are due to the new approach to teaching. The educator felt that most of the problems were due to the new approach to teaching. The educator felt that most of the problems were due to the new approach to teaching. The problems described by the educator are presented below and are categorised by the researcher as done with educator one.

##### *General Problems*

The respondent educator said that there was no free time that may be used for preparing for the next day. The free time she did have was used to help learners experiencing learning problems.

She said that some learners in her class were egocentric. They sat in groups but worked individually. If they worked in the group, they used to say, for example, “It is me who drew the picture”. Learners experiencing learning problems sometimes sat in the group without contributing anything. It was difficult for her to see that there were non-contributors in a group due to large class sizes.

### *Problems with the content*

The educator said that there was no syllabus that prescribed the content to be learnt. It was difficult for her to decide what to teach and what not to teach. The educator said that it was difficult and time-consuming to lead learners to discover facts for themselves. The OBE approach emphasises that learners should be helped towards self-discovery. Slow learners took long to arrive at desired facts. Sometimes, they wandered too far from what the educator planned. This created problems as the educator had to deviate from what she planned to teach to what learners to discuss.

### *Problems with Assignments*

In her response, the educator said that assignments given in the form of homework were not done by learners at home. The following day she would have to start by helping those who did not do their homework, thus delaying the whole class.

The respondent said that parents were not playing their role as far as the purchase of exercise books and pencils was concerned. Parents said that the government was giving free exercise books and pencils to all schools, so they were not going to buy anything. She said that what was provided by the government was not enough. Learners did not have all the needed exercise books resulting in some learners not completing the given assignments.

### *Assessment Problems*

In her response, she said that she had 62 learners in her class. It was difficult for her to observe all the learners for assessment purposes. Some learners

worked slowly and others worked faster. It took her a long time to assess all different groups of learners.

The respondent educator said that the type of assessment recording used in the new approach to education placed more work on educators than on learners. There were progress records, assessment sheets and at the end of each quarter there were progress reports to be written to parents. All these had to be done by her, which was difficult considering that she had 62 learners.

#### *Disciplinary problems*

With respect to disciplinary problems, the respondent educator said that when she was busy with one group, other groups of learners moved around, playing and fighting. There was always noise in the class. She said that activities in the form of games created chaos in the class. Learners enjoyed these activities, took advantage of the situation and played their own games. Hyperactive learners always disturbed other learners by moving up and down in the classroom.

#### *Problems with resources*

With respect to problems with resources, she said that the school did not receive all new curriculum materials from the Education Department. When she needed the materials she had to make copies from other schools, using her own money because the school had no funds to do so. She said that in her school there was a shortage of books and stationery for learners since stationery packages received from the Department of Education were not enough for all learners. This made teaching and giving of assignments difficult.



In the school, there was also a shortage of desks or tables for learners. She had an unlockable cupboard, but learners' workbooks got lost as they were kept by her in this cupboard. If a learner's workbook got lost, parents did not want to replace it and it became her own problem. She said that it was better in the old education approach because learners kept their own books.

She said that the classroom was small in size, with a very small space for activities in the form of games.

Books available in the school did not cater for all learners, abilities. Grade one had the same copies of reading books and some stories in these books were beyond learners' level of understanding. She gave an example of a story about Eskimos in Iceland. She said that the story did not make any sense for her learners as they did not understand who an Eskimo is.

In terms of the critical question being researched, interviewing educator two revealed that the respondent was aware of the problems she experienced. She was also aware that the environment in which she taught was the main cause of the problems.

#### 4.4.6.6. THE INFLUENCE OF THE PROBLEMS ON EDUCATOR'S CLASSROOM PRACTICES

The next critical question researched was, "What influence do the problems have on educators' classroom practices?". To this critical research question, she responded by saying that it was not easy for her to mention the influence of the problems on her classroom practices as it varied.

She said that one problem had different influences on different groups and at different times. She said that it was teaching and learning time that was mostly influenced by the problems. When she used different examples to explain the content to slow learners, the whole class was delayed. Sometimes she used time after the lessons to help learners experiencing learning problems, resulting in a time for preparation for the next day was lost. Some time was lost due to shortage of resources. With learners sharing books and other resources, this pace of teaching and learning was reduced.

#### 4.4.6.7. WAYS OF COPING WITH THE PROBLEMS

For the critical research question, “How do educators cope with the problems?”, the educator was asked, “How do you cope specifically when you are dealing with the content, assessment, assignments, discipline and resources?”.

The respondent educator said that because there was no clear syllabus describing the content, she discussed what had to be taught with other educators. They designed learning programs and learning activities together.

To help learners experiencing learning problems to grasp the content, she used different examples taken from learners’ everyday experiences. She used teaching aids like pictures and self-made models to make learning meaningful to all learners.

To cope with assignments, the educator said that if the homework was not done at home, she started by helping learners who did not do it. The disadvantage was that the whole class was delayed.

The educator said that she asked parents to help learners experiencing learning problems with their homework. If she noticed that the learner did not always do the homework, she asked the parents to come to school to discuss the matter with her.

With respect to assessment the educator said that she gave herself extra time for writing assessment records. That might be time after school hours either at school or at home.

With respect to content the educator said that she gave hyperactive learners more work to do. This might be in the form of taking books from the cupboard and giving them to others. She also gave highly gifted learners more difficult exercises to keep them occupied.

The educator said that for activities in the form of games, she asked learners to pack desks at the back of the classroom to make a larger space. To cope with inadequacy of writing space, she gave learners written exercises in groups. When one group was writing one would be reading. That gave them the opportunity to share the few desks they had. To supplement books, she said she had made self-designed reading or mathematics cards, which she exchanged with other grade one educators.

In her responses, the educator revealed that she had some ways of coping with the problems she experienced in mixed ability classes.

#### 4.4.6.8. THE EDUCATOR'S SUGGESTIONS

The educator was asked to give suggestions to the educator who has just started teaching a mixed ability class using OBE principles. She responded by saying that the new educator should work as a team with other educators, in particular with other grade one educators and those from other grades in her school. She should also work with educators from other schools.

In her response, she said that mixed ability classes require commitment, responsibility and patience from the educator. The educator teaching these classes should have these qualities. The new educator should always praise learners experiencing learning problems when they have done something successfully and avoid sarcastic remarks to learners. Hyperactive learners should not be discouraged even if they had done something they were not asked to do.

At the end of the interview, the educator was asked to give comments if she wished to do so. She responded by saying that she did not like to look as if she was against OBE approach. She said,

*The approach is good for learners, especially those who experience learning problems, as it treats learners as unique. The problem with it is that, it places more work on educators. Most Black schools have larger classes than White schools. Some aspects of OBE approach are impractical in schools with large numbers of learners in one class (transcript 2;2000).*

She wishes that the government would reduce the educator-learner ratio, especially in grade one. The average should be at most 30 learners per class. She thought that White schools were managing because educator- learner ratios were low. She felt that the government made changes in the teaching approach ignoring changes in the physical resources at schools. Schools should have adequate resources like buildings, furniture and books for the OBE approach to teaching to be successful.

The researcher felt that interviewing two educators and observing one of them at Muhle Primary School provided information that answered the critical research questions. On the next day, the researcher visited Khula Primary School for fieldwork. Findings obtained in this school are presented in the next section.

## CASE II : KHULA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Khula Primary School is situated west of Mpophomeni Township. Khula is about five kilometres from Muhle Primary School.

The results that are presented in this section were obtained by interviewing two educators at Khula Primary School, while one of them was also observed inside the classroom. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow the researcher to probe initial responses and to avoid vague responses.

### 4.5. GAINING ACCESS

The researcher gained permission to conduct the research by travelling to the school. The principal was approached first as she was the 'gatekeeper' of the

school. The purpose of and the need of the research was explained to her by the researcher. The principal was not certain whether to allow the researcher into the school or not, because educators were busy with the Developmental Appraisal System. In fact, the whole circuit was busy with the Developmental Appraisal System during the time of the researcher's fieldwork.

The principal called all grade one educators. The researcher explained the need and the purpose of the research to educators. Educators also felt that they would be busy, but they were all willing to participate. The sample was then selected.

#### 4.6. SAMPLE SELECTION

The researcher explained the procedure that would be used to select the sample. The procedure used in the first school was used in this school. Names of all four grade one educators were written on separate pieces of paper, which were thrown on the table. Two pieces paper were picked by the principal, with those educators whose names appeared on papers being included in the sample. To find one educator who would be both interviewed and observed from the two already chosen, two pieces of paper were again thrown on the table. The educator whose name was picked from the papers was both interviewed and observed.

The researcher gave the school profile form to the principal and asked her to complete it, having decided to hand the form out earlier to give the principal enough time as, she was busier than other educators because of the Appraisal System. Dates and time of interviews were set.

#### 4.7. THE FINDINGS

Findings that are presented in this section were obtained by interviewing two educators at Khula Primary School. The aim of the study was to find out the problems experienced by educators in mixed ability classes. Interviews were seen as the most suitable technique for this study, as they would enable educators to tell stories in their own words, which is a good feature of qualitative research. Observation technique of data collection was used to confirm that what educators said in the interview was really happening in class. The findings obtained by using these two techniques of data collection, are presented below.

##### 4.7.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL

The school profile form completed by the principal gave detailed information on the school.

At the time of the research the school had three buildings with 15 classrooms. There was one little office for the principal, one little store room and no staff room. There was no telephone service, fax machine, photocopier, typing or duplicating machines. There was tap water but not inside the classrooms. There was a shortage of furniture. The school needed minor repairs and painting.

There were 847 learners and 15 educators in the school. Of these learners, 253 were grade one and there were four grade one educators. There was no support staff.

The school had “Life Skills”, “Numeracy and Literacy” Programmes with and without Teachers’ Guides. The school had Policy Documents for the Foundation Phase. It received “Stationery Packages” but these did not contain enough materials for all learners.

The findings from the school profile instrument revealed that the school was under-resourced. It had the average of 56 learners in one classroom. Grade one classrooms had an average of 63 learners, far more than the set educator-learner ratio of 1:35. The findings gave a clear indication that educators at this school were experiencing problems.

The researcher felt that it was important to study the classroom environment as it has an influence on the teaching and learning process. The description of the classroom is presented below.

#### 4.7.2. INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

The classroom resource profile form, completed by the researcher, provided information used to describe the classroom.

There were 66 learners in the classroom. Some learners did not have tables on which to write and when it was time for writing they knelt down and wrote on benches. The writing and sitting space was totally inadequate with movement between desks being difficult because the classroom was small. Charts were displayed on the wall which needed painting. On the whole, however, the classroom was clean and it was a pleasant place for anyone to be in.



Findings revealed that there was a shortage of furniture and that the classroom was overcrowded, giving a clear indication that the educator experienced problems in the classroom.

Another instrument used in this research was an educator profile which was intended to give useful information about educators. This instrument was also used in this school and its findings are presented below.

#### 4.7.3. EDUCATOR THREE

As it was mentioned in the previous section, the educator profile was used to obtain useful information about educator three. It was completed by the educator before she was interviewed and observed.

Findings from the educator profile revealed that the educator three was a post level one educator with teaching experience of 16 years. She was teaching grade one for the tenth year. Year 2000 was her tenth year at Khula Primary School. Her highest academic and professional qualifications were standard ten, and Primary Teachers' Diploma (PTD). At the time of the research she was studying for Higher Diploma in Education (HDE). She had attended five OBE workshops and viewed them as useful.

On the educator profile form, there was space for educators to fill in what they felt was missing and describe what they learnt from the workshops. Educator three wrote that there was no clarity of what had to be done inside the classroom and practical demonstration of the teaching and learning situation in the workshops.

Educator three wrote that she learnt how to divide learners into groups, how to design learning programmes and understanding of different types of assessment.

The findings showed that the workshops attended and viewed by the educator as useful were enough for her to teach effectively in an OBE style.

After the educator had completed the educator profile form, the interview started. Educator three was both interviewed and observed. Data collected by using the two techniques of data collection are presented below.

#### 4.7.4. INTERVIEWS SESSION

Interviews were aimed at hearing the actual voices of educators when they talked about problems, and their experiences when teaching mixed ability classes. Observations were used to confirm that what educators said during interviews was really happening inside the classrooms.

The educator was interviewed inside her own classroom with the intention of not only studying the educator in her natural setting but also to gain some insight regarding the environment in which the educator was teaching. The educator was observed inside the classroom on the next day and it took the whole day to do this.

Interviews were conducted in the presence of learners, the educator giving them some work to do while the interview was conducted. The researcher sat side by side with the educator to minimise power relations as before. The

researcher then assured the educator of confidentiality and the first question was asked.

#### 4.7.4.1. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF MIXED ABILITY CLASSES

The first critical research question was, "What do educators understand by mixed ability classes?". To answer this critical research question, the educator was given four definitions of mixed ability classes and she had to choose the definition that came closer to her understanding of such grouping. She was given the opportunity to give her own definition if she wished to do so.

The educator responded by saying that she understands that mixed ability classes are classes in which learners who have different learning aptitudes are taught in one classroom. She said that it is the same as when one educator is teaching different grades in one classroom. She was also asked if she was dealing with a mixed ability class to which she responded positively.

The educator was then asked to give the procedure used to assign different learners to different educators. She responded by saying that she and other educators wrote down the names of learners on a temporary admission register as learners register. When they assigned learners to different educators, they used the list of learners from the temporary register. The first girl on the list went to grade one A, the second girl went to grade one B, the third girl went to grade one C and the fourth girl went to grade one D. The process was repeated until all the girls were assigned to different educators. The same procedure was used to assign boys.

The educator's responses showed that the educator understood what mixed ability classes are and that the educator was aware that she was teaching such a class. The procedure used to assign different learners to different educators was random enough to produce mixed ability classes.

The educator's responses were confirmed by the classroom observation schedule. The researcher put a tally in the appropriate space on the observation schedule when there was a learner who:

completed the task before the time set,  
did not complete a task at all,  
moved up and down the classroom,  
read poorly,  
read and talked fluently and  
who did every task neatly and correctly.

Tallies were made next to all the above mentioned behaviours. This process confirmed that the educator was indeed teaching a mixed ability class.

#### 4.7.4.2. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNERS WITH LEARNING PROBLEMS

The second critical question research was, "What do educators understand by learners experiencing learning problems?". For this critical research question the educator was asked if she had learners experiencing learning problems in her class and she responded positively. She was then asked to describe the problems her learners had.

The respondent educator said that she had slow learners who some time to understand what was learnt. Those learners needed more attention from the educator. She said that she also had to deal with learners' emotional problems. These learners were always lonely and sleepy during lessons. She said that some of her learners were shy and lazy; for example they could not talk in front of the class and could not take the initiative. She also had learners who had short concentration span. All these demonstrated poor academic performance which was reflected in low marks obtained in tests.

In her responses, the educator said that some of her learners were not able to read simple words and it was worse when they had to read sentences. Some learners confused sounds when they spelt words, such as, "iqude" for "iqhude" in Zulu.

Findings revealed that the respondent educator understood the meaning of the term 'learners experiencing learning problems'. In terms of the critical question researched, interviewing educator three revealed that she was aware of the problems her learners had.

#### 4.7.4.3. TEACHING ACCORDING TO OBE PRINCIPLES

The next critical question was, "What does OBE say about teaching in general?" . The educator was asked to mention what she was doing differently since the introduction of curriculum 2005 in grade one in 1998.

The respondent educator said that in class, learners were sitting in groups and not in rows as it was the case in the traditional way of teaching. She said that she no longer relied on tests and examinations as was the case before

curriculum 2005 was introduced. She was practising continuous assessment. She said that she had not changed the teaching methods because she felt that teaching in OBE style is the same as teaching in a tradition way.

The educator was then asked to mention what had not changed in her teaching since the introduction of curriculum 2005 in grade one in 1998. She responded by saying that she was practising theme teaching which she used in the old approach to teaching. She said that in the new approach to teaching theme teaching is called integration of learning areas. She said that she was using the readers for learners that she used in the old style of teaching. She still practised whole class presentation, when teaching some learning areas such as Life Orientation, which she was doing in the old style of teaching.

In her responses, she said that she was still teaching the same content, in language and mathematics, as that which she was teaching in the traditional education approach. She said that she started by teaching all five vowels before teaching consonants, which she had done in the old education style as well.

In her responses, the educator emphasised that there was not much difference between what she was doing before and what she was doing after the introduction of curriculum 2005. In terms of what was being studied, (teaching according to OBE approach), interviewing educator three revealed that she understood the OBE principles, but she felt that teaching by using these principles was more or less the same as teaching using the old style.

#### 4.7.4.4. TEACHING MIXED ABILITY CLASSES USING OBE PRINCIPLES

To answer the critical research question, “What does OBE say about teaching mixed ability classes?”, the educator was asked to describe how she taught a mixed ability class using OBE principles. In her response the educator started by emphasising that what she was doing was the same as what she was doing before the introduction of curriculum 2005.

The educator said that when teaching language and mathematics she divided learners into groups according to their pace of learning. She said that the fastest group was doing activities on subtraction and addition combined, the following group was doing subtraction only and the next group was on addition only. She said that the last group which consisted of slow learners, was struggling with counting.

The educator said that in reading, the groups of learners were on different chapters. The fastest group was on chapter 13 of a reader with 16 chapters and the slowest group was on chapter 4.

Findings revealed that educator three understood how to teach mixed ability classes using OBE principles and she was indeed using these principles when she was teaching but had done so before, according to her.

To supplement the educators responses, the classroom observation schedule was used. The researcher put a tick in the appropriate space on the observation schedule if:

Learners were organised for group work;  
Learning was activity based;  
The educator integrated learning areas;  
The educator provided individual attention;  
The educator asked questions;  
Learners asked questions;

The analysis of the classroom observation schedule showed that the educator asked questions, learning was activity-based and the educator asked questions. It also revealed that learners did not ask questions and that individual feedback was provided to few learners.

The findings from the observation schedule confirmed that the educator was teaching a mixed ability class using OBE principles, although the educator did not provide much individual feedback.

#### 4.7.4.5. PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY THE EDUCATOR

The next critical question researched was, “What problems do educators experience when teaching learners experience learning problems in mixed ability classes?”. For this critical research question the educator was asked if she experienced any problems when teaching learners experiencing learning problems in a mixed ability class and she responded positively. She was then asked to explain the problems she experienced. Below, problems experienced by educator three are presented as categorised by the researcher.



### *Problems the content*

The respondent said that she did not know what to teach as there was no syllabus that prescribed the content to be taught. She found it difficult to design her own learning programme.

### *Problems assessment*

In her response the educator said that she was doing formative continuous assessment, and that she was not pleased with this type of assessment as it involved more work and it was time-consuming. She was expected to write notes about how learners worked, but found this impractical. She said that it was impractical to observe all the learners all the time. She became frustrated when she had to assess a learner who worked slowly as she could not assess these with the rest of the group. The respondent said that the principle of learners working at their own pace was frustrating.

The respondent said that integration of learning areas was difficult in a mixed ability class. She said in her class there was one learner who was good in mathematics and poor in language and another learner who was good in language and struggling in Natural sciences. To integrate learning areas with such learners was impractical.

### *Problems with resources*

The respondent was further prompted to speak about problems with resources. She responded by saying that learning in her class was activity-based. The use of magazines and newspapers, cutting and pasting were common activities in the classroom. Learners from disadvantaged homes, who were usually those who experience learning problems, did not have scissors and glue. They were not provided with magazines and newspapers at

homes, so they became more disadvantaged at school as they could not participate in class.

### *Disciplinary problems*

The respondent said that discipline was the major problem in her classroom. She said that the classroom was less formal than before, with learners moving from group to group during lessons. Learners did not take activities in the form of games seriously and there was chaos in her classroom.

In terms of the critical question being researched, interviewing educator three revealed that the respondent educator had problems when teaching a mixed ability class and she was aware of these problems.

To confirm what was said by the educator during the interview, the classroom observation schedule was used. The researcher put a tick in the appropriate space on the observation schedule if problems with content, assignments, assessment, discipline and resources occurred.

The observation schedule revealed that the educator experienced many problems with resources and disciplinary problems. There were few assessment problems noticed. Problems with the content were not detected by using the observation schedule.

On the whole, the classroom observation schedule confirmed what was said by the educator during the interview.

#### 4.7.4.6. THE INFLUENCE OF THE PROBLEMS ON EDUCATOR'S CLASSROOM

The next critical research question was, “What influence do the problems have on educators classroom practices?”. The educator was asked the question, “What influence do the problems have when you are dealing with the content, assignments, assessment, resources and discipline?”.

The educator responded by saying that assessment according to OBE approach constituted about 75% of her work. That decreased her work rate and delayed the whole class. She said that formative continuous assessment was time-consuming and she felt that it deterred her from getting involved with learners.

In her response, the educator said that disciplinary problems resulted in chaotic classes. Learners disturbed each other and there were fights among learners.

The educator said that learners were not equipped with materials for meeting the demands of OBE approach and this placed additional burden for her. It prevented her from giving the assignments she planned to give.

The educator's responses showed that the educator's classroom practices are influenced by the problems she experienced when teaching a mixed ability class using OBE principles.

#### 4.7.4.7. WAYS OF COPING WITH THE PROBLEMS

The next critical question research was, “How do educators cope with the problems?”. The educator was asked how she coped specifically when she was dealing with the content, assignment, assessment, resources and with discipline.

The educator responded by saying that she discussed what had to be taught with other grade one educators in her school. They designed the learning programmes together. In language and mathematics she taught what she was teaching before the introduction of curriculum 2005.

With respect to assessment, she said that she did not always write notes about learners’ progress. She did not assess all learners in one day as it took her a week to observe and write notes about all learners’ progress.

With respect to disciplinary problems, the educator said that she had classroom rules which helped her to maintain order in the classroom. She said she had rules like, ‘ If you are angry, count from one up to ten’. This rule helped her to reduce fighting in class.

To cope with resources problems, the educator said that she kept some scissors and magazines and during class-time gave these to learners who did not have them.

The educator’s responses showed that she was aware of the problems she had in her class and had found some ways of coping with these problems.

#### 4.7.4.8. EDUCATOR'S SUGGESTIONS

The last critical question researched was, "What suggestions can educators give to educators who had just started teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principles?".

The respondent said that the new educator should have patience because teaching a mixed ability class can be frustrating. She said that the new educator should work as a team with other educators, especially educators teaching the same grade as she is. She also said that the new educator should use a variety of teaching methods as different learners learn in different styles.

The interview ended, and the researcher felt that interviewing and observing educator three provided useful information that would not only help the researcher in her research but, would also help other educators who are teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principles.

On that day, the researcher interviewed educator four at the same school, that is, Khula Primary School. The findings obtained by interviewing this educator are presented in the following section.

#### 4.7.5. EDUCATOR FOUR

The purpose of this study was to find out problems educators experience when they deal with mixed ability classes. To achieve this purpose, the oral interviews on grade one educators formed the most important aspect of data collection. The study aimed at understanding the experiences of educators in

their classrooms, information which would be mainly obtained through educators' narratives about how they taught.

Educator four was one of the educators who was only interviewed and not observed. She started by completing the educator profile form. This form was designed to provide information about educator's qualifications, her teaching experience and the number and quality of OBE workshops she attended.

The educator profile instrument revealed that the educator was a post level one educator with teaching experience of 12 years. She started teaching at Khula Primary School and remains there. Her highest academic and professional qualifications were standard ten and Higher Education Diploma, respectively. At the time of the study she was not studying. She had attended two OBE workshops and viewed these as useful.

The educator profile asked educators to state what was missing and what they had gained from OBE workshops. The educator said that practical classroom demonstrations and explanation of how to design learning activities for mixed ability classes were missing from the workshops she attended. She said that she, however, learnt how to divide learners into groups.

The findings revealed that educator four, like educators three, had attended few OBE workshops which was an indication that the educator had problems inside the classroom.

#### 4.7.6. THE INTERVIEW SESSION

The findings that are presented in this section were obtained from interviewing educator four at Khula Primary School. The educator was interviewed in her classroom after she had given learners some work to do.

The researcher started by assuring the respondent of confidentiality. This was done to gain mutual trust between the researcher and the researched. Carlgren et al, (1994) say that the development of a relationship that is based on trust, enables the researched to feel sufficiently free and relaxed to be themselves and share all the necessary information. The first question was asked after ensuring that the respondent was relaxed.

##### 4.7.6.1. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF MIXED ABILITY CLASSES

The first critical question researched was, "What do educators understand by mixed ability classes?". As done with other educators, the educator was given two definitions of mixed ability classes, and had to choose the definition that came closer to her understanding of such classes. She was given the opportunity to give her own definition if she wished to do so.

The educator responded by choosing the definition that states that mixed ability are classes in which dull, average and highly gifted learners are placed and taught in one classroom. She was asked if she was dealing with a mixed ability class and she responded positively. She was then asked to give the procedure used to assign different learners to different educators.

The educator responded by saying that she and other grade one educators wrote down a list of learners as they register. The list was used to assign learners to different educators. The first girl on the list went to grade one A, the second girl went to grade one B, the third girl went to grade one C and the fourth girl went to grade one D. The procedure was repeated until all girls were assigned. The same procedure was used for boys.

The findings revealed that educator four understood what mixed ability classes are and that she was dealing with such a class. The procedure used to assign learners to different educators was the same as that given by educator three and it was random enough to produce a mixed ability class. This demonstrated that at Khula Primary School grade one classes were mixed ability classes.

#### 4.7.6.2. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNERS WITH LEARNING PROBLEMS

The next critical research question was, "What do educators understand by learners experiencing learning problems?". To answer this critical research question, the researcher was asked if she had learners experiencing learning problems in her class and she responded positively. She was then asked to explain the problems her learners had.

The respondent educator said that she had learners who were so dull that they took a long time to understand what was learnt, and always needed her help. She said that some of her learners were restless in the classroom, moving from one group to the next disturbing others.



In her responses, the educator said that some of her learners had spelling problems which were reflected in omission of syllables when they spelt words, such as, “heka” for “hleka”. She said that some of her learners had problems in mathematics which were reflected in the confusion of basic operation. Most of the learners confused addition with multiplication.

In terms of the concept researched, (learners experiencing learning problems), interviewing educator four revealed that the respondent educator understood the meaning of the term ‘learners experiencing learning problems’ and that she had such learners in her class.

#### 4.7.6.3. TEACHING ACCORDING TO OBE PRINCIPLES

The next critical question researched was, “What do OBE principles say about teaching in general?”. To answer this critical research question, the educator was asked what she was doing differently in her teaching since the introduction of curriculum 2005.

The educator responded by saying that she was no longer the content deliverer as was the case before the introduction of curriculum 2005 but, she was now a facilitator of learning. She allowed learners to discover facts for themselves. She said that she was teaching learning areas and not subjects, and when she was teaching she integrated learning areas. She said that she was practising continuous assessment and assessed learners holistically.

The educator was also asked what had not changed in her teaching since the introduction of curriculum 2005. The respondent said that she was still using

the reading books she used before the introduction of curriculum 2005: She was still using tests to determine how much learners had learnt. In her response she said that she was practising whole class presentation when teaching some learning areas like Human and Social Sciences.

The educator's responses revealed that the educator had changed to the new approach to teaching but had not completely abandoned the old style of teaching.

#### 4.7.6.4. TEACHING MIXED ABILITY CLASSES USING OBE PRINCIPLES

The next critical research question was, 'What do OBE principles say about teaching mixed ability classes?'. The educator was asked to describe how she taught mixed ability classes using OBE principles.

The respondent educator said that she divided learners into groups and taught different activities to different groups. She said she taught each group according to its members' learning pace. She said that she gave different tests to different groups. For example, when testing spelling she called out different words for different groups to spell. She gave more challenging exercises to highly gifted learners and simple and easy exercises to learners who were struggling.

The above explanation of how the educator taught revealed that the educator was indeed teaching a mixed ability class using OBE principles.

#### 4.7.6.5. PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY EDUCATORS

The next critical research question was, “What problems do educators experience when teaching learners experiencing learning problems in mixed ability classes?”. To answer this critical research question the educator was asked if she experienced any problems when teaching learners experiencing learning problems in a mixed ability class. She responded positively and was then asked to describe the problems.

The educator responded by saying that the most problematic area was assessment. She said that it was difficult for her to assess learners of different abilities. She said that it was difficult and time consuming to design different assessment tools that would cater for all learning abilities.

The educator said that she had problems with resources. She said that the school had a shortage of benches and tables for learners which resulted in inadequate sitting and writing space. This situation encouraged learners to copy each others’ work. Learners experiencing learning problems usually copied from highly gifted and average learners. Learners experiencing learning problems might look as if they had achieved a satisfactory performance due to copying, but in reality they had not.

With respect to assignments, the educator said that it was difficult for her to give the assignments she planned to give because learners did not have the necessary resources to do the assignments. Learners without resources did not do the given assignments. In her response, the educator said that learners experiencing learning problems did not do the assignments in the form of homework because they needed assistance, which parents were not providing.

The following day, the educator had to start by helping them with the assignments.

In her response, the educator said that she used to teach more to the average and below average learners, and highly gifted learners were often neglected.

With respect to discipline, the educator said that she had no problems. She said that in the workshop she had attended, it was said that noise in the classroom is normal. The problem she had as far as discipline was concerned was fighting and quarrelling amongst learners.

The educator's responses revealed that the educator had problems when teaching learners experiencing learning problems in a mixed ability class, and she was aware of these problems.

#### 4.7.6.6. THE INFLUENCE OF THE PROBLEMS ON EDUCATOR'S CLASSROOM PRACTICES

To answer the critical research question, "What influence do the problems have on educators' classroom practices?", the educator was asked to tell the influence of the problems when she was dealing with the content, assessment, assignment, discipline and with resources.

The educator said that all the problems influenced the teaching and learning pace. When assignments were not done at home, on the next day the educator had to start by helping learners who did not do the assignment before she progressed with that day's work. When there was a shortage of reading books, learners had to share the few books available. The reading process

was thus delayed. Writing notes about each learners' progress during lessons delayed the whole class.

#### 4.7.6.7. WAYS OF COPING WITH THE PROBLEMS

The next critical question researched was, "How do educators cope with the problems?". To answer this critical research question, the educator was asked how she coped with the problems when she was dealing with the content, assignments, assessment, resources and discipline.

The educator responded by saying that she could not clearly tell how she coped with each of the problems and said that she handled each problem as it came. She said that the best way to cope with the problems was to sacrifice, said she used her time at home to write assessment records. She used time for tea brakes to help learners who needed extra help. She used her money to buy resources like pencils and crayons for learners who did not have these.

The educator's responses revealed that the respondent had no clear ways of coping with the problems. She handled each problems as it came.

#### 4.7.6.8. EDUCATOR'S SUGGESTIONS

The last critical question researched was, "What suggestions can educators give an educator who has just started teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principles?".

The educator responded by saying that the new educator should attend as many workshops as possible. The new educator should give learners

experiencing learning problems simple tasks so that they can experience success and become motivated to work much harder. When these learners had completed a task successfully, the new educator should praise and give rewards to these learners.

The researcher felt that the interview was successful. She hoped that interviewing educator four provided answers to the critical research questions mentioned in the first chapter and repeated in this.

#### 4.8. THINASONKE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Thinasonke Primary School was the third school to be visited by the researcher for fieldwork. The school is situated about a kilometre from Muhle Primary School. These two schools were very close to each other, but the conditions and the context in which they operated were very different.

The purpose of the fieldwork done in the school was to collect data by interviewing and observing two educators. The interviewing technique was preferred because it would allow educators to express their feelings in their own words. Observation was used to confirm what educators said in the interviews.

#### 4.9. GAINING ACCESS

The researcher travelled to the school to ask for permission to conduct the research. The principal was approached and the purpose and the need for the research were explained to the principal. The principal called all grade one educators. She explained to educators the aim of the researcher's visit to the

school. She even explained the need and the purpose of the research to the four educators, all of whom were willing to participate.

The researcher asked the principal to complete the school profile instrument when she had time to do so and she promised that she would give it to the researcher when the latter returned to interview the two selected educators.

#### 4.10. SAMPLE SELECTION

The sample was selected on the day of gaining access. The researcher explained the procedure for sample selection to educators. The principal volunteered to help in the sample selection as she felt that she was clear about random sampling. The procedure for sample selection that was used in the previous school was also followed in this school.

Pieces of paper with names of educators were thrown on the table. Two pieces of paper were chosen and the educators whose names were on the picked pieces of paper were included in the sample. Two of the same pieces of paper were thrown on the table again and one was picked. The educator whose name was on the chosen piece of paper was both interviewed and observed. The dates and time for interviews and observation were set at that time.

#### 4.10. ON THE DAY OF INTERVIEWS

On the day of interviews, the researcher arrived at the school hoping that she would be able to interview educators. The principal, however, told the researcher that grade one educators would not be available and explained that

educators were being appraised on that day. She explained that the decision for appraisal on that day had been taken suddenly for various reasons. It was a Friday, so the researcher asked to see educators the following week. The principal, however, explained that during the following week educators would be busy writing progress reports for learners because the school would be closing for the end of the third quarter. The researcher was denied access to the educators on that day.

There are only three primary schools in Mpopheni Township. The researcher felt that her study would not be complete with only two schools, so she kept on trying to get into the school.

When the school re-opened for the last term, the researcher travelled to the school again to ask for permission to conduct the research. This time the principal told her that educators were already behind with grade one work, and since they were busy catching up with their work, they would not be able to accommodate the researcher.

The researcher felt that studying four educators would not be enough, and tried again. In the third month of the following year (year 2001), the researcher travelled to the school again to ask for permission for the third time. This time, permission was obtained. A new sample had to be selected because educators who were selected for the first sample were no longer teaching grade one.

This explanation should be borne in mind on account of the different results that can be obtained due to differences in the duration of data collection, which can be a source of both internal and external validity problems.



#### 4.11. SELECTION OF THE SAMPLE FOR THE SECOND TIME

In terms of sample selection, the researcher had no choice, but to take the volunteers offered her. Borg and Gall, (1981) state that most educational research places high demands on the subjects. As a result, even if the researcher selects a random sample she or he rarely gets co-operation from all the subjects selected. This explains why the researcher accepted volunteer educators as participants in this school.

Given the problems in gaining access to the educators, volunteer bias was a smaller risk than not having respondents at all. Since this is however, a qualitative study seeking respondents on educators' experiences, issues of validity of data do not invalidate the findings.

The researcher was aware that volunteering might provide bias in the sample because volunteers might differ from non-volunteers. As said earlier in this chapter, volunteers might be educators who are more intelligent or who are hard workers in the school. The sample used in this school might not be representative of the population of that school, but generalisation in terms of the population is not a purpose of this study. It merely acknowledged that the findings are limited to the two cases studied in this school.

The two educators who participated were working in the environment that is described below.

#### 4.12.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL

The information used to describe the school was obtained by using the school profile instrument. This instrument was completed by the H.O.D. as the school principal's delegate. The principal was attending a meeting with the School Governing Body at the time and had not completed it since it was handed to her three months earlier. This represents another limitation of the results from this school.

At the time of the research, the school had four buildings with 21 classrooms which were in a bad condition. Window panes were broken and most of the classrooms had no doors. There were two offices, one for the principal and one for the H.O.D. There was one staff room. One classroom was used as a store room. There was no library or sports field. There was no telephone service, fax machine and typing or duplicating machine. Two classrooms were not used and some furniture was not used because the school had fewer learners than it used to have.

There was electricity in the offices and staff room. There was electricity in the classrooms before but it was then vandalised. There was tap water. On the whole, the school needed major repairs.

There were 417 learners and 15 educators. There were 88 grade one learners with four educators operating in three classrooms. Four of the educators in this school were waiting to be redeployed and one of them was one of the four grade one educators from whom volunteers were taken.

With regard to new curriculum material, the school had 'Literacy', 'Numeracy' and 'Life Skills Programmes' with 'Teachers Guides'. The school had 'Policy Document' for the Foundation Phase.

The school profile instrument provided information that described the environment in which educators taught. This environment had an influence on the way in which educators taught. The findings from this instrument revealed that the school had adequate physical and human resources. Looking at the completed school profile instrument, one could predict that the school was functioning well.

The profile instrument that was used to study the classroom was the classroom resource profile.

#### 4.12.2. INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

The classroom resource profile instrument, described in the methodology chapter, was used to get information to describe the classrooms in which teaching and learning took place. This instrument was completed by the researcher inside the classroom in which observation took place.

There were 25 learners in the classroom. There was adequate sitting and writing space. There was a table and a chair for the educator. There was no cupboard. Windows were broken and there was no door. The wall needed painting. Charts were not displayed on the wall. The classroom was clean, but it was not as attractive, in terms of what was displayed on the wall, as most of the grade one classrooms the researcher had seen.

The classroom resource instrument showed that the classroom was not in a good condition. It was not good for learners to learn in a classroom with broken windows and without a door. The classroom provided sufficient writing and sitting space.

The educator profile form was one of the instruments used in the study. The findings from this instrument are presented below.

#### 4.12.3. EDUCATOR FIVE

Educator profiles were designed to obtain educator's qualifications, their teaching experiences, and the number and quality of workshops attended by the respondent educators. Educator five completed this profile form before she was interviewed.

The findings revealed that educator five was a post level one educator with five years of teaching experience. She started teaching at the present school and she was teaching grade one for the third year. Her highest academic and professional qualifications were Standard 10, and Primary Teaching Diploma (PTD), respectively. At the time of the research, she was studying for a Higher Diploma in Education, had attended four OBE workshops, which she viewed as useful.

Where she was asked to fill in what she thought was missing from the workshops, she mentioned that full explanations of new concepts was missing. She said that facilitators were not able to answer some of the educators' questions. She said that the time spent in workshops was too short to learn all that was needed. She was not able to grasp all the new

concepts used in OBE approach to teaching by attending only a few workshops.

Where she was asked to fill in what she gained from the workshops, she said that she learnt how to divide learners into groups. She also said that she gained knowledge about types of assessment and how to record assessment.

The findings revealed that the educator did not understand the meaning of new concepts used in OBE approach to teaching. She did not say much about what she gained from the workshops, making it difficult to tell whether she understood or not, what she had to implement in her own classroom.

#### 4.12.4. THE INTERVIEW SESSION

The study was conducted by using the qualitative approach to research. The qualitative approach is a form of inquiry that explores phenomena in their natural settings. This was basically the reason why educators were interviewed in their classrooms.

The respondent was assured of confidentiality and it was explain to her that the interview would be tape-recorded. The first question was then asked.

##### 4.12.4.1. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF MIXED ABILITY CLASSES

For the first critical research question, "What do educators understanding by mixed ability classes?", the educator was presented with four definitions of mixed ability classes. She had to choose the definition that came closer to her

understanding of such classes and she was given the opportunity to provide her own definition if she wished to do so. She chose the definition that states that mixed ability classes are classes with dull, average and highly gifted learners learning together.

The educator was asked if she was dealing with a mixed ability class and she responded positively. She was then asked to state the procedure used to assign different learners to different educators. She responded by saying that learners were admitted by the H.O.D. in her school. Educators received lists of learners assigned to each of them from the H.O.D. She said that she understood that the H.O.D. assigned learners to different groups randomly as they registered. She did not understand how that random assignment was done.

To confirm what the educator said during the interview, observation schedules were used. The researcher put a tally in the appropriate space on the observation schedule when there was a learner who completed the task before time set, did not complete a task at all, moved up and down the classroom, read poorly, read and talked fluently, and did every task neatly and correctly.

The observation schedule showed that there were learners who completed tasks before the time set, read and talked fluently, did not completed tasks at all, and those who did everything neatly and correctly. There were two learners who did not even attempt simple tasks.

The educator five's responses alone were not enough to show that she was dealing with a mixed ability class. She did not understand the procedure used

to assign learners to different groups. Using the observation schedule was a good idea in this case. It showed that the educator was dealing with a mixed ability class as there were tallies made next to indicators of mixed ability classes described in the previous sections.

#### 4.12.4.2. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNERS EXPERIENCING LEARNING PROBLEMS

The next critical question researched was, "What do educators understand by learners experiencing learning problems?". The educator was asked if she had learners experiencing learning problems in her class, to which she responded positively. She was then asked to describe the problems her learners experienced.

The educator responded by saying that her learners had spelling problems which were reflected in reversal of syllables when they write. For example, they wrote 'sasu' for 'susa'. Some had hearing problems which were reflected in incorrectly spelt words. She felt that learners did not hear well when words are called out by the educator.

In her response, the educator said that some learners counted sounds when they read such as, 'u-ya-kha-la'. She felt that when sounds in one word were counted the meaning of the word was lost.

The educator said that some learners confused basic operations like multiplication, with addition. Some learners were not able to count from ten upwards.

She said that she had slow learners who did not easily understand what was learnt. These took a long time to complete the given task and were passive in all class activities. She also had learners with physical disabilities which she thought influenced learners' academic performance. She said that there was one learner with epilepsy in her class and one learner showed some signs of mental retardation.

The responses given by educator five showed that she understood the meaning of the term 'learners with learning problems' and that she had such learners in her class.

#### 4.12.4.3. TEACHING ACCORDING TO OBE PRINCIPLES

The next critical question researched was, "What do OBE principles say about teaching in general?" To answer this question the educator was asked what she was doing differently and what has not changed in her teaching since the introduction of curriculum 2005 in 1998 in grade one.

The educator responded by saying that she was dividing learners into groups and taught different activities to different groups. She had changed the sitting plan in the classroom. Before the introduction of curriculum 2005, learners were sitting in rows, but at the time of the research they were sitting in groups. This was also confirmed by the researcher during observation.

The respondent was then prompted to say more about changes in her teaching. She then said that she assessed learners in all they were doing. In assessment she did not look at how much learners know, rather how much



they can do. She said that she used symbols instead of numbers when she wrote assessment records.

She went on saying that she no longer drew a scheme of work. Instead she designed learning programs. She used the 'Policy Document' to design activities that would meet the desired outcomes.

The respondent was also asked to mention what had not changed in her teaching since the introduction of curriculum 2005 in grade one. To this question she responded by saying that she still practised whole class presentation in respect of some activities, and still used textbooks, but rather as a source of knowledge. When she was further prompted, she said that she still taught mathematics in a sequence. She started by teaching learners to count, teaching addition, and subtraction and then both operations combined in that order.

These responses reflected the perception that the respondent educator had started teaching in OBE style. The responses also showed that the educator had not completely abandoned the old approach to teaching.

#### 4.12.4.4. TEACHING MIXED ABILITY CLASSES USING OBE PRINCIPLES

The next critical question researched was, "What does OBE say about teaching mixed ability classes?". To answer this critical research question, the respondent educator was asked to describe the way she taught mixed ability classes using OBE principles.

The educator responded by saying that she divided learners into groups. Each group consisted of members who were learning at the same pace. When she was teaching she asked learners questions that led them to self-discovery. She asked simple and easy questions to learners who struggle to give them the opportunity to experience success. She said that she assessed learners throughout the lesson. This gave her the opportunity to find out how each learner was doing so that she could provide the necessary remedial help.

In her response she said that in her class there were many learners with learning problems. She gave these learners more attention than others, and used flexi-time for extra providing them with help. She said that she gave highly gifted learners more challenging exercises to challenge further their intellectual ability.

The educator said that she gave learners the opportunity to ask questions and she provided individual feedback when it was possible to do so.

The educator's explanation of how she taught showed that she understood the methods of teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principles.

To supplement the educator's responses, the observation schedule was used. As it was done with educators one to four, the researcher put a tick in the appropriate space on the observation schedule, if:

Learners were organised for group work;

Learning was activity based;

The educator integrated learning areas;

The educator provided individual feedback;

The educator asked questions and

Learners asked questions.

The observation schedule showed that learners were organised for group work, learning was activity based, and the educator asked questions. It also showed that learners did not ask questions and individual feedback was given to few learners.

The researcher also observed that the educator was teaching the same activity to all groups. This showed that on some measures, at least, the educator did not understand how to teach different groups using OBE principles.

#### 4.12.4.5. PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY THE EDUCATOR

For the critical research question, “What problems do educators experience when teaching learners experiencing learning problems in mixed ability classes?” the respondent was asked if she experienced problems when teaching learners experiencing learning problems in the mixed ability classes, to which she responded positively. She was also asked if the problems were due to the new approach to teaching or if they were general problems. She responded by saying that most of the problems are due to the new approach to teaching.

##### *General Problems*

The respondent was then asked to explain the problems she experienced. The educator responded by saying that she did not receive classroom assistance either from the Department of Education or the her H.O.D. inside the school. She said that she was supposed to be given help by the H.O.D., but as the

H.O.D. had not attended an OBE workshop at that time, she could not help. She said,

*‘ My H.O.D. is teaching grade four. She has not yet attended an OBE workshop. What she knows about OBE approach is what we, educators, tell her. ’ (Transcript 5. page 5, 2001)*

In her response she said that it was difficult for her to teach learners with disabilities as she was not trained to teach these learners.

### *Problems with the content*

The researcher prompted the educator to speak about problems she experienced when she was dealing with the content. The educator responded to the prompts by saying that when she taught one group of learners, other groups heard what was taught to that group. When it was their turn, they knew better and answered all the questions correctly. This resulted in the slow learners appearing as if they understood while they in fact did not. This was also confirmed by the researcher during observation.

During observation the educator taught one group and this became revision for other groups. The researcher felt that the educator did not understand group teaching. She was supposed to be teaching different activities to different groups, but her problem was confirmed as she explained it.

The educator was further prompted to say more about problems with assignments, assessment, resources and with disciplinary problems.

### *Problems with assignments*

In her response she said that learners with learning problems did not do assignments that were to be done individually and she needed more time to help these learners to do the assignments. She said that some learners did not do the assignments because they did not have the necessary resources.

Parents did not support their children as far as school work was concerned according to her. They did not buy the resources and did not help learners with homework. She said she found it difficult to help learners in areas which can be done by parents.

### *Problems with assessment*

In response to prompts regarding assessment problems, the educator said that it was difficult for her to assess learners with learning problems because they were quiet in class and did not play in the playgrounds. She said that it was difficult for her to assess these learners holistically. As with the other two educators interviewed, she said that writing assessment records is time-consuming. She said that assessment placed too much work on educators, leaving them with little free time.

### *Disciplinary Problems*

The educator said that she did not experience many disciplinary problems because she had few learners in her class. She said that she had normal problems, such as fighting and playing while lessons were still on. Her learners sometimes made noise, but she felt that it was normal for young learners to make noise and this was not a problems to her.

### *Problems with resources*

When responding to prompts regarding problems with resources, the respondent educator said that it was difficult for her to teach in a class without a door and windows and that the problem became worse when it was a cold day.

In her response she said that the school had no books, making it difficult for learners to learn to read. Books for different exercises were not available in the school, and the educator had to design her own exercises for different learning areas and for different learners' abilities, which she found difficult.

She said that the OBE approach to teaching was more successful in schools with photocopying machines. She had more work that needed to be photocopied, but her school did not have a photocopying machine, and the lack of this facility made it difficult for her to make copies of learners' worksheets.

Classroom observation schedules were used to supplement the educator's responses. The researcher put a tick in the appropriate column on the observation schedule if:

the content;  
assignment;  
assessment;  
resources and  
disciplinary problems were noticed.

The classroom observation schedule revealed that all areas had ticks. The area of disciplinary problems had fewer ticks than other areas confirming what the educator had said during the interview about few disciplinary problems. The researcher noticed that there was not even a single book in that class. Learners were reading cards that were hand written.

In terms of clarifying the concept being studied,( problems experienced by educators), interviewing and observing educator five revealed that the respondent educator was aware of the problems she experienced in the classroom, and was also aware of the reasons for these problems.

#### 4.12.4.6. THE INFLUENCE OF THE PROBLEMS ON EDUCATOR'S CLASSROOM PRACTICES

The next critical question researched was, “What influence do the problems have on educators’ classroom practices?”. The respondent was therefore asked about the influence of the problems when she was dealing with content, assignments, assessment, discipline and resources.

The respondent said that lack of understanding from parents led to destruction of the school. Educators cannot leave charts displayed on the wall and books that were supplied by the Department of Education to the school were stolen. Educators cannot make good use of resources available in the school because of the community’s lack of co-operation.

The respondent said that doors and windows were vandalised. It was therefore difficult for her and other educators to teach when learners were shivering because of cold and wind coming through broken window panes.

With regards to assessment, the educator said that she used time for preparing for the next day for assessment recording. That sometimes resulted in her starting the day's work with inadequate preparation.

#### 4.12.4.7. WAYS OF COPING WITH THE PROBLEMS

The next critical research question was , “ How do educators cope with these problems?”. To answer this question the educator was asked how she specifically coped when she was dealing with the content, assignments, assessment, discipline and resources.

The respondent educator said that she used different methods of explaining the content to slow learners. She also asked other learners to explain what was learnt to learners who did not understand.

She further responded by saying that she encouraged parents to do their part in the learning of their children. If there was a problem such as a learner who did not have basic resources, she wrote a letter to the parent asking him or her to buy the resource in question. She said that she took the role of a mother by giving learners pencils and crayons that were supposed to be given to them by their own mothers

With respect to content, the educator said that she encouraged passive learners to take part in activities. She created situations that would interest learners so that they would participate in learning activities.



With respect to problems with resources the educator said that she designed her own reading cards and exchanged these with those of other educators in the same grade. This gave learners the opportunity to read something designed by other educators.

The respondent said that she used her own money to make copies of materials she needed for teaching and learning and her own time to go to town to make copies.

Using interviews to answer the above mentioned critical research question revealed that the respondent educator made sacrifices in order to cope with resources problems. She sacrificed her own money and time in order to help learners.

#### 4.12.4.8. EDUCATOR'S SUGGESTIONS

The last critical research question was; "What suggestions can educators give an educator who has just started teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principles?".

The educator responded by saying that the new educator should work as a team with other educators. If the educator has problems, she may ask for help from other educators in her school or from other schools.

The educator said that the new educator should keep herself or himself informed with new information. She or he should attend as many workshops as possible. In her response, the educator said that the new educator should invite personnel from different departments to help with learners who have

problems. Nurses, social workers and psychologists can give help to schools. The new educator should give learners the opportunity to learn from each other, can be can be done by co-operative learning. She defines co-operative learning as the type of learning where learners help each other.

Despite initial problems, the interview went well. The researcher was confident that interviewing educator five gave answers to the given critical research questions.

It was mentioned at earlier that two educators participated at Thinasonke Primary School. In the next section, data obtained from interviewing educator six are presented.

#### 4.12.5. EDUCATOR SIX

The aim of the study was to find out and explain the problems that are experienced by educators teaching learners experiencing learning problems in mixed ability classes. Foucault, (cited in Goodson, 1992) has been influential in encouraging researchers to retrieve and represent the voices of their subjects. With this encouragement in mind, the researcher felt that interviews were the more suitable research technique for this study.

Educator six was the educator who was only interviewed and not observed at Thinasonke Primary School. The educator started by completing the educator profile form.

This form revealed that, at the time of the study, educator six was a post level one educator with teaching experience of seven years. She had taught grade

one for two years and she started teaching at Thinasonke Primary School. Her highest academic and professional qualifications were standard ten and Higher Diploma in Education (HDE), respectively. She had attended one OBE workshop which she viewed as useful.

The educator profile form asked educators to state what was missing and what they had gained from workshops. The participating educator responded to this by saying that there was no full explanation of how assessment was done. She also said that nothing was said about designing learning materials for different learning abilities.

She said that she learnt how to divide learners into different groups and learnt that learners had to be assessed holistically.

It was mentioned in the methodology chapter that the researcher preferred participants should have taught grade one for two years. The educator profile revealed that educator six was a suitable participant as she had taught grade one for two years. The number of workshops she had attended and what she said was missing from workshops, in other words her full explanation of how assessment was done, makes one suspect that the educator had problems in this area.

After completing the educator profile form, the interview session started.

#### 4.12.6. INTERVIEW SESSION

The educator was interviewed in her classroom after learners were dismissed. The educator's own classroom was seen as her real setting in as far as

teaching was concerned. The educators was reassured of confidentiality and the first critical research question was asked.

#### 4.12.6.1. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF MIXED ABILITY CLASSES

The first critical question researched was, "What do educators understand by mixed ability classes?". To answer this question the educator was given four definitions of mixed ability classes from which she had to choose one definition that came closer to her understanding of mixed ability classes. She was also given the opportunity to provide her own definition if she so wished. Educator six chose the definition stating that mixed ability classes are classes in which dull, average and highly gifted learners are taught in one classroom.

She was then asked if she thought she was dealing with such a class, and she responded positively.

She was then asked to give the procedure used to assign different learners to different educators. She responded by saying that in her school it was the H.O.D. who assigned different learners to different educators. She said that she understood that the H.O.D. wrote a list of learners as they registered and used that list to assign learners to different educators. She said she understood that the assignment of learners to educators was randomly done.

The educator's responses revealed that she understood what is meant by mixed ability classes. What she said however, was not enough for one to positively state that she was dealing with a mixed ability class as she was not

certain about the procedure used to assign different learners to different educators.

#### 4.12.6.2. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNERS EXPERIENCING LEARNING PROBLEMS

The second critical question researched was, "What do educators understand by learners experiencing learning problems?" For this question the educator was asked if she had learners experiencing learning problems in her class and she responded positively. She was then asked to explain the problems her learners had.

The educator responded by saying that most of her learners had problems in language and mathematics. Language problems were reflected in learners reversing syllables when they spelt words, such as, 'thakhe' for 'khetha'. When they read, they omitted or substituted words, such as, 'Thenga uswidi' for 'Thenga amaswidi'.

The respondent said that the most common problem in mathematics was the confusion of basic operations. Most of the learners experiencing this problem confused addition with multiplication, for example,  $2 \times 3 = 5$  for  $2 \times 3 = 6$ . In her response she said that some of her learners experience behavioural problems which were manifested in stealing, bullying and aggression. Some absent themselves from school frequently. The result was that the academic performance of these learners deteriorated.

The educator's responses revealed that the educator understood what was meant by the term 'learners experiencing learning problems'. Findings also revealed that the educator understood her learners and the problems they had.

#### 4.12.6.3. TEACHING ACCORDING TO OBE PRINCIPLES

The next critical research question was, 'What do OBE principles say about teaching in general?'. To answer this question, the educator was asked what she was doing differently in her teaching since the introduction of curriculum 2005. The respondent educator said that the learners were sitting in groups while in the old classes learners used to sit in rows. Other than that, the respondent also made reference to the ways of assessing learners and said that she used continuous or formative assessment and did not only rely on tests and examinations as used to be the case before curriculum 2005 was introduced.

The educator was then asked what had not changed in her teaching since the introduction of curriculum 2005 in grade one in 1998. In her response, the educator indicated that she was still using books as sources of knowledge. She still gave learners tests as part of summative assessment. She said that she still found some methods of traditional teaching useful, like the narrative method, when she taught religious education.

According to the findings, the educator had changed to the new approach to teaching but had not completely abandoned the traditional methods of teaching.

#### 4.12.6.4. TEACHING MIXED ABILITY CLASSES USING OBE PRINCIPLES

The next critical question researched was, “What do OBE principles say about teaching mixed ability classes?”. To answer this question the educator was asked to describe how she taught mixed ability classes using OBE principles.

She responded by saying that she divided learners into groups and taught each group according to the pace of its members. She presented the example that when she was giving words for spelling to one group of learners, another group would be doing sums and a further group would be reading the reading cards. When learners had completed the given tasks, the group which was learning spelling would be doing sums, the group which was reading would be writing spelling and the group which was doing sums would be reading the reading cards. She said that she rotated the tasks until all groups had done each task.

The responses revealed that the educator did not understand how to teach different groups of learners. The example she gave showed that she taught the same activities to all groups of learners, which was not in accordance with OBE principles. The educator did not understand what OBE says about teaching mixed ability classes.

#### 4.12.6.5. PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY EDUCATORS

The critical question that followed ask educators about problems they experience in teaching mixed ability classes. To answer this question the

educator, was asked if she experienced some problems when teaching learners experiencing learning problems in mixed ability classes, to which she responded positively. She was then asked to describe the problems.

### *General Problems*

The educator responded by saying that there were many learners experiencing learning problems in her class. She was finding difficulties in teaching those learners as she was not trained to teach such learners. She said that in her school there was no remedial educator to help her to deal with so many problematic learners. She also said that her H.O.D. had not attended any OBE workshop at that time and therefore could not give her any help.

The educator was prompted to speak about problems she experienced with the content, assignment, resources and disciplinary problems. She responded to the prompts by saying that she had no problems with discipline as she had 20 learners in her classroom.

### *Problems with the content*

With regard to content, the respondent educator said that in the OBE approach to teaching, there is no clear scheme of work that prescribes the content to be taught. She found it difficult to design her own learning programmes and learning activities. It is difficult for her to design learning activities that cater for different learning abilities.

### *Problems with assignments*

With regard to assignments, she said that some learners did not do assignments in the form of homework, and parents did not help their children with homework. Some learners did not do the assignments because they did



not have basic resources like crayons since the stationery packages received by the school from the Department of Education did not contain crayons. Parents did not help by buying these.

#### *Problems with assessment*

With regards to assessment, the respondent said that she did not have many assessment problems because she had few learners in her class. The only problem she had was that assessment recording was time consuming.

#### *Problems with resources*

With regard to resources, the respondent said that the school did not have books, especially readers, which made it difficult for her to give learners reading exercises. The school did not received all new curriculum material and that made it difficult for her to teach without educator's guides for different learning areas.

She said that her problems became worse as the school had no photocopying machine and it was difficult for her to make copies of learners' worksheets .

The educator's responses revealed that the educator had problems even though she had relatively few learners in her class.

#### 4.12.6.6. THE INFLUENCE OF THE PROBLEMS ON EDUCATOR'S CLASSROOM PRACTICES

The next critical research question was, "What influence do the problems have on educators' classroom practices?". For this critical question the

educator was asked to mention the influence of the problems when she was dealing with the content, assessment, assignment, discipline and resources.

The respondent indicated that lack of co-operation from parents delays the teaching and learning process. She spent more time helping learners who did not do their homework and learners experiencing learning problems. This delayed the whole class.

She said that her classroom had no door and had broken window panes and it was difficult for her to teach under such conditions during the cold weather.

The findings based on the above mentioned critical research question revealed that the problems decreased the teaching and learning tempo.

#### 4.12.6.7. WAYS OF COPING WITH THE PROBLEMS

The next critical research question was, “How do educators cope with the problems experienced when teaching learners experiencing learning problems?”.

The respondent indicated that to cope with content problems she works together with other grade one educators. They design learning programmes and learning activities together. With respect to assessment, she said that she used her own time at home to do assessment recording.

With respect to resources, the respondent said that she used self-designed reading cards because the school had no reading books. She sometimes exchanged the reading cards with other educators when she felt that her

learners had gone through all the cards. She said she kept some crayons that she gave to learners who did not have these and she used her own money to make copies of learners' worksheets.

#### 4.12.6.8. EDUCATOR'S SUGGESTIONS

The last critical question researched was, "What suggestions can educators give an educator who has just started teaching mixed ability class using OBE principles?".

The educator responded by saying that the new educator should love children, and should play the role of a mother at school and create the atmosphere of love in the classroom. She also said that the educator should work as a team with other educators.

The interview session went well and the researcher was confident that interviewing educator six at Thinasonke Primary School answered the critical questions.

#### 4.13. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

(a). Time spent in observations was insufficient to draw conclusions about problems experienced by educators in mixed ability classes. After breaks, educators had other commitments, so the researcher had to leave. Perhaps longer time would have provided a chance to collect more information.

(b). Some educators put on a special performance during observation, while learners generally behaved well during observations. They did not make a

noise and they concentrated on what the educator was saying or doing. When it happened that it was noisy, educators asked learners not to make noises in front of a visitor. One educator said to her learners when they were making noise;

*“Why are you making noise now? Didn't I ask you yesterday, not to make noise in the presence of an inspector?” (Transcript 6, pp5. 2001)*

Therefore, generalisations based on the behaviour of learners inside the classrooms are invalid since some respondents put on special performance when they were being observed.

#### 4.14. THE STRENGTHS OF THE APPROACH USED TO COLLECT DATA

Despite the problems outlined above, the findings reveal that the critical research questions were adequately addressed.

Two methods were used to collect data, namely interviews and observation. Observation enabled the researcher to validate what was said by educators during interviews. Educators knew that they would be observed after interviews, so what they said would not deviate from what they actually did. The use of classroom and school profiles helped to give the context within which educators were working.

The researcher felt that semi-structured interviews guided her throughout the interview sessions as questions were directed towards what was needed, resulting in valid data being collected.

Prompts allowed the researcher to dig deep down to get the true picture of what was happening inside the classroom. The researcher dealt with different personality types of respondents, which was difficult and could affect the quality of data collected. Prompts and probes were useful with such respondents.

The researcher feels that it was advantageous to use the tape-recorder. By so doing she was able to concentrate on listening and prompting rather than making notes. She was receptive to non-verbal responses from educators as she had visual contact with respondents. Time was saved since taking notes would have taken longer.

The purpose of this chapter has been to present the findings obtained from the fieldwork done in three primary schools. The research revealed some important issues with regard to teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principles. What these findings mean to the study will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

#### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

This study aimed at discovering and explaining the problems experienced by educators teaching learners experiencing learning problems in mixed ability classes. In this chapter, the results of the study are discussed in the context of relevant literature and the findings of other researchers where possible.

Despite the fact that research has been done on experiences and attitudes of educators who are using OBE in their teaching, not much has been done on explaining the problems they experience in mixed ability classes. In this regard, it may not always be possible to justify and compliment the findings of this study with other findings.

The findings are discussed according to the instruments used to collect data.

#### 5.2. SCHOOL PROFILES

The school profiles were used to obtain information about both physical and human resources available in each school.

Findings obtained by using these instruments revealed that two schools were under-resourced in terms of both physical and human resources, indicating that educators in these two schools experienced problems in their classes. Contradictory findings were obtained from the third school, which had excess educators and unused furniture. Looking at the resources that were

available in this school, one might feel that educators were experiencing fewer problems than the other two schools, but it was not so.

To get more information about what was happening inside the classrooms classroom resources profiles were used. Findings from these instruments are discussed below.

### 5.3. CLASSROOM RESOURCE PROFILE

This instrument was used to obtain information about resources available inside each classroom observed.

Findings revealed that there was inadequate space in the two classrooms of the under-resourced school. There was also inadequate sitting and writing space and the number of learners in each classroom exceeded 60. This was not conducive to an outcomes-based approach, which requires adequate space for effective group work. In the classroom of the third school, there were few learners and adequate sitting and writing space.

Irrespective of different classrooms conditions, all respondents had problems in their classrooms. This shows that problems may be due to both lack of physical resources and insufficient skills on the part of educators.

Other instruments that were used were the educator profiles. Findings from these profiles are discussed below.

#### 5.4. EDUCATOR PROFILES

Educator profiles provided information about the respondents' qualifications, their teaching experience and the number and quality of workshops they attended.

Findings from educator profiles revealed that the respondents' qualifications and teaching experiences were enough to equip them with effective teaching skills. Findings also revealed that some respondents were furthering their studies and they had attended OBE workshops. This was in accordance with Moorosi (2000), who recommends that educators should undergo in-service training to update themselves on current issues in order to be as up-to-date on policies and practices as possible.

Findings also revealed that respondents felt that practical classroom demonstrations were missing from the workshops, and that workshops facilitators themselves were not clear about the OBE approach to teaching as they had no answers for some of the educators' questions. This supported educators' views in Govender (1999), who said that facilitators should workshop educators on OBE practice rather than theory.

The findings discussed in the following section were obtained by the use of both interview and observation schedules.

#### 5.5. INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION SCHEDULES

Interview schedules were used to allow the respondents to mention and explain the problems in their own words. Interview schedules were



supplemented by observation schedules which were used to confirm that what educators said in interviews was really happening inside the classrooms.

#### 5.5.1. EDUCATORS' UNDERSTANDING OF MIXED ABILITY CLASSES

Findings revealed that all respondents understood what mixed ability classes are and that they were indeed teaching such classes. The procedure for assigning different learners to different educators given by educators from the first two schools were random enough to produce mixed ability classes. Educators from the third school were not certain about this procedure because in their school learners were assigned to different educators by the H.O.D.

The procedures for assigning different learners to different educators, as described by the respondents from the first two schools were different from those given by the respondents in Sithole (1992). In Sithole's study educators said that they predetermine the ability of learners by giving them certain tasks to do and tests to write before assigning learners of different abilities to different educators.

#### 5.5.2. EDUCATORS' UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNERS EXPERIENCING LEARNING PROBLEMS

With respect to educators' understanding of learners experiencing learning problems, findings revealed that the respondents understood the term 'learners experiencing learning problems' and that they had such learners in their classes. The problems their learners had included Language,

Mathematics and Behavioural problems as manifestations of learning problems. One respondent mentioned physical disability and respondents from the first school mentioned mental retardation. These problems were the same as those discussed in Du Toit (1997).

### 5.5.3. TEACHING ACCORDING TO OBE PRINCIPLES

According to the findings, the respondents had changed from the traditional style of teaching to OBE style of teaching. They mentioned changes which can be summarised and listed as follows:

Change in sitting plan;

Integration of learning areas;

Practising of formative continuous assessment;

Change from being a content deliverer to being a facilitator of the learning process.

These changes are in lined with principles of OBE.

Findings also revealed that the respondents had not completely abandoned the traditional way of teaching. They said that there were some aspects of the traditional way which they found useful such as introduction of sounds before the whole words the whole word is written. This is against the OBE style of teaching, which supports the introduction of the whole word.

Observation sometimes contradicted what was said by the respondents in the interviews. In the interviews, the respondents said that they gave learners the opportunity to discover facts for themselves. They also said that they were the

facilitators of learning. Observations showed that the respondents, as educators, were still at the centre of the learning process. Discussions in the classrooms were centred around the respondents' questioning, which required closed responses from the learners, and learners asking questions was rarely seen. Govender (1999) also found that educators were still at the centre of the learning process.

#### 5.5.4. TEACHING MIXED ABILITY CLASSES USING OBE PRINCIPLES

Findings revealed that respondents were using OBE principles when teaching mixed ability classes. The respondents said that they gave different learners different activities, and this is in accordance with the OBE principle which says that different learners learn at different times and different paces. In the first two schools, observation confirmed that the respondents were giving different activities to different groups of learners.

In the third school, observation showed that the respondent educator was teaching the same activity to different groups of learners. This showed the respondent was not clear about how to teach different groups using OBE principles. This supported Jansen (1998) and Christie (1999) who have stated that, at the time of their studies, the vast majority of educators were still confused about OBE.

#### 5.5.5. PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY EDUCATORS

Findings revealed that the respondents experienced problems in teaching learners with learning problems in mixed ability classes. Respondents felt

that they did not receive training that will help them to deal with learners experiencing learning problems. They felt that they were not equipped with skills that would allow them to implement curriculum 2005 more effectively than they were doing at the time of the study.

Respondents felt that lack of resources resulted in disciplinary problems, a situation witnessed by the researcher when learners fought for books in one of the schools. Furthermore, findings revealed that lack of resources also resulted in assignments problems which were reflected in learners not doing the given assignments because they had no resources with which to do them.

According to the findings, respondents felt that assessment was time-consuming. They felt that it was impractical for them to assess all learners because of the large number of learners in their classrooms. These findings are consistent with those of Bennie et al (1998), which indicated that educators have insufficient time for assessment and remediation in the classroom.

#### 5.5.6. THE INFLUENCE OF THE PROBLEMS

Findings revealed that different problems had different influences on the respondents' classroom practices. Most of the respondents said that it was the teaching and learning tempo that was mostly influenced by the problems. They said that because of the problems, the highly gifted learners, whose learning pace was fast, were delayed, and this is inconsistent with the OBE principle which says that learners should learn at their own pace.

#### 5.5.7. WAYS OF COPING WITH THE PROBLEMS

According to the findings, different respondents had different ways of coping with the problems. All educators said that they sacrificed their own time. They did school work at their free time at school and do the work at home during the time that they would normally spend with their families. They used their own money to buy resources such as pencils and crayons for learners, and also used their money to make copies of learners' worksheets.

#### 5.5.8. EDUCATORS' SUGGESTIONS

According to the findings educators suggested that a new educator should work as a team with other educators within her or his school and with those from other schools. In the OBE approach to teaching, teamwork which includes educators from other school, is mostly needed, especially in the planning stage.

Findings also revealed that the new educator should love and be sympathetic to her or his learners, especially young learners. This is supported by female educators in Moorosi (2000) where they believed that they belonged in primary schools due to their motherly nature. They put emphasis on love when one is working with young children.

Educators advised the new educator to be a life-long learner to inform himself or herself with new developments in education. This is consistent with the COTEP Norms and Standards for Educators, which says that educators should be life-long learners.

## 5.6. CONCLUSION

The study was successful in providing background information which helped the researcher to understand the problems experienced by educators teaching learners experiencing learning problems in mixed ability classes. Findings have provided a basis for understanding the present situation of some grade one educators, and have also opened the door for further research in mixed ability classes and in the new curriculum. There is additional discussion on further research discussed in the next chapter on recommendations.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

This study was designed with the purpose of understanding and explaining the problems experienced by educators teaching learners experiencing learning problems in mixed ability classes. This purpose was achieved basically by listening to the respondents explaining the problems they experienced in their own classes.

This chapter, therefore, briefly suggests recommendations for policy, practice and for further research.

#### 6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

##### 6.2.1. RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICY

The most important aim of the study was to determine the problems experienced by educators in mixed ability classes. Respondents interviewed were working in different schools under different conditions, but all had problems in their classes. All respondents felt that most of the problems were due to the introduction of curriculum 2005 in 1998. Therefore, this leads to the following recommendation made in this study:

For future policy, educators should be given a chance to contribute to curriculum development so that more practical issues can be addressed. It is obvious that educators are the ones who are more informed about what is

happening inside the classrooms, and therefore, their contribution to curriculum development must be useful. This will also ease the gap between rhetoric (policy-makers' view) and reality (practical implementation of the policy). This recommendation is consistent with that made by Govender (1999), who recommended that policy-makers should listen to the advice given by educators who are frustrated by their working conditions. It is also supported by Pratt (1980), who alleges that the curriculum designers do not know how to implement what they have designed and the maximal involvement of all those having an interest in the curriculum is of cardinal importance.

#### 6.2.2. RECOMMENDATIONS ON PRACTICE

Most respondents said that time spent in workshops was not enough for them to master all skills needed to implement curriculum 2005 more effectively than they were doing. This opinion is supported by Jansen (1997), who argues that policy-makers made flawed assumptions that educators exist to make sense of the new curriculum. Ramphela (1997) also warns policy-makers not to ignore the huge skills gap created by Bantu Education. A recommendation is therefore made that:

Educators should be provided with ongoing in-service training and not just five days workshops. This in-service training should not only focus on theory but also on practical issues of OBE approach, methods of teaching mixed ability classes using this approach.

The respondents also said that they were not trained on teaching learners with learning problems in mixed ability classes. The recommendation is therefore



made that educators should use a variety of teaching styles because learners in mixed ability classes learn at different learning styles. This will give different learners the opportunity to learn within their own learning styles.

According to Fullan and Miles (1992), change is resource hungry. Change demands additional resources for training, skilled educators, new material and new space. A recommendation is therefore made that;

Schools should be adequately resourced to facilitate change. Educators will be more comfortable and more motivated to facilitate learning if they are given the right context. If redress does not become the reality for disadvantaged schools, their learners will continue experiencing learning problems.

The respondents said that they had problems with the content since there is no clear scheme of work that prescribe the content to be taught. According to educators, in mixed ability classes it is difficult to identify different learning content to be taught to learners of different abilities. The recommendation is therefore made that;

The same content may taught to all learners, but for those who experience problems the content should be broken to simpler components that will be easily understandable.

### 6.2.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The introduction of OBE in mixed ability classes is new to all educators in South Africa, therefore, continuous research on it should be done so that

problems encountered inside the classrooms should be addressed. This is supported by Jordaan (1989), who argues that for the curriculum to be successfully implemented problems must be continuously addressed.

This study was conducted in grade one classes, using a small sample. The population of educators teaching mixed ability classes was not fully represented. For further studies, it would be advisable to have a large sample so that there will be more representatives of the population. It would also be beneficial to include educators of other grades who have implemented curriculum 2005 in mixed ability classes.

This study was conducted with educators who were working with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and poorly resourced schools. For further studies it will be advisable to conduct the study with educators working in well-resourced schools in order to find out if they experience similar problems.

There are many other areas requiring further research that are not mentioned in this study, which lays the foundation and points the way for further research.

## 6.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The findings of this study may be useful to educators, trainers of educators, OBE facilitators and policy-makers by making them more cognisant of the skills needed in teaching mixed ability classes. In order to implement curriculum 2005 more effectively than it seems the case at present, the learning environment, which includes educators and the context in which

teaching and learning takes place, needs to be recontextualised so that educators will not be seen as resistors of change.

Thus, educators have a long way to go in order to achieve the aim of the Department of Education which is the full and effective implementation of curriculum 2005 in mixed ability classes. There are still educators who remain unclear about how to teach mixed ability classes using OBE principles. It is sincerely hoped that if suggestions made in this study are implemented, there might be improvements in teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principles.

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## **REPORT FOR THE PILOT STUDY**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, research methods and procedures of data collection are discussed and reviewed. The purpose of this study was to find out problems that educators are faced with when dealing with learners with learning problems in mixed ability classes. In order to do this, self-designed interview and observation schedules were used.

### **2. METHODOLOGY**

In this section, the actual data collection procedures are presented and discussed.

#### **2.1. THE RESEARCH SITE**

The pilot study was conducted at a primary school at Mafakatini rural area which is about 30 km from Howick. This area is about 15 km from Mpophomeni Township where the actual study will be conducted. This school was thought to have similar characteristics to the schools chosen for the study, hence the reason for using it in the pilot study. For example:

There are no resources that promote learners' good performance. There is neither the library nor photocopying or typing machines in the school. In short, the school is under-resourced, just like the schools to be studied.

Most parents were retrenched from SARMCOL Rubber Factory. There is poverty and unemployment in the area. Poverty is a social problem which denies families the ability to provide their children with basic resources needed for studying. Most of learners in this school have learning problems, probably similar to those of learners in the three schools to be studied.

The above description of the school is similar to that of the schools in which the actual study will take place. Data that were obtained from this school are seen as valid, by the researcher, because learning in this school is influenced by factors which are similar to those of the schools of the actual study.

#### **2.2. THE POPULATION**

For the purpose of the pilot study, the population was all grade one educators in this school.

### 2.3. THE SAMPLE

There are four female grade one educators in this primary school. Because of small population, characteristics of grade one educators in this school and gender only one educator was studied. The names of all four grade one educators were written on separate pieces of paper. Pieces of paper with names were thrown on the table and the researcher took one piece of paper. The educator whose name was on the piece of paper was taken.

The educator who formed the sample is teaching grade one in OBE format for the second year. She had attended OBE workshops. The researcher believed that results obtained by studying this educator would be valid as the participating educator has similar characteristics as educators that will participate in the actual study.

### 2.4. GAINING ACCESS

According to Bell, (1969) as cited in King, (1984); " Schools are not open systems, like street corners or discos, with relatively easy access for research purposes, but closed system requiring 'sponsorship' for entry. The researcher obtained permission to conduct the pilot study from the principal, by traveling to the school to talk to the principal. The researcher explained to the principal the purpose and the need for permission to interview an educator in his school. The researcher explained that she is a university student who needs the information for study purposes.

The principal called all four grade one educators and introduced the researcher to them. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to educators as she explained it to the principal. The principal asked the educators to participate voluntarily. To avoid bias, the researcher asked that the participant be randomly selected. This was agreed to and done.

Educators had no problems in participating because they, themselves, are studying at SACOL. They understand that there are times when students have to go to schools to find information and that without the support of other educators, any such studies would not be possible.

### 2.5. DESCRIPTION OF INSTRUMENTS USED

To collect data interview and observation schedules were used. Both schedules were designed on the basis of critical questions. The school, classroom and educator profiles were used to get information that might help during data analysis.

### 2.5.1. THE SCHOOL PROFILE

The school profile was to be completed by the principal or his or her delegate. It was designed to get information about resources available in the school such as buildings, classrooms, furniture, textbooks, new curriculum materials, means of communication and personnel.

### 2.5.2. THE EDUCATOR PROFILE

Educator profile was designed to obtain information about educators' qualifications, teaching experience and OBE workshops attended by educators. It was to be completed by the educator to be interviewed.

### 2.5.3. THE CLASSROOM RESOURCE PROFILE

Classroom resource profile was designed to obtain information about resources available in the classroom, like table for the educator, chair for the educator, desks or tables for learners, cupboard and charts on the wall. It was to be completed by the researcher.

### 2.5.4. THE EDUCATOR INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The educator interview schedule consisted questions which were designed to get answers for each critical question. There were questions which were designed to answer the following critical questions:

- What do educators understand by mixed ability classes?
- What do educators understand by learners with learning problems?
- What does OBE say about teaching in general?
- What does curriculum 2005 says about teaching mixed ability classes?
- What problems do educators experience when teaching learners with learning problems mixed ability classes?
- What influence do these problems have on educators classroom practices, i.e. when they :
  - explain the content
  - assess learners
  - discipline learners
  - give assignments
  - allocate resources?
- How do educators cope with these problems?
- What suggestions can educators give to someone who had just started teaching mixed ability classes by using OBE principles?

### 2.5.5. THE CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

The observation schedule was used to confirm what the educator said in the interview was happening inside the classroom. The observation schedule was designed to observe the following:

- Whether the educator used OBE principles when teaching.
- To find out problems that educators are experiencing when teaching mixed ability classes.
- To judge the influence of the problems on educators classroom practices.
- Whether the educator is teaching a mixed ability class or not.

Indicators of the above mentioned aspects were written down and to be observed by the researcher.

### 2.6. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The school profile was completed by the principal. The educator profile was completed by the educator who was to be interviewed and observed. Classroom resource profile was completed by the researcher before the commencement of the observation session.

The educator was interviewed in the principal's office because the principal decided to keep learners busy while the educator was interviewed. The interview took about twenty minutes. The educator was observed after the interview in her classroom. The observation session took about forty-five minutes.

## 3. PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

Results presented below were obtained from an interview which the researcher conducted with one educator. The educator was also observed while she was teaching.

### 3.1. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF MIXED ABILITY CLASSES

To answer the critical question "What do educators understand by mixed ability classes?" The educator was given four definitions of mixed ability classes and she had to choose the definition that comes closer to her understanding of mixed ability classes. The educator chose the definition that states that "Mixed ability class is class with learners who need different teaching styles and who learn in different styles and at different paces." The educator was also asked to give the procedure that is used to assign learners to different educators. She said that learners were randomly assigned to different educators

by educators who were registering them at the beginning of each year. She said that all names of learners were written down by gender as they register. From the list, first girl went to grade one A, second girl went to grade one B and the third girl went to grade one C. The same was done to boys.

To confirm that the educator is teaching a mixed ability class, observation schedule was used. The researcher put a tall when there was a learner who did the following:

Completed a task before time set.  
Did not complete a task at all.  
Moved up and down in the classroom.  
Read poorly.  
Did not do simple tasks.  
Read and talk fluently.  
Did everything neatly and correctly

The researcher found that there were nine learners who completed the task before time set. Only five learners did not complete task at all. There was only one learner who moved up and down the classroom during lessons. This confirmed that the educator was indeed teaching a mixed ability class. In terms of process of observing, this exercise revealed that time spent by the researcher on observation was short as a result other parts of the observation schedule were not observed.

### 3.2. EDUCATOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNERS WITH LEARNING PROBLEMS

For critical question number two which asks, "What do educators understand by learners with learning problems?", the educator was asked the following questions:

"In your opinion, do you have learners with learning problems in your class?". She responded that she did have learners with learning problems in her class. The next question was, "Using your own classification of mixed ability class, what kind of learning problems do the majority of learners have?" To this question she responded by naming and describing the problems as follows:

Reading and writing problems: Learners count words when they read. They also confuse sounds when they read as well as when they write.

Mathematical problems: Learners have problems with basic operations and with counting. They have problems in writing digits, for example, 4 may be written facing the opposite direction.

Some learners have poor concentration and some are hyper active.

Slow learners: These take too long to understand concepts.

### 3.3. TEACHING ACCORDING TO OBE PRINCIPLES

To answer the critical question, “What does OBE say about teaching in general?”. The educator was asked what she is doing differently as a result of the introduction of curriculum 2005 in grade one in 1998. She responded by mentioning the following changes:

- She is no longer delivering the content, instead she asks questions that will lead learners to self-discovery.
- She is integrating learning areas by practicing theme teaching.
- She no longer uses the syllabus. She is using illustrative learning programs that suggest activities of some specific outcomes.
- She is dividing learners into groups and gives different learning activities to different groups.

This means that she is using OBE principles when she is teaching.

She was asked what has not changed to her teaching since the introduction of curriculum 2005. She responded as follows:

- She still uses textbooks as sources of knowledge.
- She still uses tests, but now as part of assessment tools.
- She still gives whole class presentation when some lessons.
- She is still the authoritative figure in the class.

This means that she had not completely abandoned the old methods of teaching, she took some to the new approach to teaching.

To answer the critical, “What does curriculum 2005 say about teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principles?”, the educator was asked to describe how she teaches using OBE principles.

She responded by saying that she divides learners into groups and gives them different learning activities. She gave an example on reading. Learners who are on the same chapter of a reader are placed in one group. When the educator feels that the learner is now able to read that chapter, he or she is moved to the group which is in the next chapter. She said that she uses flextime to help learners with learning problems and she gives enrichment exercises to fast learners. She assesses learners to determine whether learners had achieved a specific outcome.

To supplement the educator’s own responses an observation schedule was used by the researcher. The researcher ticked yes or no if the following happened or not in the class.

- Learners organized for group work.
- Learning is activity based.
- Educator integrates learning areas.
- Educator provides individual feedback.
- Educator asks questions.
- Learners ask questions.

It was confirmed that the educator is teaching using OBE principles.

### 3.4. PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY EDUCATORS

To answer the critical question “What problems do educators experience when dealing with learners with learning problems in mixed ability classes?” the following questions were asked:

“ Are there any problems that you encounter when teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principle? (please explain).”

“ Are these general problems or they are due to the new approach to teaching? ( please explain)”.

The educator responded that there are problems encountered and most of the problems are due to the new approach to teaching. Below are the problems that were mentioned and explained by the educator. The researcher grouped these problems around certain themes.

#### 3.4.1. GENERAL PROBLEMS

The educator responded by saying that she and other educators are not well trained to teach in OBE format. OBE workshops took one week, which was too short for educators to understand all the work they are required to do in their classrooms.

She said that she is not trained to teach learners with special needs. In the old education system, these learners were taught in special schools by special educators. Because of inclusive education, these learners are in ordinary classes as it is in her class. She said that she is experiencing p[problems in teaching these learners. The problem becomes worse since the introduction of curriculum 2005.

She also responded by saying that individual teaching is impossible to her class because the class is too big to use this approach. She has seventy two learners in her class.



### 3.4.2. PROBLEMS WITH THE CONTENT

The educator responded by mentioning the following content problems:

She feels that OBE principles puts more emphasis on assessment as a result, she spend more time on assessment and little time is spent on explaining the content.

She experiences problems when she links the new knowledge with learners' existing knowledge. She gave the example on introducing sounds. The whole word is written down, for example, when introducing a Zulu sound 'h', words like 'hamba, ihashi' may be written down. This is confusing to learners as 'mb and sh' sounds are unknown to learners. So this gives her problems.

To develop her own activities that are directed to specific outcomes whose activities are not suggested by illustrative learning programs is difficult. She is required to develop these activities because there is no syllabus that prescribes what has to be done. She said that her problem becomes worse when she has to design different activities for different groups of learners since her class consist of mixed abilities.

### 3.4.3. PROBLEMS WITH ASSIGNMENTS

In her response , she said that most of the problems encountered with assignments are due to lack of resources. Learners do not have enough crayons and pencils and there are no old magazines that are required at home. This hinders the educator from giving assignments as suggested in the illustrative learning programs. She mentioned that assignments given in the form of homework are not done by learners. Parents do not help their children to do homework as a result the next day the educator has to start by helping those who did not do homework before proceeding to that day's work This delays the whole class.

### 3.4.4. ASSESSMENT PROBLEMS

The educator said that it is time-consuming to develop and evaluate alternative assessment forms if one form did not work.

To assess different skills and different areas of knowledge places more work on the educator.

### 3.4.5. DISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS

The educator said that her class is very big. She said she has nine groups which consist of eight learners each. When she is helping one group, the other group mess around and play. This creates the atmosphere of chaos.

When she gives activities that require learners to move around, learners take the opportunity to play and make disorder. All these are different from the way things used to be before the introduction of 2005.

#### 3.4.6. PROBLEMS WITH RESOURCES

She said there is shortage of textbooks and it becomes difficult for her to handle groups of learners who share few books. When she has to make copies of learning materials she had to pay from her pocket because the school has no photocopying machine and there are no sufficient funds to use for this purpose.

She said that she experiences problems when designing teaching and learning materials. It becomes more difficult when she has to design materials for different groups of learners with different learning abilities.

She said she has little space to move from group to group because the classroom is very small in size.

To confirm the types of problems experienced by the educator as indicated by her in the interview, the following was observed and a tally was made if the problem occurred.

- Content problems
- Disciplinary problems
- Assessment problems
- Assignment problems
- Problems with resources.

The areas that had most tallies were disciplinary problems and problems when giving assignments. Assessment and content problems were not observed by the researcher because the time spent on observation was short.

#### 3.5. INFLUENCE OF THE PROBLEMS ON EDUCATORS' CLASSROOM PRACTICES

The next critical question was "What influence do the problems have on educator's classroom practices?". This was answered by the educator as she was explaining the problems that she encounters when teaching by using OBE principles. In her explanation she mentioned the influence of the problems. For example, when she was explaining that learners do not have enough crayons and pencils, she mentioned that she becomes unable to give assignments that are suggested in the illustrative learning programs. That is why the researcher grouped the problems around certain themes.

### 3.6. WAYS OF COPING WITH THE PROBLEMS

To find out how the educator copes with the problems, the following question were asked:

“ How do you specifically cope when you are dealing with:

Content

Assignments

Assessment

Discipline

Resources ?”

She responded by saying that she is coping with content in the following ways:

She uses simple examples and the examples are taken from learners’ everyday experiences.

She asks questions that lead learners to self-discovery.

To the example of introducing sounds she made in problems, she concentrates on a particular sound and ignores other sounds.

To cope with assignments , she said that she encourages parents to help their children with homework. She called the parents to school and explained the importance of homework to them. Message books are given to children for parents to sign when the homework has been done.

To cope with assignment problems, she responded by saying that assessment instruments are designed by grade one educators as a team.

She said she is coping with disciplinary problems by practicing cooperative learning whereby learners help each other in the group while the educator is busy with one group. She gives enrichment exercises to fast learners.

She mentioned that she is coping with resources by working as a team with other educators. She also asks parents to buy things needed for learners to learn.

### 4. OVERVIEW OF THE PILOT STUDY

The pilot study was successfully conducted. Access was easily obtained. The permission to conduct the pilot study in the school was given by the principal. Educators who formed the population were willing to participate although only one was studied.

#### 4.1. FINDINGS

From the educator's responses, the researcher found that most of the problems experienced by the educator are due to the introduction of curriculum 2005 in 1998 as underpinned by OBE approach. The educator said that educators were not ready to teach using OBE principles because they were not adequately trained. Workshops that were conducted on OBE were insufficient. Time given to workshops was limited. A week's time was not enough for educators to master all the changes they had to implement.

From the study the researcher learnt that were not ready to receive curriculum 2005 at the time it was introduced and they are not ready even now. Schools lack resources that suit teaching in OBE approach. OBE approach needs classrooms that have space for group work and larger space for learners to interact with each other. Classrooms are overcrowded. Overcrowding leads to disciplinary problems.

#### 4.2. HOW THE INSTRUMENT WORKED

The instrument worked well. Valid information needed was obtained by using it.

##### 4.3.1. THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

To answer critical question on educators' understanding of mixed ability classes, the educator was given four definitions of mixed ability classes she had to choose from. This limited her choice and prevented her from giving her own understanding of the concept of mixed ability classes. In the actual study, educators will be given an opportunity to give their own definitions if they feel so.

Questions from the interview schedule were understandable to the respondent. To get more information, follow up questions were asked by the researcher. Questions like "Can you expand on that? , Is that all?" were asked. This format will be used in the main study to prompt, elicit and elaborate responses.

Sub-questions of one question were answered simultaneously. For example, the questions

"Are there any problems that you encounter when teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principles?"

"If yes explain these problems."

These questions were addressed in the same way. Since this is an interview guide, the researcher will keep sub-questions for own guidance in the main study.

There was redundancy in some questions. In questions where the educator was asked to explain problems she experiences in teaching mixed ability classes and when she was asked to explain the influence of the problems on her classroom practices, the same responses were given by the educator. The educator explained problems and explained the influence at the same time. The questions on the influence of the problems will be kept for guidance in the main study. This will help to minimize the time on the interview. In this way, the interview will end before the educator becomes bored.

#### 4.2.2. CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

The instrument worked well. The problem was that time spent in the classroom observation was short. Forty-five minutes was spent on observation. At first the researcher thought that forty-five minutes would be enough, but at the end it was not. Most of the problems were not seen. In the actual study the whole day will be spent on observation to see many aspects of classroom interaction in a mixed ability class.

#### 5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Only one educator was interviewed. The results obtained apply to this one educator and may not be generalized to others although it is assumed that valid data will be collected since this educator's characteristics are similar to those to be studied in the main study.

Time spent on observation was short to discover all the problems that may occur in the classroom. As indicated above, this will be rectified by the researcher by spending a whole day with each educator.

#### 6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the researcher is confident that the pilot study provided useful information to improve the instruments as well as testing the feasibility of the whole study.

## APENDIX A

### SCHOOL PROFILE

This profile will be completed by the principal or his or her delegate.

1. Name of the school : (optional)-----
2. EMIS number : -----
3. Classification of the school : (tick in the appropriate box)

3.1.	Lower Primary School
3.2.	Combined Primary School

#### 4. POSITION OF THE SCHOOL

- 4.1. Physical position : -----
- 4.2. Geographical position : -----

#### 5. LOCATION OF THE SCHOOL

- 5.1. Province : -----
- 5.2. Region : -----
- 5.3. District : -----
- 5.4. Circuit : -----

6. Language of instruction : -----

7. Please complete the following with regard to buildings in the school and state the condition of each.

	ITEM	NO.	CONDITION
7.1.	Buildings		
7.2.	Classrooms		
7.3.	Toilets		
7.4.	Shelters		
7.5.	Offices		
7.6.	Staff-rooms		
7.7.	Store rooms		
7.8.	Sports fields		
7.9.	Library		

8. Does the school have the following items? If yes, what is the condition of each?

	ITEM	YES	NO.	CONDITION
8.1.	Telephone			
8.2.	Fax machine			
8.3.	Photocopier			
8.4.	Typing machine			
8.5.	Duplicating machine			

9. Please complete the following with regard to furniture available in the school.  
(please tick)

	ITEM	FOR EDUCATORS	FOR LEARNERS	COMMENTS
9.1.	Tables			
9.2.	Chairs			
9.3.	Cupboards			
9.4.	Benches			
9.5.	Desks			

10. Does the school have adequate?

	ITEM	YES	NO	CONDITION
10.1.	Books			
10.2.	Dusters			
10.3.	Chalk			
10.4.	Stationery			

11.1. Does the school have water? .....

11.2. Does the school have classroom water? .....

11.3. Does the school have electricity? .....

11.4. Does the school have classroom electricity? .....

12. Rate the general conditions of the school. ( please tick in the appropriate box)

12.1.	Not suitable for learning	
12.2.	Needs major repairs	
12.3.	Needs painting	
12.4.	Needs minor repairs	
12.5.	Good condition	
12.6.	Excellent condition	

13. Complete the following with respect to personnel in the school.

13.1. No. of learners .....

13.2. No. of educators .....

13.3. No. of non-educator staff .....

14. Please complete the following with regard to Grade one.

14.1.No. of Grade one learners -----

14.2. No. of Grade one educators -----

14.3. No. of Grade one classrooms -----

15. Which of the new curriculum materials does the school has? ( please tick what the school has)

15.1. Policy document for the Foundation Phase -----

15.2. Literacy Programs with Teachers' Guides -----

15.3. Literacy Programs without Teachers' Guides -----

15.4. Numeracy Programs with Teachers' Guides -----

15.5. Numeracy Programs without Teachers' Guides -----

15.6. Life Skills Programs with Teachers' Guides -----

15.7. Life Skills Programs without Teachers' Guides -----

15.8. Illustrative learning Packages -----

15.9. Stationery Packages -----



## APPENDIX B

### EDUCATOR PROFILE

This profile form will be completed by the educator who will be interviewed.

1. Name of the educator : ( optional)-----
2. Position at school : -----
3. Sex : -----

#### 4. TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 4.1. No. of years as an educator :-----
- 4.2. No. of years in this school : -----
- 4.3. No of years teaching grade one : -----

#### 5. QUALIFICATIONS

- 5.1. Academic qualifications :-----  
:-----
- 5.2. Professional qualifications : -----  
:-----
- 5.3. Presently studying :-----  
:-----

#### 6. OBE WORKSHOP ATTENDED

- 6.1. No. of OBE workshops attended :-----
  - 6.2. Generally, did you find workshops useful? :-----
  - 6.3. Are there certain things missing in the workshops?: -----  
If yes, name a few:-----  
:-----  
:-----
  - 6.4. What had you learnt from the workshops :-----  
:-----  
:-----  
:-----
  - 6.5. What can you suggest to workshop planners:-----  
:-----  
:-----  
:-----
-

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

The aim of the study is to explain the problems experienced by educators teaching learners with learning problems in mixed ability classes. I, as a researcher am interested in the question of whether educators are teaching mixed ability classes and whether they have learners with learning problems in their classes. I am also interested in knowing whether educators are teaching using mixed ability classes using OBE principles, what problems do educators experience in these classes, what influence does the problems have on educators' classroom practices and how do educators cope with the problems. My interest is also on educators' suggestions to an educator who has just started teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principles.

In short, I would like educators to talk about their experiences in mixed ability classes. It will be educators' views that will count. There are certainly no right or wrong answers to the questions. I am aware of the fact that, using OBE principles when educators are teaching is difficult especially because OBE approach to teaching is new to them.

The interview will be recorded on an audio tape and recorded tapes will be transcribed later for the presentation of the findings. Names of individuals and of schools will be not used in the presentation.

#### 1. EDUCATORS' UNDERSTANDING OF MIXED ABILITY CLASSES

1.1. Which of the following definitions of mixed ability classes comes closer to your understanding of such classes? You are also free to give your own definition.

1.1.1. Learners from different achievement levels in the same room.

1.1.2. Gifted learners, average learners and dull learners taught in one classroom.

1.1.3. Learners who need different teaching styles and learn at different styles are placed and taught in one classroom.

1.2. Do you think you are teaching a mixed ability class?

If yes, please explain the procedure you used to assign different learners to different educators.

## 2. EDUCATORS' UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNERS WITH LEARNING PROBLEMS

- 2.1. In your experience, do you have learners with learning problems in your class?
- 2.2. Using your classification of mixed ability classes, What kind of problems do the majority of your learners have?
- 2.3. Please describe these problems.

## 3. TEACHING ACCORDING TO OBE PRINCIPLES

- 3.1. In 1998 the government's directive was that educators teaching the foundation phase should teach using OBE principles.
  - 3.1.1. What are you doing differently as a result of the introduction of curriculum 2005 in grade one in 1998?
  - 3.1.2. What has not changed in your teaching since the introduction of curriculum 2005 in grade one in 1998?
  - 3.1.3. Please describe how do you teach generally using OBE principles?
  - 3.1.4. Please describe how do you teach mixed ability classes using these principles?
- 3.2. Are there any problems that you encounter when you teach using OBE principles?  
Please explain these problems.
- 3.3. Are these general problems or they are due to the new approach to teaching?  
(explain)

## 4. THE INFLUENCE OF THE PROBLEMS

You said there are problems in teaching mixed ability classes using OBE principles. Are these problems the same when you are dealing with the following? (please explain)

- 4.1. Explain the content;
- 4.2. Give assignments;
- 4.3. Assess learners;
- 4.4. Discipline learners;
- 4.5. Allocate resources.

## 5. WAYS OF COPING WITH THE PROBLEMS

Most educators find teaching mixed ability classes difficult, you said, you also find it difficult. How do you specifically cope when you are dealing with:

- 5.1. Content explanation;
- 5.2. Assignments;
- 5.3. Assessment of learners;
- 5.4. Discipline

### 5.5. Teaching resources.

6. What suggestions can you give that might help somebody who has just started teaching a mixed ability class using OBE principles?
7. Is there anything that is not clear to you and you feel it needs clarification from me?

## APPENDIX C

### CLASSROOM RESOURCE PROFILE

The researcher will complete this profile form at the beginning of the observation session. She will indicate how she describes the classroom being observed.

1. Are the following items available in the classroom?

	ITEM	YES	NO	COMMENTS
1.1.	Adequate sitting space for learners			
1.2.	Adequate writing space			
1.3.	Adequate space for movement between desks			
1.4.	Charts displayed on the wall			
1.5.	Table for the educator			
1.6.	Chalkboard and chalk			
1.7.	Duster			
1.8.	Lockable cupboard			
1.9.	Adequate roofing			
1.10.	Adequate light			
2.	Is the wall painted			
3.	Are the windows available and in a reasonable condition			
4.	Is the classroom clean and pleasant for any one to be there			

3. The following will be completed with respect to mixed ability classes.

		YES	NO	COMMENTS
3.1.	Are there any learners who;			
3.1.1	Complete tasks before hand;			
3.1.2	Do not complete a task at all;			
3.1.3	Move up and down the classroom;			
3.1.4	Read poorly;			
3.1.5	Read and talk fluently;			
3.1.6	Cannot do simple tasks;			
3.1.7	Do every task neatly and correctly.			
3.2.	Does the educator do the following?			
3.2.1	Give different learning activities to different groups			
3.2.2	Give more challenging exercises to some learners			
3.2.3	Give different readers to different learners			