

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**Teachers Teaching Multi-grade Classes in a Rural Setting**

**By**

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Masters in Education (Professional Development and Higher Education), in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal (Durban - Edgewood)**

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**February 2011**

## DECLARATION

I, **Thandazile Iris Ngubane**, declare that this dissertation is my own work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged.

It is being submitted for the Degree of Masters in Education, Professional Development and Higher Education at University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank God Almighty for the blessing and strength to go through with the successful completion of my study.

Furthermore I would also like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the following people:

My husband, Sithembiso for his support, understanding and for being there for me all the way to fulfill my dream.

My supervisor, Prof LabbyRamrathan, for his continual encouragement, support, guidance and motivation.

My family, especially my mom Ma Hlongwa, my three daughters Londy, Sihle and Mpume and my son Siphosethu for their patience, encouragement and support.

My friends and colleagues who supported and motivated me all the way.

KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education for granting me permission to undertake research in a school under their supervision.

The participants who sacrificed their time when I conducted fieldwork.

## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CREATE	Consortium for Research on Education, Access, Transition and Equity
DoE	Department of Education
EFA	Education for All
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MMTTC	Malcolm Moffat Teachers Training College
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
SGB	School Governing Body
TVM	Teacher Visitation Model
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations
CMGE	Centre for Multi-grade Education
PTC	Primary Teachers Certificate

## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to explore the experiences of teaching foundation phase multi-grade classes in rural settings. I am interested in understanding how teachers teach multi-grade classes so that I am able to make sense of the challenges and opportunities that they encounter. This is a qualitative case study and is guided by the interpretive paradigm. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants.

I collected data by using qualitative research methods including interviews and observations. Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and interpreted through an open coding process. Data was synthesised and resulted in the formulation of five themes.

The findings show that teachers were faced with challenges which include lack of proper training, insufficient support from stakeholders, no workshops organised for multi-grade teachers, lack of resources at school which makes teaching and learning difficult, conditions of the school and the community that are not conducive to effective teaching and learning.

Recommendations include that multi-grade teachers need to receive ongoing support from stakeholders. They also need to be given pre- and in-service training so that they are aware of strategies they can use to overcome challenges that they encounter when teaching. The Department of Education needs to provide relevant support for the benefit of the learners and the community.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the study**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The topic of my study is ‘Teachers teaching multi-grade classes in rural settings’. Using the case study method, I explored the experiences of teachers who teach multi-grade classes. This chapter provides the background of the study; describes the background of the school where I conducted the study and the rationale for the study. The focus and the purpose of the study are outlined. I also present the research questions that guide the study and provide an overview of the study. The research methodology is provided. I conclude by outlining the structure of the research report.

### **1.2 Background of the study**

Multi-grade teaching is a worldwide phenomenon. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states that every child has the right to basic education and that every parent has the responsibility of ensuring that their children get education. This right has immense benefits but carries with it some challenges. The challenges include availability of classrooms, availability of adequately trained teachers and availability of resources to promote this agenda. Many developing countries have introduced multi-grade teaching as a way of managing these challenges.

In South Africa, multi-grade teaching largely happen in rural contexts where there are fewer learners spread across a wide geographical region. This brings about challenges with regards to providing an adequate number of teachers and classrooms to provide grade wise teaching. Hence multi-grade appears to be a norm in rural schools. The focus of this study is the experiences of teachers who teach multi-grade classes in rural schools with regard to challenges that they face and how they overcome such challenges. This could provide a better understanding of how best I and other teachers can utilise strategies of teaching multi-grade classes.

### **1.3 Background of the school targeted for the study**

I conducted this research in a primary school that is situated on the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal, at Mthwalume near Hibberdene. The nearest city is Port Shepstone and is about 50 km

from the school. The school is in a deep rural area and is under the leadership of Inkosi, the chief.

One teacher who knows the history of the area and that of the school confirmed that there were no schools in the surrounding areas and learners had to walk long distances and sometimes cross rivers when going to schools. Members of the community realised that there was a need for children to go to schools near home. This led to Inkosi and the community coming together to build the school. One member of the community donated land where the school was built and the school was thus named after him.

The staff compliment is three teachers including the school principal. The enrolment is about fifty five learners. The school has foundation phase and grade four. There are only two classrooms and two pit toilets that are made of timber. The toilets do not look safe or strong. There is no office, staffroom, storeroom or library.

#### **1.4 Rationale**

I am a primary school teacher and teach in a rural area. Multi-grade teaching appears to be a norm in such contexts. Understanding multi-grade teaching has largely been through experiences of teaching in such settings. This experiential understanding of multi-grade teaching is insufficient as it limits our current outcomes of learners' achievements. A deeper theoretical understanding through research will provide new insight into multi-grade teaching. Therefore this study will allow me to gain deeper insight into the phenomenon of multi-grade teaching so that it may enhance my teaching abilities in this rural context.

Teachers who teach in multi-grade classrooms may not necessarily have been trained as multi-grade teachers as there are currently no formal teaching training programs in South Africa that develop such competencies. Hence this study aims to look at ways that could help in enriching pedagogical practice in multi-grade classes. I also want to understand challenges that attribute and opportunities that teachers encounter when planning, teaching and assessing learners in multi-grade classes. This study will also inform all stakeholders on strategies that can be used to implement multi-grade teaching effectively in rural schools.

### **1.5 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of teachers teaching multi-grade classes in rural settings. The experiences of teachers will include the challenges and opportunities that teachers are confronted with when teaching multi-grade classes. An example of a multi-grade class is when one teacher teaches grade one, two and/or three in one classroom simultaneously.

### **1.6 Critical questions**

My study is guided by the following critical questions:

1. How do teachers teach in multi-grade classrooms in the rural context?
2. What challenges and opportunities do teachers experience when teaching multi-grade classes in rural settings?
3. What school structures and processes support multi-grade teaching in rural settings?

### **1.7 Overview of the study**

This study explores the experiences, perceptions and the pedagogical practise of teachers who teach primary school multi-grade classes in rural contexts and the challenges and opportunities that they may have. My rationale for conducting this study is to gain deeper insight into the phenomenon of multi-grade teaching so that my own teaching abilities can be developed and enhanced. This will help in deepening my understanding of theoretical underpinnings guiding multi-grade teaching in rural settings since I also teach in such contexts.

Theories and different methodological approaches to multi-grade teaching from a variety of literature have been studied. Most literature highlights that multi-grade teaching in rural areas is found to be the solution to provide viable opportunities to achieve Millennium Development Goals that stresses Education for All by 2015 (Jordaan & Joubert, 2007; Little, 2004). Multi-grade teachers need ongoing support for this to be achieved.

My study is guided by qualitative research methodology. I adopted a qualitative research approach because my intention is to understand experiences of teachers in multi-grade contexts using their own original voices. Data that is produced will be descriptive and not numerical or statistical as is the case with a quantitative approach. Paradigmatic orientation of this study is

interpretive. Multi-grade teachers have their own philosophies, understandings and practices, of which my role is to understand these practices and attach relevant meaning to them.

The research is a case study of a primary school which provides multi-grade classes in foundation phase. Purposeful sampling of three female teachers who teach multi-grade classes in foundation phase was used. Data was generated through in-depth interviews and observation. Audio-tape was used to record interview with the participants for later retrieval.

I configured and reconstructed data produced by the participants so that relevant and important data were retained for analysis. Recorded data were analysed using codes, categories and themes whilst developing the chronology of experiences of each participant. Triangulation and member checks were used to ensure research rigor and trustworthiness.

### **1.8 Research methodology**

I used qualitative research methodology in this study. Qualitative research refers to the type of inquiry in which the researcher carries out research about people's experiences, in natural settings, using a variety of techniques such as interviews and observations (Chilisa & Preece, 2005:142).

Given this context the study is framed within interpretive paradigm. Interpretivists try to understand social action on the level of the meaning that the people attach to it (Agger, 2006:30). The purpose of interpretive research is to understand people's experiences. Denzin and Lincoln (2003:33) assert that interpretive research is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) argue that the interpretive paradigm strives to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors.

The research is a case study of teachers' experiences regarding multi-grade teaching in rural settings. Maree (2007) asserts that a case study helps the researcher to come to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the situation. Similarly, Henning (2004) maintains that a case study is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of situations and meaning for those involved. The case in this study is teachers who teach foundation phase multi-grade classes in a primary school in the Port Shepstone district.

Purposeful sampling guides the selection of participants of the study. Bless and Achola (1990) assert that purposeful sampling is the strategy of selecting participants that are judged to be typical of the population under investigation. Participants in my study are teachers who teach multi-grade classes.

Interviews and observation were used to gather information from participants. Cohen et al. (2007) define an interview as a flexible tool of collecting data which enables multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken or heard. Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. The reason for using semi-structured interviews is that they allow the researcher to probe initial responses of participants, and participants are free to express their answers as they wish (Bless & Achola, 1990). Audio-tapes were used to record data, which were then transcribed.

I also observed teachers while they were teaching. The reason for classroom observations was to gain a deeper understanding and more clarity on how teachers interact with learners, teaching methods and methods of assessment that they use.

Data analysis began as the data collection process started and at the end of the study (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). This helped inform me about emerging themes, patterns, and issues that needed probing, and questions that needed to be asked. Data were organised for easy retrieval; coding and categorising were used for the breaking down of themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

## **1.9 Brief overview of the report**

Chapter One – This chapter introduces the background and rationale for the study, and a brief overview of the methodology used in the study.

Chapter Two – In this chapter I provide the literature reviewed relevant to the study. I have looked at international and local/ South African literature based on the topic for my study.

Chapter Three – This chapter presents the research design and methodology used in the study. The guiding structures, logistics and planning mechanism of the research are described in detail including relevant aspects of validity, reliability and ethical considerations. A theoretical/ conceptual framework has been dealt with in this chapter.

Chapter Four – This chapter presents the data related to my research question and analysed findings. A brief description of the school targeted for my study, and the community it serves has been given. I included the actual words spoken by my participants as part of the data I selected.

Chapter Five – In this chapter, suggestions and recommendations are presented. I discuss the significant problems and issues that are highlighted by the research. I offer possible solutions as a prelude to giving my final conclusions and recommendations

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews literature available in the field of multi-grade teaching in schools in rural settings. In particular, this chapter aims to review literature related to the experiences of teachers teaching in multi-grade classes, and the challenges and opportunities they encounter when teaching in such contexts. Most of the informative research studies are done internationally and little research exists in the South African context (e.g. Jordaan & Joubert, 2007), with KwaZulu-Natal province being no exception. The reason is that in the South African context, multi-grade teaching is less acknowledged by the Department of Education (DoE) and the government (Jordaan & Joubert, 2007).

Multi-grade schools or classes usually occur in rural, underdeveloped areas. The underdevelopment in rural settings is ascribed to the reason that there is a lack of motivation by the government to provide services to rural communities as compared to urban communities for expansion of schools, insufficient educational resources and lack of motivation of teachers who teach in multi-grade schools/classes in rural areas (Emerging Voices, 2005).

The following is an account of literature about multi-grade teaching at both international and national (South African) level. I focus on the theory that guides the different reviewed literature and the different methodological approaches that are used to produce data. Findings from other literature, both national and international are used to compare and inform those of my study.

### **2.2 Definition of terms**

Distilling from the literature on multi-grade teaching, the definitions, meanings and terminology vary across time and context. Terms like ‘multi-aged’, ‘multi-level’, ‘composite class’, ‘family class’, ‘vertical group’ and ‘multi-class’ (Juvane, 2005; Kadivor, 2005; Little, 1995), have been used to describe what essentially is a teacher simultaneously teaching a group of learners that are at different grade levels.

Multi-grade teaching refers to the teaching in which one teacher instructs learners of different ages, grades and abilities at the same time (Juvane, 2005). It also refers to a class that comprises

of two or more grade levels and one teacher is given responsibility to teach these classes (Mulryan-Kayne, 2006). Multi-grade is distinguished from mono-grade or single-grade teaching in which learners within the same grade or class are assumed to be more similar in terms of age and ability (Little, 1995).

In rural schools within South Africa, and more especially farm schools, multi-grade teaching could involve a teacher teaching across five grades in a single class (Little, 2001). Family schools are becoming an increasing choice of education for parents, especially in relation to cost and safety, and in this kind of schooling, a teacher is employed by the family to educate their children who are at different grade levels (Birch & Lally, 1995).

### **2.3 Organising patterns of multi-grade teaching**

Studies conducted by different researchers globally have revealed that most countries have a common pattern of organization of multi-grade classes which is two grade combinations; however, there are those who have a combination of three or more in one classroom (Miller, 1991b). In these countries, individual teachers may have 30 or more learners of three or four grades combined.

### **2.4 Rationale for multi-grade teaching**

According to Berry (2001), there are a number of reasons for the existence of multi-grade schools/classes in rural settings:

- Multi-grade is often associated with ‘small’ schools in remote rural and sparsely populated areas. In such schools there may be one, two or three teachers yet they offer a complete cycle. If a cycle consists of eight grade levels, each teacher has to teach combined classes.
- In some countries it is a response to uneven learner enrolment.
- Where there are high rates of teacher absenteeism, multi-grade teaching is a solution to avoid having some classes unattended. A single teacher has to teach two combined grades.

Kadivor (2005) asserts that reasons for multi-grade classes/schools' existence is either philosophical or administrative reasons:

- A philosophical reason is that learners benefit from the range and diversity possible with multi-age grouping which reflects a deliberate and systematic mixing of learners of different ages as desirable and beneficial to learners.
- An administrative reason is more common and mundane in all countries. Classes are combined simply because there are not enough learners to form a single grade or due to school isolation.

Research conducted by Brown (2009), as well as the Consortium for Research on Education, Access, Transitions and Equity (Create, 2008) revealed that multi-grade teaching is a response to host new necessities including unpredictable number in annual enrolment among new learners in some schools in rural settings, teacher shortages which may be the result of migration, re-deployment, teacher rationalism or lower entrants to teacher education programs. Teacher absenteeism due to ill-health may result in multi-grade teaching in some of the schools (Department of Education, 2005a).

UNESCO (2003) contends that multi-grade classes are smaller and can be established more cheaply than complete schools and they can be a means of providing more relevant schooling to learners and hence potentially reduce dropouts.

CMGE (2010) maintains that there are a set of goals, i.e. Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to be achieved by teachers targeted for the year 2015 that stresses Education for All (EFA 2015). Most of these goals are located in the remotest region of the world, in the poorest countries, where small populations and tight budgets mean that the ratio of one teacher to one grade is generally unobtainable. He further asserts that multi-grade teaching in these rural areas is found to be the solution to provide a viable opportunity to help achieve EFA goals. He noted that multi-grade schools play an important role in providing access to EFA in many parts of the world, in both industrialised and developing countries. In developing countries, multi-grade teaching represents the poorest and least resourced schools.

According to Juvane (2005), the traditional mode of teaching in schools and classroom settings has remained the dominant way of organizing formal learning. Classes are organised into one grade and one teacher is responsible for teaching in each grade. However, in rural areas and sparsely populated communities, socio-economic factors have changed that traditional way of organizing schooling into separate classes and teachers. Juvane (2005) maintains that multi-grade teaching offers a genuine and workable alternative to traditional modes of teaching as it caters for the needs of teachers and learners in rural settings.

In the South African context, multi-grade teaching arises through need rather than choice as compared to other countries in the world (CMGE, 2010). Multi-grade teaching is a response to host the new necessity including the unpredictable number in annual enrolment among new learners in some schools, teacher shortages which might be due to out-migration or teacher shortages especially in hard to reach places with small school enrolments. It also assists regions to be able to achieve Millennium Developmental Goals (MDG) as set by the Department of Education, redeploy teachers, and address the problem of absenteeism due to ill-health (Department of Education, 2007).

According to Juvane (2005), most South African regions are affected by the shortage of teachers which might be caused by teacher migration to seek better jobs with good salaries. It is reported in literature that there may be few or no incentives for teachers who teach in multi-grade schools/classes in rural disadvantaged areas.

Multi-grade teaching may be a deliberate response to educational problems (Berry, 2001). In the South African context, the set-up of schooling from the foundation phase is that learners of the same age are grouped together and taught by one teacher in one class, which is known as a mono-grade/single-grade classroom. Due to the problems in rural and sparsely populated areas, it is by necessity and not by choice to have classes of learners of mixed ages and different levels grouped together and taught by one teacher in a class. However, in many African countries a major rationale for multi-grade teaching is its potential to increase access to the full cycle of primary education in areas where it is currently not available.

## **2.5 Factors influencing the need for multi-grade teaching**

There are several factors influencing multi-grade classrooms/schools in rural settings. These include historical factors, political factors, philosophical factors/educational philosophies, demographic factors, topographical factors and poverty (Birch & Lally, 1995).

### *2.5.1 Historical factors*

Multi-grade teaching is not a new or recent innovation to any country in the region (Jordaan and Joubert, 2007) It has existed for a number of years. It has been the approach in religious schools for centuries, particularly Islamic (Birch & Lally, 1995). In other countries including South Africa, multi-grade teaching has almost a century old tradition primary education (UNESCO, 2003). In countries like Scotland, multi-grade education work well because of the commitment of the state to it. This is contrary to countries like South Africa where multi-grade education is an alternative for learners in poor rural areas where there is lack of resources, funding from the state and insufficient support.

### *2.5.2 Political factors*

There is evidently a lack of political interest in multi-grade teaching and in the rural world; South Africa is no exception (Jordaan & Joubert, 2007). Rural people tend to have no political voice, as when there is competition for limited resources they lose (UNESCO, 2003). In many rural areas in different countries, poverty continues to put large numbers of learners at risk of school failure. Usually illiteracy coincides with poverty and hunger (Emerging Voices, 2005).

Multi-grade education is as much a political consideration as other forms of education (Birch & Lally, 1995). Multi-grade teaching is also of importance in the political dimension as it provides people with the opportunity of participating more successfully in the communities and countries in which they live. It has been seen as a liberating force in terms of enabling communities and individuals to escape from poverty and illiteracy in most countries in the world (UNESCO, 2003)

### *2.5.3 Educational philosophies*

The arrangement of schooling from the foundation phase usually is that learners of the same age are grouped together and taught in one class by one teacher at the same time, and that is a mono- or single-grade classroom. On the other hand, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa in itself mandates to make education accessible to every child irrespective of age, gender, class and race. Thus multi-grade teaching has been a solution, as it allows mixed age, abilities and different levels of learners to be grouped together in one class (Berry, 2001).

The philosophy of teaching has been considered in the literature as important in multi-grade teaching. Different roles are ascribed to teachers in the multi-grade teaching context as compared to single-grade classrooms/schools. These roles include the ability of developing lesson plans for different grades, using a variety of teaching methods and assessment strategies and multi-tasking (Birch & Lally, 1995). Researchers have argued that the professional teacher is a key resource person in the multi-grade context (Little, 2004). The view that any teacher trained in single-grade level teaching could be automatically expected to be a multi-grade teacher is discounted (Little, 2004; UNESCO, 2003).

In the field of learning, two aspects have emerged to be considered (Little, 2004):

- The acknowledgement that learning is not only formal but informal as well. Multi-grade teachers need to recognise and utilise it in their teaching situations.
- The recognition of the competitive-co-operative continuum in which learning takes place.

The notion of the whole child as being of particular importance for multi-grade teaching has been reinforced (Birch & Lally, 1995). They further argue that in developing countries, multi-grade teaching provides excellent opportunities for the needs and expectations of the individual child, and be recognized and addressed. This addresses health, education and welfare needs of children in the social and community context in which they live. It is important for multi-grade teaching to be treated as a special form of education, requiring support particularly from community and government.

#### *2.5.4 Demographic factors*

In South Africa, growth in population has signified schooling to be multi-grade schools/classes as a means to meeting the pressures of education for all. Multi-grade teaching is utilised most often to meet the demands of large numbers of learners or where there is a deficit in the supply of teachers (Birch and Lally, 1995). The formal limitation on class size or limited supply of teachers leads to the necessity of operating multi-grade classes/schools. The literature has revealed that in countries like Pakistan and India, multi-grade has been used in different ways with mobile populations. In the former, the teacher travels with the community; and in the latter the teacher is residentially stable and serves communities as they pass (UNESCO, 2003). Minority populations are also often targeted with multi-grade teaching as the appropriate form of schooling particularly when their situation is affected by factors that include poverty, illiteracy and others (Little, 2001).

#### *2.5.5 Topographical factors*

In many countries, it has been found that multi-grade teaching is pursued in disadvantaged situations due to topographical factors. Topographical factors may include water in the case of island countries (UNESCO, 2003), far distances or desert regions. In some of the areas, poor communication or lack thereof serves to emphasise isolation. Such isolation may result in delays in receiving messages from stakeholders, the unwillingness of teachers to accept such hardship appointments, their inability to exchange ideas, to share problems and participate in in-service courses if available. Lack of communication has benefits and burdens (UNESCO, 2005):

- Benefit: One benefit as mentioned in the literature is the protection against the interference and adulteration from outside sources and influences.
- Burden: One burden is that suffered by the centre, which is unable, even if willing, to promote multi-grade teaching by way of in-service courses, school inspection, and the provision of resources and relevant curriculum materials.

#### *2.5.6 Poverty/economic considerations*

Jordaan and Joubert (2007) have maintained that poverty has put large numbers of learners at risk of school failure. They further argue that illiteracy also coincides with poverty and hunger in rural areas where most multi-grade schools/classes are found. According to Birch & Lally

(1995), poverty in rural areas has attributes such as hunger, inadequate shelter, little or no healthcare. There is also powerlessness in social, cultural, and political terms.

There is mass migration/urbanization of people from rural areas to cities and townships in many regions in South Africa. Loubser (2005) reports that the perception of life in urban centres and the slow rate of development in rural areas are the reasons for urbanization worldwide, thus leaving the rural areas with small populations. This results in schools having a class of two or more grades combined and taught by one teacher.

## **2.6 Strategies of teaching in multi-grade classes**

A study conducted by Miller (1991a) reveals that schools have different ways of organizing and teaching multi-grade classes. He has found that in some schools in lower level classes, teachers organised instruction around key concepts that could be introduced to all learners and then individualized to different levels in the class. For example, the teacher explains his lesson to everyone (all levels group) at the same time. The young ones/the other group is given worksheets to do and giving instruction to follow when completing the task. The teacher continues to give instruction to the other group on the same concept but at a more advanced level than the first group and follows the task of the second group.

In other schools, teachers use two phase approach to group instruction (Miller, 1991a). In the first phase, they introduce a concept to the entire class, across all grade levels. Teachers argue that it allows for cross-grade interaction with the concurrent benefit of younger learners learning from older ones as they participate equally in thinking, answering posed questions, reading, brainstorming, and so on. It is also a more efficient use of the teacher's time.

In the second phase, teachers have learners engaged in closed task activities at their respective level. Special events like holidays, field trips and activities that do not require strict grouping were organised around total class participation. Teachers argue that this allows each and every member of the group to contribute and share equally. They learn to be responsible and self-directed, able to work independently, able to provide help to others and also receive help from others when required.

Birch and Lally (1995) have identified some teaching and learning strategies in multi-grade teaching that are best described as methods, techniques or devices used to enhance teaching to facilitate learning. The strategies discussed include the grouping of learners, team teaching, peer teaching, and innovative teaching, as well as community involvement for multi-grade teaching to be effective.

### *2.6.1 Grouping of learners*

Multi-grade teaching can be based on grade teaching and also on subject teaching. Based on this technique, a single teacher handles more than one class and teaches all the subjects throughout the whole day. This may be the result of the small number of classrooms in a school, fewer enrolled learners per year or fewer staff. The teacher may group learners either on the basis of classes, age, sex, or ability. Sometimes the teacher may create mixed groups. It has been argued that mixed grouping may remove shame and hesitation among learners (Miller, 1991a).

If the number of classrooms is sufficient, teachers can arrange different groups in separate classrooms; however one teacher will have to teach both groups all subjects, which is not an easy task. There has to be a monitor or group leader for each class. While the teacher is working with the one group, the monitor takes care of the other group. Exercise based activities are encouraged.

The subject teaching technique has been pointed out to better serve the needs of multi-grade teaching. The reason is that it is understood that teachers may not be experts in all subjects. They may have better knowledge of a specific subject. Using this technique, more than one class is kept together and learners are taught by different subject teachers.

Multi-grade teaching by grouping learners can be based on learners' abilities per particular subject, which may be multi-aged grouping. Example is that multi-aged with brighter younger learners being grouped according to their ability with older learners. In this case the teacher needs to be skillful in such a way that he/she at appropriate intervals re-arranges the groups according to the regular progress, or completion of tasks.

### *2.6.2 Team teaching*

Another approach/strategy in multi-grade teaching is when two or three normal sized grade classes are brought together with their two or three teachers to form one large group (Miller, 1991 a). After such a combination, the ability and social grouping techniques are applied with these teachers acting as a team. Each teacher takes responsibility for more of the work in his/her subjects. Learners have the chance to be influenced by different teachers rather than just one teacher. Teachers also have opportunities to learn from each other.

### *2.6.3 Peer teaching*

Peer teaching is defined in literature as ‘each one teach one’ where learner help one another to complete a given task. Two learners work together as a team. Birch and Lally (1995) asserts that this is the form of teaching which is often neglected by teachers. It is assumed that in peer teaching learners may learn better from their peers than from formal teaching. Peer teaching also enables older learners to reinforce their own learning. Teachers may be assisted by senior learners in marking work and supervising classes. This technique is seen as one which can encourage learners to compete and surpass one another.

### *2.6.4 Innovative teaching*

In many parts of the world, a number of innovative approaches have been developed in both developing and industrialised countries. There are technical and technological innovations that were developed in countries like Indonesia, Pakistan, Australia, Philippines and China. Multi-grade teaching has placed responsibility on teachers for innovative approaches to meet the needs of special classes of learners, especially those with learning problems (Birch and Lally, 1995).

Case studies had been conducted in different schools in these countries for the researchers to have a clear understanding of the innovative approaches they use in multi-grade teaching processes. Findings are as follows:

- In Indonesia they have developed a ‘Teacher Visitation Model’ (TVM) in which the teacher has to go to the learner rather than the traditional approach of learners coming to school where the teacher is located. This strategy involves teachers visiting groups of learners living far from schools where teachers conduct classes and supervise learning.

In the attempt to eradicate illiteracy, to reduce the drop-out rate and accomplish the goal of compulsory education, they developed three different stages in the multi-grade teaching approach.

The first stage aimed to overcome the shortage of teachers to in-populous areas, the second stage was to overcome the shortage of teachers in remote areas and difficult contexts, and the last stage attempted to give education to a small number of learners in those remote places where establishing a school, even a small one, was not viable. In all three stages, they invited community participation in the teaching process, monitoring, and organization of learning material and activities.

- In Pakistan itinerant teachers take on the task of following people and providing a form of multi-grade teaching for them.
- In Australia, they have developed a form of schooling which they named ‘School of the Air’. Australians developed this to ensure that schooling is also provided to isolated or itinerant families who have no possibility of having their children attend school.
- In Philippines, they produced mobile schools for the children of parents who do not settle permanently in one area of the country. Teachers follow those learners who belong to such a disadvantaged group and teach them where they are.
- In China, they have developed a form of schooling which they named ‘School on Horseback’. This kind of schooling is brought to an itinerant people whose livelihood is raising horses and sheep. The principle is that the teachers live with and teach these nomadic people as they follow their accustomed routines.

## **2.7 Contextual issues related to multi-grade teaching in countries in rural settings**

In this section I provide an account of the literature on multi-grade teachers’ work in terms of contextual realities that these teachers face in classroom practice and their professional status. Studies conducted by researchers internationally and in the South African context have revealed that multi-grade teachers face many challenges regarding teaching in multi-grade classes, which may include curriculum challenges, professional training and resources in schools.

Juana cited in Jordaan & Joubert, (2007) argues that on a global scale there seems to exist very little interest in multi-grade education. He further argues that in the South African context, multi-grade education is seen as an inexpensive form of education. Multi-grade schools are regarded as second rate schools, schools that parents would not like their children to go to.

There is a gap between multi-grade reality, teacher education and curriculum assumption (Little, 1995). He reports that multi-grade teaching is probably more common than departments care to realise and admit. Any school with more grades than teachers has to organize multi-grade teaching. Yet few Ministries of Education, few curriculum development agencies and few Teacher Education Institutions recognise this reality. The knowledge required to work effectively within it appears not to be transmitted via textbook on curriculum and teaching methods, via syllabi, via teachers guides nor via the content and pedagogy of teacher training colleges or universities (Little, 2004). Thus there is a need for all stakeholders to recognise multi-grade teaching as real and plan for it accordingly.

### *2.7.1 Curriculum challenges*

It has been revealed in the literature that most countries have nationally prescribed curricula which are almost the same for primary schools in both urban and rural areas (Birch & Lally, 1995; Juvane, 2005). The curriculum usually consists of a list of minimum learning competencies stated in terms of behavioural objectives which the teacher is expected to achieve with each grade level within a particular limit of time. Since the learning competencies are normally specifically designed for mono-grade schools, the multi-grade teachers find it difficult to make the content meaningful to learners. According to Birch and Lally (1995), the designed curriculum lacks relevance and is dysfunctional when applied to the socio-economic needs and cultural lifestyles of multi-grade teaching and their communities.

Studies conducted in international countries like Australia, China, Bangladesh and Nepal (UNESCO, 2003) confirmed that:

- Primary curriculum documents and their associated lists of ‘minimum learning competences’ have not been specifically designed for multi-grade teaching in schools/classes.

- School plans, instructional material and methodological guidelines are difficult to apply to multi-grade teaching situations.
- There is a shortage of support material for the teachers and individualised instructional materials for the learners.

According to Beukes (2006), teachers who teach in multi-grade classes are faced with greater demands of delivering two different curricula to learners of twice the age range in the same amount of time, factors which make these two structures drastically different. He further argues that these two curricula that are part and parcel of these classes require more preparation, more grouped instruction, and more teaching time.

UNESCO (2003) has suggested that the curriculum has to be flexible given the nature of multi-grade teaching. The greatest difficulty in promoting multi-grade teaching is the inflexibility of grade-based curriculum. Teachers are required to cover all the material for one full year for the learners enrolled in that year. In other countries the requirement is that the primary or the elementary school syllabus be covered over the total years of primary schooling, leaving the teachers the option as to when certain material will be covered. Provided all aspects of the curriculum are eventually covered, the order is not regarded as important.

In South Africa the common approach of teaching the curriculum in schools/classes is for the teacher to teach each grade group separately, a kind of quasi-single-grade arrangement, in which the teacher is hop-scotching between the grade groups (Brown, 2009). However, it has been revealed in some schools, more especially in rural areas, that teachers have to adjust single-grade curriculum for multi-grade teaching classes since there may be no relevant curriculum for multi-grade classes. The primary school curriculum needs broadening (Campbell, 1993) and teachers need support and guidance (Brown, 2009). Multi-grade teachers may need assistance in planning for different grades, as successful planning enables teachers to provide a coherent, relevant and engaging curriculum that promotes continuity in learners' teaching (Johnston, Halocha & Chater, 2007).

In the South African context, there is a challenge for academics, policy makers and curriculum developers to identify relevant and common policies for specifically multi-grade schooling so that multi-grade teaching is effective and teachers are supported towards its effectiveness. There is a great need for curriculum and program modification so that it reflects the culture of local community and the needs of the learners within the demands created by multi-grade organization. The curriculum needs to be restructured so that it is community-based. The environment in which the community lives, the history and culture, and the utilisation of skilled people in the community for improving the quality of education, should be emphasised (Miller, 1991b).

It has been noted in the literature that the four walls of the classroom and the long periods demanded by programmes in different countries including South Africa, somewhat inhibit and restrict the child's activities (Miller, 1991a). Outdoor activities should be encouraged and experiences outside classrooms should be regarded as a point of departure in the curriculum. It must always be remembered that children learn best from what they encounter in their immediate environment, hence learning is from known to unknown (Johnston, Halocha & Chater, 2007).

### *2.7.2 Challenges regarding professional status of teachers for multi-grade teaching*

It has been highlighted in the literature that there are some countries that have developed training courses/modules for multi-grade teaching teachers, for pre- or in-service training. Some countries have also made arrangements for preparing and supporting multi-grade teachers (Juvane, 2005). He further contends that this seems not to be an effective way of creating a supportive environment for teachers and learners. Since multi-grade is likely to be a permanent feature of most education systems, it is important that efforts are made to strengthen it through teacher training as well as full support from the government.

Although many teachers work in multi-grade teaching situations, few countries have developed special teacher training curricula for pre- or in-service training. Teaching practice during pre-service is invariable, carried out in mono-grade schools. Birch & Lally (1995) reported that:

- In Vietnam, teacher training modules for multi-grade teachers have been developed for use in teacher education institutions. Textbook for learners have also been prepared.

Assessment material for the use of teachers in evaluating learners have also been designed and in common with prepared material. Multi-grade teaching aids and learning aids are provided. The kits provided are very supportive and encourage non-directive, independent learning.

- In Nepal, the Curriculum Development Centre gives training to teachers on material development. In-service and teacher training have been conducted which includes the use of multi-grade teacher material.

Little (1995) has reported that in Zambia in-service training courses in multi-grade teaching were developed and mounted by the Malcolm Moffat College (MMTTC). This college was a designated institution for the formal in- and pre-service training for multi-grade teachers.

In the Caribbean, four manuals that give specific guidance for multi-grade teachers were developed. These manuals were prepared by different authors but generally the focus is on training packages for multi-grade teachers. These manuals cover features such as classroom management technique, instructional strategies, planning from curriculum, instructional materials and school and community relations. It directs multi-grade teachers on how to involve communities in the life of the school. It is argued that the teacher should be trained in approaches that help to develop relations between the school and the community (Berry, 2001).

Many South African teachers are not trained during initial teacher education to teach in a multi-grade class (Brown, 2009), and in-service training in higher education does not include multi-grade teaching as a curriculum topic. There is a need for teachers to improve their knowledge regarding multi-grade teaching. Teachers should be skilled to handle combined grades (Juvane, 2005). Teacher training institutions will need to retrain teachers to adapt multi-grade teaching in classrooms. At national level, policy decisions will be required to incorporate multi-grade teaching in pre- and in-service teacher programs and consider the use of multi-grade techniques.

A study conducted by Jordaan and Joubert (2007) revealed that initial training on multi-grade teaching does not exist in the South African context. However, new developments have been made regarding courses for multi-grade teaching teachers. These are short courses accredited

with 40 credits on multi-grade teaching, an Advanced Certificate in multi-grade teaching which was started in 2004, and in 2008 an M.Ed. in Rural Education was offered to teachers. There are also students studying towards their doctoral degree focusing on Rural Education/Multi-grade Education. All these studies are offered by Cape Peninsula University of Technology. In South Africa there are nine provinces but only one province has shown interest in multi-grade teaching by establishing these new courses to help multi-grade teachers. Each province has its own rural areas and multi-grade schools/classes seemingly appear in all provinces, thus it would be beneficial if each province develops its own strategy to help multi-grade teachers within the province.

Some studies show that exposure to training in multi-grade teaching is able to influence teachers to feel positive about teaching in multi-grade contexts (Little, 2004). As a result, teachers in multi-grade classes should receive specialised training for effective education in multi-grade schools/classes.

For multi-grade teaching to be successful, researchers have pointed out that universal primary education in rural areas can only be achieved by multi-grade education. In order to address this issue, it is of utmost importance to begin by training the officials that will be spear-heading rural education development initiatives, as well as the teachers who are responsible for the actual education of the learners (Jordaan & Joubert, 2007).

### *2.7.3 Challenges regarding resources*

The multi-grade strategy requires a good allocation of resources for effective multi-grade teaching and learning. Emerging Voices (2005) and CMGE (2010) argue that the unavailability of resources (human and material) in schools in rural settings is a major problem.

There may be a shortage of teachers which leads to teachers combining two or more grades in one class and being taught by one teacher. It can also be material resources like books, teaching and learning aids for multi-grade classes, proper buildings (classes), facilities like electricity, clean water and others. This is true in most of the provinces in South Africa and KwaZulu-Natal is no exception. From the framework of social critical theory, Emerging Voices (2005) and Jordaan and Joubert (2007) confirm that rural people have limited political voices, so when there is competition for limited resources, they tend to lose and remain disadvantaged.

Juvane (2005) argues that the design, reproduction and distribution of large quantities of self-study materials to support individual, peer, and small group learning is essential. He further argues that effective implementation of multi-grade teaching requires establishment of mechanisms for regular supervision, monitoring, and support at regional/district level, teacher and classroom level. It requires support structures in place and definition of minimum standards a learner has to achieve. Parents and community have to be involved in the provision of facilities in multi-grade teaching.

## **2.8 Teachers' attitudes towards teaching multi-grade classes**

In this section teacher attitudes towards multi-grade teaching will be discussed and compared with attitudes of multi-grade teachers in developed countries. The reason for such comparison is to establish attitudes that could help implementation of multi-grade teaching in other areas. Studies conducted show that teachers attitudes towards multi-grade teaching in the South African context is somewhat negative (Brown, 2009; Forbes, 2006; CMGE, 2010). Teachers may not have the confidence to teach multi-grade classes as they have not been prepared for teaching in such contexts. There is a dominant view that multi-grade classes are a poor substitute for single-grade classes. This is true in many schools in rural settings. Forbes (2006) argues that there is a difference in attitudes towards multi-grade teaching classes in developing countries as compared to industrialised countries. In the first world or industrialised countries, multi-grade teachers are trained and supported for effective classroom practice, thus they have confidence in teaching multi-grade classes and their attitudes are positive.

Kadivor (2005) argues that most teachers have negative attitudes towards multi-grade teaching and they prefer working with single-grade classes because of the following reasons:

- Teaching multi-grade is more challenging; teachers need to be able to design open-ended divergent learning experiences accessible to learners functioning at different levels.
- They must know when and how to use homogenous and heterogeneous groupings and how to design a co-operative group task.

- They must be proficient in assessing, evaluating and recording learners' progress using portfolios and anecdotal reports, positive group interaction and to teach social skills and independent learning skills.
- They may be not well prepared/trained towards multi-grade contexts.

Birch and Lally (1995) argue that multi-grade teachers are faced with particular deprivations in terms of their personal and professional status which include the following:

- There is usually no financial incentive for teachers to take positions in isolated multi-grade teaching situations.
- There are no promotional incentives tied to multi-grade teaching positions, and, indeed, such appointments may be detrimental to promotional opportunities.
- Many national systems have inadequate provision for the supervision of multi-grade teaching teachers and their inspection to the disadvantage of the system in terms of improving the quality of its education and to teacher in terms of promotion and the like.

## **2.9 Opportunities for teachers teaching in multi-grade schools/classes in rural settings**

Miller (1991a) highlights some of the advantages and opportunities for teachers who teach in multi-grade schools/classes. One advantage is that multi-grade is usually small size classes/grades, which compensates for many instructional difficulties. Furthermore, age-wise heterogeneous groups are natural bodies where the members educate each other. The older learners in combined grades may function as instructors to the younger ones.

## **2.10 Teacher education and multi-grade teaching**

In most teacher education programmes, all teachers are provided with the same courses without a specific support for multi-grade teaching (Birch & Lally, 1995). Furthermore, in-service training, if provided, is often poor quality with inadequate support and follow-up available to teachers. According to Mulryan-Kayne (2006), problems that have been identified in relation to the quality of teacher education are that not all graduates that emerge from teacher education programmes become great teachers, and critiques of teaching quality blame teacher education programmes for poor teaching performance.

Korthagen (2001 cited in Mulryan-Kayne, 2006) challenges what he calls the technical-rationality model for teacher education and the consequent separation of theory and practice. He argues for a model of teacher education that integrates theory and practice and that focuses on preparing good teachers who understand themselves as teachers, rather than teachers who ‘know’ a lot about teaching. He accepts that it is impossible to prepare teachers for every eventuality in the classroom. Therefore, teachers need not just technical competence in teaching but both ‘starting competence and growth competence’.

Teacher education programmes have to educate teachers to be flexible and adaptable problem-solvers who can adapt to different settings and circumstances, and accommodate change and development within the context in which they teach. Howly and Strom (1987) argue that teachers need to become reflective decision-makers who have the mental tools that they require to become and remain adaptive, questioning, critical, inventive and self-reviewing.

Mulryan-Kayne (2006) asserts that teachers need to be professional, competent and creative individuals who are flexible and adaptable as well as informed and skilled. Thus teacher education programmes need to reflect that fact. He further suggests that when designing and implementing teacher education policies and programmes, cognisance needs to be taken of different contexts and settings in which teaching takes place. Preparing teachers to deal with a diversity of learner characteristics and needs in various contexts, including in large and small classes, in same grade or multi-grade settings, in disadvantaged or more advantaged settings, is a tall order for teacher education. Encountering such diversity is likely to be part of experiences for in most of teachers in the course of their teaching careers.

It is unlikely that any initial teacher education programme will succeed in preparing teachers for all the eventualities that may occur in the course of teaching (Good & Brophy, 2003). They further argue that it is also unlikely that initial education can provide teachers with all the skills and competences that they need to function effectively in more specialised teaching contexts throughout their teaching life. Thus quality ongoing teacher education and support is needed to enable teachers to deal with these specific situations and to ensure that potential of multi-grade teaching is realised. Good and Brophy (2003) further maintain that it is important that teachers

are treated in a professional way, both in the context of their education, and in the context of their support and their work. Multi-grade teachers need ongoing support in those areas which are specific to them.

## **2.11 Conclusion**

The literature is limited in pointing out structures/processes that support multi-grade classroom practice in the South African context. The literature does not point out the opportunities teachers teaching in multi-grade schools/classes may have in South African contexts. There is also limited research that has been conducted in KwaZulu-Natal province concerning multi-grade education.

However, multi-grade classes/schools do exist in rural areas in this province. Seemingly little support, if available, has been given to multi-grade teachers in rural areas in the province. As yet, multi-grade schools/classes seem not to be recognised fully by the government and the Department of Education as compared to single-grade schools/classes. Teachers in multi-grade schools/classes need to be motivated and supported for effective teaching in multi-grade classes.

It has been shown that in developed countries, multi-grade teaching has improved rural education and is seen as the only way to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015. I suggest that is important for the Department of Education, multi-grade teachers and principals, and the community to be well trained and be continuously supported to handle multi-grade classes effectively in KwaZulu-Natal since these classes or schools are available and will continue to exist in this province. The Department of Education should consider incentives like rural allowances, specifically for multi-grade teachers, to motivate them to love and continue working in challenging rural contexts.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The topic of my study is ‘Teachers teaching multi-grade classes in rural settings’. My rationale for conducting this study is to explore experiences and perceptions of teachers who teach in multi-grade contexts, challenges and opportunities that they may experience. This will help me to be well equipped with more knowledge and understanding of day-to-day practices in multi-grade classes and deepen my understanding of theoretical underpinnings guiding multi-grade teaching.

This chapter unpacks the research design and methodology that I used to understand multi-grade teaching in schools in rural settings. I provide the approach, paradigmatic orientation which I use to contextualise the study, methodology, sample selection, explain the site, population and type of instruments employed to generate the data, analysis, validity and reliability issues has been discussed and ethical considerations. I have also discussed reasons for choosing to conduct my study using a qualitative research approach and the research methods that I used. Limitations and advantages of research methods are discussed so as to sharpen my understanding of when and how to use each method. The theoretical framework that is used to understand the study is provided.

### **3.2 Qualitative approach**

This study is guided by qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research refers to a type of inquiry in which the researcher carries out research about people’s experiences, in natural settings, using a variety of techniques such as interviews and observations, and report findings mainly in words rather than statistics (Chilisa & Preece, 2005: 142). I chose to use a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach because I wanted to get verbal accounts of the experiences of teachers who teach multi-grade classes. Contrary to qualitative research, quantitative approaches are experimental, correlational, numerical and statistical. Denzin and Lincoln (2003:13) argue that qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry.

Creswell (2007) indicates that qualitative research is a type of educational research that relies on views of participants, asks broad, general questions, collects data consisting largely of words or text from participants, describes and analyses these words for themes and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner. Furthermore, Leedy (2005) asserts that qualitative research serves one or more purposes which include description and interpretation. Description is about revealing the nature of certain situations, processes, relationships or people. Interpretation enables the researcher to gain new insight about a particular phenomenon, discover problems that exist within the phenomenon and develop new concepts or theoretical perspectives about the phenomenon. She continues to argue that qualitative researchers focus on phenomena that occur in natural settings i.e. real world. This study is a naturalistic enquiry (Chilisa & Preece, 2005) because it will take place in a multi-grade school where the experiences of multi-grade teaching occur.

Henning (2004) confirms that qualitative studies are conducted in settings that are bounded by theme. She further states that in a qualitative inquiry the researcher wants to understand and explain an argument by using evidence from literature as well as the data collected on what the phenomenon that he/she is studying is about. A qualitative researcher interprets and makes meaning of evidence collected.

I adopted a qualitative research approach because I wanted to understand the meaning given by the participants (multi-grade teachers) and attempt to make sense of the phenomenon (multi-grade teaching) in terms of what participants say. I captured the original voices of participants using an audio-recorder for the interviews and in their classrooms. As my study aims at understanding and interpreting the perceptions of people, it lends itself to an interpretive paradigm.

### **3.3 Interpretive paradigm**

Multi-grade teachers have their own philosophies, understandings and practices, of which my role is to understand these practices and attach relevant meanings to them. Agger (2006:30) maintains that interpretive research attempts to understand social action on the level of the meaning that people attach to it. Denzin and Lincoln (2003:33) state that interpretive research is

guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied.

Chilisa and Preece (2005) assert that the interpretive paradigm has philosophical underpinnings which are phenomenology (Edmund Husserl's philosophy) and hermeneutics (Wilhelm Dilthey's philosophy). They ascertain that phenomenologists use human thinking, perceiving and other mental and physiological acts, and their spirituality to describe and understand human experiences. For them, truth lies within the human experience and it is time, space and context bound. Interpretivists believe that research should produce individualised conceptions of social phenomena and personal assertions rather than generalisations.

Hermeneutics involves a reading and interpretation of human texts. Both phenomenology and hermeneutics largely inform assumptions on the nature of reality, knowledge and values in the interpretive paradigm. Interpretivists believe that reality (ontology) is socially constructed (Mertens, 1998, cited in Chilisa & Preece, 2005). Reality is therefore mind dependent and personally or socially constructed. In this study, the reality about the phenomena of study was based on the experiences of the participants and what they said and did during their interactions with me.

Interpretivists believe that knowledge is subjective because it is socially constructed and mind dependent. They further assert that truth lies within the human experience. In this study, truth about multi-grade teaching experiences, challenges and opportunities was voiced by the participants during data collection.

### **3.4 Case study**

The research is a case study of teachers' experiences regarding multi-grade teaching in rural settings. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) define a case study as a study of phenomena in its real life context. According to Yin (1989), a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that the advantage of the case study is that it presents a real life situation and provides a holistic account of a phenomenon and insight that would enable the reader to visualise the experiences of the people in the phenomenon.

In my study the case focuses on teachers who teach in a primary school in the UGU district in KwaZulu-Natal province and the phenomenon studied is multi-grade teaching in foundation phase classes. Maree (2007) argues that a case study helps the researcher to come to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the situation. In this context the dynamics of my study include experiences and perceptions that teachers hold about multi-grade classes. Furthermore, Descombe (2007) asserts that a case study focuses on one or a few instances of a particular phenomenon, with a view of providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance. This is appropriate to my study because I focused on multi-grade teaching as experienced by teachers.

I conducted in-depth interviews with multi-grade teachers who are the primary data sources for my study. I recorded detailed accounts about the context surrounding the case including information about the physical environment and any historical, economic and social factors that have a bearing on the multi-grade situation (Leedy, 2005).

### **3.5 Sampling of participants**

Purposeful sampling guided the sampling of participants for the study. Davies (2007:57) and Bless and Achola (1990, 75) assert that purposeful sampling is the strategy of selecting participants that are judged to be typical of the population under investigation.

In a selected primary school, only teachers who teach in multi-grade classes in foundation phase participated in the study. They were two female teachers. The school has only female teachers. I regard this group of teachers as the group that is most likely to produce information that is relevant and trustworthy because they teach multi-grade classes. These teachers have hands-on experience of multi-grade classes and are in a good position to share their challenges and dynamics involved in multi-grade teaching.

### **3.6 Data collection**

A pilot test was conducted using participants (teachers) who did not necessarily meet all criteria of multi-grade teaching but who were willing to participate. This pilot test helped me realise whether questions prepared were able to guide participants to produce data that I could use

effectively for my study. Alternatively this exercise was targeted at enabling me to make improvements that could sharpen my data collection strategies.

Data collection took place in a school and involved teachers who teach multi-grade classes in foundation phase. The reason for choosing foundation phase is because multi-grade teaching normally occurs in the foundation phase rather than in intermediate or senior phase. I am also a foundation phase teacher and need to have substantial understanding of multi-grade teaching. Data gathering techniques that were used include interviews and observation. Data gathering was divided into two phases.

The first phase involved in-depth interviews with teachers whilst the second phase involved practical observation of lessons delivered by teachers. Two multi-grade teachers were interviewed, one at a time, about their experiences, challenges and support in multi-grade teaching. Multi-grade teachers were also observed in their classes during teaching and learning practice.

### *3.6.1 Phase 1 – Interviews*

The first phase of data gathering was in-depth interviews. I conducted in-depth interviews with individuals (participants) who are multi-grade teachers in a school that I selected. The interview is defined as a purposeful conversation, usually between two people but sometimes involving more, and is directed by one in order to get information from the other (Morgan, 1988, cited in Bodgan & Biklen, 1992:96). He further argues that in the hands of the qualitative researcher, the interview takes on a shape of its own. It may be used as the dominant strategy of collecting data or it may be employed in conjunction with participant observation, document analysis or other techniques.

I did not follow the same order (shape) of questioning with participants and had to probe in certain instances. However, the data produced guided me to the next question that I needed to ask. According to Bodgan & Biklen (1992), qualitative researchers use interviews to collect descriptive data in the subject's own words so that the researcher can develop insight on how the subject interprets their piece of the world.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2007:349) define the interview as a flexible tool of collecting data which enables multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken or heard. In this study, I ensured that when interviewing participants I was attentive to the responses of participants so that I was able to identify new emerging data that were directly related to multi-grade teaching.

I acknowledged data produced by nodding my head and used appropriate facial expressions to show acceptance of what was being communicated. I also asked for clarity when the participant mentioned something that was unfamiliar to me by using phrases such as ‘What do you mean? / I’m not sure I’m following you, could you explain that?’ I also avoided asking questions that would lead to ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ answers.

There are advantages and limitations with individual interviews. According to Chilisa and Preece (2005:148), there are several problems with the individual interview approach. The problems normally exist in the power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The question is around whose knowledge is constructed during the interview, using whose language and whose vocabulary. A limitation when using interviews is that selection of key informants is susceptible to selection bias. However, when such key informants are involved in a study, they provide in-depth information that enhances the credibility of the study. The interviewer played a dominant role in the whole process and semi-structured interviews were used to produce data.

#### *3.6.1.2 Semi-structured interview*

I prepared an interview guide of questions that focused on multi-grade teaching in classes. Maree (2007) states that the interview guide/schedule basically defines the line of inquiry. It is argued that in semi-structured interviews, the sequencing of questions is not the same for every participant as it depends on the process of interview and answers from each individual participant (Chilisa & Preece, 2005:147), but the interview guide ensured that I collected similar types of data from all participants.

Bless and Achola (1990) argue that semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to probe respondents’ initial responses and participants are free to express their answers as they wish.

I conducted interviews per individual multi-grade teacher in foundation phase. The intention was to talk interactively with multi-grade teachers, to ask questions, to listen to them and gain access to their accounts in order to analyse their practices of multi-grade teaching. The interviews provided the most direct evidence of teachers' experiences, challenges and support structures in multi-grade teaching. During interviews a tape recorder was used to record the raw data.

I could have used other interview techniques such as structured and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews for instance would not be suitable for my study because each participant is asked the same questions and in the same order. Unstructured interviews on the other hand start with a general question in the broad area of study (Chilisa & Preece, 2005:147).

### *3.6.2 Phase 2 – Observations*

The second phase focused on observing lessons of multi-grade teachers while teaching and handling a combination of two or more grades in one teaching period. Lesson observation responded to the first critical question of the study which was 'How do teachers teach multi-grade classes in rural settings?' and the second critical question which was 'What challenges and opportunities do multi-grade teachers experience when teaching?'. This helped me to gain an understanding of how multi-grade teachers interact effectively with different grades simultaneously, and it enabled me to understand the experiences regarding challenges and opportunities that multi-grade teachers have when teaching multi-grade classes in rural contexts. Lesson observations were conducted in each of the two multi-grade classrooms. My rationale for using observations is because I needed to have deeper insight regarding everything that occurs in a multi-grade classroom including, *inter alia*, how teachers present lessons, maintain order and discipline, interact with learners, assess work of learners and give feedback. Maree (2007:83) asserts that observation is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them. He further argues that observation as a qualitative data gathering technique is used to enable the researcher to gain a deeper insight and understanding of the phenomenon being observed.

Chilisa and Preece (2005) argue that researchers conduct observations to enable an elaborate discussion of specific issues, to corroborate findings and to triangulate or complement data gathered through interviews. There are different types of observer involvement i.e. complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant and informal/purposeful observation (Chilisa & Preece, 2005:156; Maree, 2007:83). I chose purposeful observation as I observed multi-grade teachers teaching in classrooms with the aim of understanding their experiences in teaching more than one class simultaneously. All the above is applicable to my study because observation was done to elaborate on data gathered through interviews. I prepared an observation guide that helped me to focus, and listed specific features that needed to be observed. I took down notes during observation and used the tape recorder to record data for later retrieval. Maree (2007) maintains that recording of observation may be notes in key phrases or short descriptions of actions, and is objective with no self-reflective notes. There are a number of advantages and limitations of using observation.

Cohen et al. (2007:396) state that the distinctive feature of observation as a research process is that it offers an investigator the opportunity to gather 'live' data from naturally occurring social situations. An advantage of observation is that it may reveal information that informant-provided data does not. A limitation in observation is that observer bias may be a threat to credibility of the data (Chilisa & Preece, 2005:160). However, Maree (2007:86) reveals that trustworthiness in observation is ensured by using the strategy of member checks. I verified my understanding of what I have been observing with my participants by letting them read notes taken to establish if they agree with the contents of the notes. When the data gathering process was over, I began transcribing data from the tape recorder and organised notes that I had taken in the field for data analysis.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging transcripts, field notes and other material to increase the understanding of data and to enable the researcher to present what she/he has discovered (Bodgan & Biklen,1992:153). Analysis involves working with data, organising them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesising them, searching for patterns,

discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what to tell others (Maree, 2007).

I began analysing data from the beginning of the data collection process. This is supported by Leedy (2005), as he affirms that a case study researcher often begins to analyse the data during the data collection process, and these preliminary conclusions are likely to influence the kind of data she/he seeks out and collects in later parts of the study. He further mentions the steps typically involved in analysing data in case study, which are organising, categorising, interpretation and identification of patterns, synthesising and generalisation of data. A brief discussion about each of the above steps is given below.

Having taken down field notes, and recorded the voices of the participants during interviews and observations, I listened to the audio-tape from start to end. Secondly, I read and re-read all transcripts and began to organise my data.

When organising collected data, I considered arranging specific facts about multi-grade teaching in a chronological order. This helped me to have a better understanding of the data produced. After arranging facts logically, I synthesised data and identify categories that helped me to cluster the data into meaningful groups. Open coding was used to sort the descriptive data collected. Chilisa and Preece (2005:172) note that open coding is the process of ‘breakdown of data’ into themes or patterns that create a meaningful story from the volumes of data. I used the voices of the participants to develop themes and categories that characterise multi-grade teaching more broadly than a single piece of information. Open coding and then axial coding was used to understand my data.

I began interpretation, which involved attaching meaning to data and reconstructing relevant themes that address the question of multi-grade teaching. Specific documents, occurrences and other bits of data were examined for specific meaning they might have in relation to multi-grade teaching in classes in rural settings.

Synthesis and generalisation is when I brought together or consolidated all elements or components that constitute multi-grade teaching. This is when I also drew conclusions pertaining to similarities and differences found in the data. Lastly, I presented the findings in this dissertation.

### **3.8 Validity and reliability**

Validity and reliability are the important elements of effective research. Validity enabled me to know whether data accurately described what it meant to describe. Cohen et al. (2000) maintain that in qualitative research validity has to be addressed through honesty, richness and depth of data gathered, the extent of triangulation, and objectivity of the researcher. To ensure reliability and validity for my study, I engaged multiple methods of collecting data, namely interviews and observation. This ensured rigor and trustworthiness of the data. The engagement of multiple methods of data collection is referred to as triangulation (Maree, 2007). Furthermore, Key (1997) states that triangulation is a convergence of data from multiple collection sources.

Participants were re-visited so that they could listen to and read data that had been audio-taped and transcribed. This ensured the originality of their voices and thereby ascertained reliability. Doing re-visits is referred to as member checks (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). Using more than one method of producing data may eliminate risks of misunderstandings and misinterpretations of data. Audio-tape is a reflection of the original voices of the participants. This also contributes to rigor and trustworthiness of data.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

It is important to consider ethical issues in qualitative research because this type of research involves working directly with people. Some of the essential aspects are issues of confidentiality on results and findings, protection of participants' identities and to ensure anonymity. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used for participants and the school. I obtained consent from the participants, permission from the principal to use her school to conduct the study and from the KZN Department of Education to conduct interviews with the participants in the selected school. I was aware of the fact that I had to ensure confidentiality and treat participants with respect. This encouraged participants to feel free to produce more relevant data.

Data collected was deleted from audio-tape after transcription. The details about how the study was to be conducted were clarified to participants. I explained to them that participation was

voluntarily and that they were free to withdraw from participation at any point and time should they wish to do so.

### **3.10 Theoretical/conceptual framework of the study**

This study employs the ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1994) to understand multi-grade teaching. When teachers teach and learners learn, there is constantly interaction between learners and the physical environment or space. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory proposes that especially in its early phases, and to a great extent throughout the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the person, objects and symbols in its immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994:38).

Bronfenbrenner (1994) refers to the interaction between the person and the immediate environment as the proximal process. Examples of proximal process are found in parent-child and child-child activities, group or solitary play, reading, learning new skills, studying athletic activities and performing complete tasks. Ecological systems theory looks at a systems approach to human development and behaviour.

Ecological systems theory is an appropriate framework to explore multi-grade teaching because of the interactions between the environment and human development as promoting education. Multi-grade teaching provides an excellent opportunity for the needs of the whole child and the child in his/her community to be recognised and addressed. Multi-grade should not be limited to academic education but should also be used to address the health, education and welfare needs of all children in the social and community context in which they live. This could mean that the language and social environment of people to be served has to be considered and may need special attention.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined the research design and methodology that I used to understand multi-grade teaching in a school in a rural setting. The approach that guides the study has been provided. The paradigmatic stance of the study has been identified. The methods of collecting data which are interviews and observations have been defined. Identification of site and population as well as sampling of participants has been dealt with in this chapter. Methods and steps to follow when analysing the data have been provided. The validity and reliability of the data has been discussed. Ethical considerations and the theoretical framework that guide the study have been provided.

## **Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I present the analysis and interpretation of data collected with an aim of understanding experiences of teachers who teach multi-grade classes in rural settings. The case study allowed me to gain insight and understanding into the strategies that teachers use when teaching multi-grade classes. Data was produced using interviews with two multi-grade teachers and by observing classes of two multi-grade teachers while teaching learners in their classrooms. The data produced during interviews with the participants in the study were coded using open codes and later by axial coding. Axial coding refers to themes which are influenced by the research questions guiding the study which are: How do teachers teach in multi-grade classes in rural settings? What challenges and opportunities are presented to multi-grade teachers in rural settings? What school structures and processes support multi-grade teaching in rural settings?

Lesson observation in classes assisted me in comparing the data produced from the interviews with the participants. From the informants' interview transcripts, five major themes were generated and these related to the experiences in multi-grade teaching. The themes included:

1. Factors influencing the need for multi-grade schools in rural settings.
2. Teachers' experiences in teaching multi-grade classes in rural settings.
3. Expertise and experiences needed in multi-grade teaching.
4. Challenges and opportunities in multi-grade teaching in rural settings.
5. Strategies used by teachers when teaching in multi-grade classes.

### **4.2 Description of the school**

I conducted research in a primary school that is situated on the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal province at Mthwalume, near Hibberdene. The nearest city is Port Shepstone and is about 50 km from the school. The school is in a deep rural area and is under the leadership of Inkosi (the chief). In this area there are gravel roads and scattered, poorly built houses with a low population density. Most houses are built with mud. They are usually *rondavels* and a few flat built rooms

One teacher who knew the history of the area well and that of the school confirmed that there were no schools in the surrounding areas and learners had to walk long distances and sometimes cross rivers when going to school. On rainy days, children had to stay at home, and did not attend classes as the rivers were flooded and posed a danger to learners some of whom had drowned. Hence there was a need for a school to be built in the area, as discussed in the first chapter of this study.

Most of the families are unemployed. Some depend on farming for a living. Some work for farmers where they plough and harvest sugar cane on a seasonal basis, whereas other families depend on social grants. This shows that the community is very poor. This has an impact on school since some parents cannot afford to pay for school fees, text books and the like.

The staff compliment consists of three teachers, including the school principal. The school consists of foundation phase (grade 1-3) and grade four of the intermediate phase of schooling. The enrolment is about fifty five learners. This enrolment does not allow the school to have single-grade classes. The teacher to learner ratio is 1:31 per each class, which is provided by the Department of Education, to all public schools in South Africa. The school combines two classes which are taught by one teacher. The school is not fully supported by the Department of Education. It does not get any funding allocation for school equipment, stationery and other school needs like all public schools in the province. It does not have a feeding scheme. The school has an EMIS number which shows that it is registered fully under the Department of Education, but when it comes to recognition and support it receives nothing.

There were only two classrooms and two pit toilets that were made of timber. The toilets did not look safe or strong. There was no office, staffroom, storeroom or library. The school had recently been provided with electricity and water. Until then, learners had to collect water from the river before they began classes.

#### **4.3 Factors influencing the need for multi-grade schools in rural settings**

The findings related to factors influencing the need for multi-grade teaching is not different from that reviewed in other literature (e.g. Birch and Lally, 1995; UNESCO, 2003) in this research field. The findings revealed that factors such as geography, topology, sparse population, low learner numbers per grade and lack of adequate facilities and resources necessitated the need for multi-grade teaching.

**Teacher A** said: “It is the situations that force us in this school to combine two classes and taught by one teacher”. *“It’s not our choice to teach multi-grade classes”*. *“This school services a small population and has few learners to have single-grade classes”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“It is constituted that all children need to learn and in this area no other school is available except this one. We only have two classes and we have to squeeze different grades in one”*. *“Learners had to cross two big rivers when going to school. The community asked for assistance to have this school built so as to shorten the distance that young children walk and to protect them against crossing rivers when going to school”*.

Rurality is characterised by sparsely populated communities, great distances to communal facilities, difficult terrain to traverse and limited choices available to the communities. This means that resources in the rural communities, like schools, have to be shared across a wider geographic region in order to be financially viable and a worthwhile endeavour, especially if this resource has to be provided by the state. The state, while it has the obligation constitutionally to provide services to communities across the country and geographic regions, may vary the nature and quality of services across the country. This means that, usually, rural communities will get services that are poorly resourced and which must be shared across a wider geographic region. This invariably means that learners will have to travel far to access schools. Schools may not be able to attract adequate class sizes (norm of 35 learners to a teacher). Schools may not be large enough to accommodate one room per class. These factors therefore necessitate the need to consider alternate forms of delivery of education – invariably in the form of multi-grade teaching. Hence it is not surprising that the factors influencing multi-grade teaching in rural contexts may be similar across the globe.

#### 4.4 Experiences of teachers teaching in multi-grade classes in rural settings

Both participants expressed that they experienced some challenges in teaching combined grades, and this was also observed during classroom observation. These teachers noted that they have more bad experiences than good in multi-grade teaching. Using the distinction of good and bad experiences that teachers expressed through their interviews, the findings related to teachers' experiences are therefore presented within these two sub-categories.

I categorised experiences into marginalisation by the DoE in terms of training needs and other support resources, engagement with learners, engagement with curriculum, about the self, and engagement with the community/parents. Each of these categories was discussed in detail.

I noted that teachers expressed that their school was marginalised by the DoE because they did not get any department officials visiting them, no workshops organised for multi-grade schools and that they did not get any kind of support from the DoE. As indicated in an earlier section, multi-grade schools are usually located in remote areas with poor roads and low population density, far from the educational centres and thus receive little support. The following quotes from the participants show their frustration with this:

**Teacher A** said: *“Multi-grade teaching is not recognised and supported by the Department of Education. There is no support workshops organised specifically for multi-grade teachers. All workshops that are organised in this circuit are designed for single-grade teachers”. “The Department of Education officials hardly pay a visit to our school”.*

**Teacher B** said: *“Multi-grade teaching is not catered for or recognised as important and real by the Department of Education. They act as if it does not exist”.*

Participants highlighted that the DoE organise workshops that are primarily intended for mono-grade schools. They attend such workshops but have to supplement the information that they receive to suit their contexts.

Teachers expressed the difficulty in teaching learners with different levels of development and different capabilities and cognitive levels. The argument that teachers raise concerns Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Some learners may still be in a sensory motor stage and combined with those in pre-operational stage. This could be the case with learners in concrete

operational stage combined with those in formal operational stage. Teachers find themselves overwhelmed with a variety of teaching methods, assessment strategies and a variety of remedial work. This could be time consuming given a short space of time to complete the syllabus.

**Teacher B** said: *“In multi-grade classes the teacher is responsible for two grades in one teaching period. Each grade has learners with different cognitive levels and capabilities. The teacher has to be able to support them equally”*.

**Teacher A** said: *“Both grades have different levels of learners. There are slow learners, achievers and high achievers. The teacher has to be able to balance her teaching so that all levels are catered for”*.

Participants highlighted that when teaching their learners, they usually have activities that cater for slow achievers, and more intensive activities to keep high achievers occupied. Teachers designed teaching periods such that learners who experienced learning difficulties are given individual attention while other learners are given class exercises to do. This could mean that teachers needed to plan their lessons well in advance to accommodate the individual needs of learners. Teachers therefore had the responsibility of gaining a good understanding of the abilities, capabilities, and different levels of cognitive development and interests of each learner. Learner enrolment was very low and gaining a holistic understanding of each learner was an advantage.

Teaching combined classes posed some shortcomings. Learners who already have some understanding of what is being taught become chaotic and disturb those who are still struggling with the content.

**Teacher A** said: *“Multi-grade teaching is demanding since a teacher has to be able to balance her planning to cater both grades equally”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“High achievers usually get bored when an easy content is introduced to them. They easily complete tasks and make noise which disturbs those who are struggling”*.

Participants highlighted that they usually give more intensive work to occupy the high achievers. They insisted that they had designed reading activities for those who have completed the written task and arranged them in their corner library. A teacher has to plan effectively to accommodate

all levels of learners. Planning is usually a group rather than an individual effort. Unfortunately participants do not have workshops that are organised for multi-grade classes to guide them on effective planning.

The DoE need to organise workshops that would be facilitated by people with sufficient knowledge, experience, expertise and interest in multi-grade classes. Such people need to have an understanding of rurality as this is where multi-grade schools are situated. Teaching and learning aids should be such that they are suitable for learners in rural areas. We cannot use, for instance, a smart board for learners in the deep rural areas where sometimes electricity is not available. Teaching resources need be contextualised and make sense to learners for future use when studying.

The curriculum that teachers implement is normally intended for mono-grade schools. There may be no curriculum designed specifically for multi-grade classes. Educational planners could base all planning on single-grade pedagogies.

**Teacher A** said: *“All foundation phase, whether multi-grade or mono-grade, use the same curriculum in this ward”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“The curriculum is the same for all primary schools. We have to adjust it in our case to fit combined classes”*.

Teachers had to adjust the single-grade curriculum to suit their multi-grade classes without any assistance or guidance by departmental officials or supervisors. This occasionally created problems for teachers as they had to spend more time comparing material for two grades to grade activities for different levels of learners. The syllabus that they used was not structured for multi-grade classes. Planning across grades was problematic to teachers in multi-grade classes because of lack of training.

Concerning their own professional development, teachers highlighted the willingness to have workshops that would cater for the different needs of multi-grade classes. This would also involve exclusive pre-service and in-service training. Regular visits by experts on multi-grade teaching were recommended. Teachers highlighted that they were also willing to have cluster

meetings with other multi-grade schools in the district. They also realised a need to meet within the school to share ideas, to plan together and to discuss issues pertaining to teaching and learning at school. This could help them to develop one another in their context.

**Teacher A** said: *“At school we do not meet as multi-grade teachers to discuss and plan our work”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“Each teacher has to plan for her class. The work schedule I use for my class is from a colleague in a neighbouring school. Each teacher designed hers”*.

Drawing from the above extract it shows that teachers do not meet for planning, sharing ideas, or discussing issues related to their teaching and learning in the school. Individual teachers had to plan their own work individually. It is the responsibility of school management to liaise with departmental officials and other multi-grade schools for cluster meetings. Teachers within the school could be encouraged by the management to sit for discussions and planning. Currently teachers rely on trial and error methods of teaching and learning. They were not sure about which strategies would work well when teaching. Teachers need to use multiple methods and techniques to accommodate different levels of cognitive development of learners.

Learners of different levels and competencies were grouped together. This context provided opportunities for peer teaching and learning amongst learners. It was assumed that learners could learn better from their peers than through formal teaching (Birch and Lally, 1995). Young learners could be easily motivated by the older ones and work up to the best of their abilities to be competent as well.

**Teacher A:** *“In peer grouping, learners are able to help one another. When grouping peers in my class, I make sure that a slow learner works with a high achiever”*.

**Teacher B:** *“What I know about multi-grade classes is that learners become active because one group is motivated by the other group, more especially during classroom discussions and presentations of groups and peer work. The younger group can easily learn from the older group and when it is their turn to present work they try to excel”*.

Participants confirmed that usually they teach learners in groups and sometimes they arrange for peer teaching. The peer support by learners could help the learners who have difficulties in

grappling with the lesson content when engaged with others in discussions and learn from them. The gifted learners could help the slow learners to get a clearer understanding of what was discussed during their own spare time or while the lesson proceeds.

#### **4.5 Expertise and experiences needed in multi-grade teaching**

This section explores what multi-grade teachers view as expertise needed to teach in such classes, how one would obtain this expertise, as well as what kinds of experiential learning one needs in order to teach effectively in such classes.

Participants confirmed that a teacher who teaches multi-grade class should have certain expertise and experiences for multi-grade teaching to be effective in rural settings. They pointed out that they were not competent enough to teach in multi-grade classes because they were not trained as multi-grade teachers and that a lot of what they know come from direct experiential learning.

The professional teacher is a key resource person to teach learners in both single-grade and multi-grade classes. Teachers who teach multi-grade classes need to be well trained and locally orientated for multi-grade teaching to be effective. A multi-grade teacher is expected to be a dedicated, qualified and committed teacher. They are expected to have competency in the language of the community (Birch and Lally, 1995).

The teachers in this study were expected to be able to understand differences between learners and be able to motivate and guide them through their learning across grades. They needed to be able to facilitate and enhance learning both at the group level and on an individual or one-to-one basis.

**Teacher A** said: *“A teacher who teaches in multi-grade classes should be a hard worker, have patience, and have love of children. She has to have knowledge of handling two different grades in one time-tabled period”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“A teacher should understand group teaching, be able to plan effectively for all level groups and be able to balance her teaching for the equal benefit of all learners”*.

The above quotes suggested that there is a need for multi-grade teachers to be prepared enough for teaching in these demanding classes. Teachers needed to be well developed and guided for

effective multi-grade teaching (Brown, 2009). Beukes (2006) notes that teachers who teach in multi-grade classes are faced with the greater demand of delivering two different curricula to learners of twice the age range in the same amount of time. These may require more preparation, more grouped instruction and more teaching time.

Teachers highlighted that grouping of learners was not an easy exercise because of their different levels of development, needs, expectations and interests. This exercise could enhance a clearer understanding of learners in a multi-grade class. Learners were grouped according to the level of their abilities and in mixed abilities. There may be advantages and disadvantages in both groupings of learners. An advantage of grouping learners according to their different levels of cognitive development is that a teacher could be able to focus on the whole group for support rather than picking individuals in each group which could take more time. A disadvantage is that a group of slow learners is always inactive since all members of the group are struggling.

An advantage in a mixed abilities group could be that when slow learners are mixed with gifted learners, they easily become motivated and strive to contribute in group work. A disadvantage could be that some learners may be inactive whilst others are working. This could need a teacher to be vigilant when monitoring groups by encouraging all learners to participate actively. Group leaders need to be selected when group discussions are done. Group leaders should be well trained to allow all learners in a group to participate equally in discussions.

Teachers in multi-grade contexts were expected to have good communication skills because they give instructions to a group of learners of different grades in one class. She could be able to go out and seek information that could help her to grow as a teacher in such a context. She must have an enquiring and evaluating mind. This could help her evaluate her teaching and see whether learners benefit so that she can try other methods.

**Teacher A** said: *“I usually seek assistance from neighbouring school teachers regarding planning”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“After attending workshops I was able to adjust methods for single-grades and teach my learners”*.

Participants confirmed that they usually seek information that could help them in teaching multi-grade classes from teachers at their neighbouring schools. They also attended workshops and were trying to adjust methods to suit their combined classes.

#### **4.6 Challenges and opportunities in multi-grade teaching in rural settings**

Participants felt that they were confronted with many challenges when teaching a multi-grade class. These challenges have been grouped according to the institutional challenges, resource challenges, professional status of teachers, support from the stakeholders and attitudes of teachers.

##### *4.6.1 Institutional challenges*

Participants expressed their concerns about the institutional factors that have impacted on the professional delivery of teaching as expected of any teacher. Their concerns included the education department and the socio-economic status of parents. The school was not provided with materials to support multi-grade teaching. For teaching and learning to be sustainable in the school, it requires a good allocation of relevant resources which includes books, stationery, more classrooms, and facilities including a photocopier, amongst others.

**Teacher A** said: *“This school does not get any allocation from the Department of Education for it to function properly. We have to request our neighbouring schools to supply us with unused stationery”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“Parents cannot afford to buy stationery since most of them are not permanently employed. They usually depend on farming for living”*.

Teachers sourced assistance from other neighbouring schools for the supply of unused stationary and books. Sometimes they had to buy teaching aids from their own pockets for the benefit of the school and the learners. They also had collected empty boxes, paper and other waste and brought them to school. They had used them to make their class teaching and learning aids. This could be the sign of poverty in this school and in the community at large.

Poverty and unemployment was a challenge in the community. Poverty was evident through hunger, inadequate shelter, lack of financial support from learners, and little or no health care.

The school does not receive any allocation like all other public schools in the region. Most of the parents did not have permanent jobs; they depended on farming which included growing crops and rearing livestock for a living. Some depended on government grants to sustain a living. This had impacted on teaching and learning since some learners come to school hungry and do not get food to eat at school, walk long distances and feel tired. They could not cope well in their work.

**Teacher A** says: *“The school does not have feeding scheme as in the case with other primary schools in our area. Most of the learners come to school having had no breakfast and they usually have no lunch boxes. They get nothing to eat at school as well. Learners suffer a lot and they do not cope with their school work”*.

**Teacher B** says: *“The Department of Education has done nothing about the situation of this school as yet. The school has been in this situation for years, it has not been resolved. The learners from this poor community suffer”*.

Learners came hungry to school because of the poverty issue with the community. Long hours in school created attention problems, more so in the context of having nothing to eat whilst at school. There was no feeding scheme in school. There was no school tuck shop and even if it was available few learners would have had money to buy anything from it.

To try and cope with the situation teachers gave learners longer breaks between teaching periods. Learners who lived nearby were able to go home and eat if food was available. Teachers therefore needed to grow fruit and vegetable gardens so that learners could have something to eat. Teachers also needed to approach business people and ask for donations so that they could in turn help poor learners. This could work well if done in collaboration with the school governing body. Learners could be introduced to some fund raising projects which could include inviting local schools to compete in sport, music or academic work.

Multi-grade schools need the same kind of attention and treatment as single-grade schools. Neighbouring primary schools within the district had feeding schemes. They extended the programme to Orphans and Vulnerable children (OVC). There was allocation for OVCs to cater for breakfast and they were sometimes given food parcels to consume at their own homes.

Drawing from the above, it is evident that this school is marginalised and neglected due to its geographical location (CMGE, 2010). To overcome this condition, teachers together with the SGB, need to invite an official from the DoE and business persons to try and solve the problem of accommodation and how to eradicate poverty which may hinder the smooth running of the school. The media can also be invited so that people from other parts of the country who have an interest in education can contribute to the development of the school.

#### *4.6.2 Resource challenges*

Teachers noted that the school does not have resources which include reading and activity books for the learners. There are no teacher's guides, or equipment including photocopiers and computers. There are no proper built classrooms and toilets. The principal's office, staffroom and storeroom are non-existent. The school has only two classrooms. CMGE (2010) affirms that the unavailability of resources (human and material) in schools in rural settings is a major problem. The school principal is unable to requisite school material and this makes teaching and learning difficult. Public schools in the KZN province get allocations to buy school equipment/resources per academic year. But this does not happen in the school in my study.

**Teacher A** said: *“Having no resources to teach in multi-grade classes is a big challenge. It is difficult to support learners with learning difficulties, to give activities either reading or writing to be helped by parents at home”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“We only have chalkboards which are very small to accommodate work for all groups in order to read and write since we do not have reading books and activity books. Some learners fail even to finish writing class work from the chalkboard let alone homework activities”*.

Multi-grade teachers found themselves confronted with many demands from schools, learners and curriculum. They work under pressure and scarcity of relevant resources, and are forced to adapt and interpret the curriculum to suit the contexts under which they work. The advantage was that teaching multi-grade classes encouraged them to be creative thinkers for the benefit of young children and the community they serve. There was little attention given to provide multi-grade teachers with appropriate resources across the region. Teachers highlighted that there were insufficient teaching resources which also include chalkboards. There was only a small

chalkboard available. This indicated that a teacher had limited space to write enough work for all grades.

Given the challenges mentioned above, teachers took it upon themselves to prepare teaching and learning aids. Sometimes they had to carry heavy teaching materials from home. Other teaching and learning resources were taken from the school grounds, for example, stones and sticks for counting and other objects like boxes for shapes.

Bronfenbrenner refers to the interaction between the person and the immediate environment as the proximal process. Examples of proximal process are found in parent-child and child-child activities, group or solidarity play, reading learning new skills, studying athletic activities and performing complete tasks. Ecological systems theory looks at a systems approach to human development and behaviour.

Ecological systems theory is an appropriate framework to explore multi-grade teaching because of the interactions between the environment and human development as promoting education. There are two propositions that underpin ecological systems theory. The first one states that human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment. The second proposition states that the form, power, content and direction of the proximal processes affecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

#### *4.6.3 Professional status of multi-grade teachers*

The findings suggested that no in-service and pre-service training were available for multi-grade teachers in the region. Brown (2009) confirms that many South African teachers are not trained during initial teacher education to teach in multi-grade classes, and in-service training in higher education does not include multi-grade teaching as a curriculum topic. Hence multi-grade teachers had to be skilled in handling two or more grades at a time, to manage instructions effectively to benefit both grades equally, and be able to plan across grades. It was highlighted

that no workshops were available for multi-grade teaching. The following were concerns from teachers:

**Teacher A** said: *“I was not trained as multi-grade teacher. I was trained as junior primary phase teacher in single-grade classes”*. *“No workshops organised for us as multi-grade teachers to assist and guide in teaching multi-grade classes effectively”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“We are not trained to teach combined grades. Workshops organised are only based on single-grade teaching”*.

Teachers were asked how they develop themselves as multi-grade teachers. They stated that they learned through group discussions, where they meet with colleagues of neighbouring schools to discuss issues pertaining working with young learners. From these meetings they were able to adjust and apply what they discussed to their learners in the multi-grade context. They attended workshops that were organised for single-grade teachers. One teacher highlighted that she had a negative attitude towards multi-grade teaching for years. After she attended workshops and effectively adjusted methods for her class, she developed confidence and a more positive attitude towards teaching. The following shows how they developed:

**Teacher A** responded: *“I learn through discussing with colleagues from our neighbouring schools. I once attended a workshop organised by the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which guided teaching activities. I benefited a lot and was able to teach my learners of both grades to apply those reading methods, for better reading”*. *“I sometimes go out to seek for information in areas where I need assistance”*.

**Teacher B** responded: *“I usually attend workshops, though they were for single-grade teaching, but I was able to adjust methods for single-grade to fit in my classes”*. *“I have learned best in practicality of teaching in multi-grade classes. I’m able to reflect on the performance of my learners and I’m able to change my teaching methods. This gives me clear indication of which methods my learners learn best”*.

Although there was no specific training for multi-grade teaching, teachers had learned to develop themselves for effective multi-grade teaching. In-service or pre-service training may be formal, informal, incidental, planned, mandatory or voluntarily (Fraser, Kennedy, Reid & McKinney,

2007; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Participants highlighted that they attended workshops organised by the education department, thus their learning was formal and planned.

Participants found they could learn from others while sharing ideas or good practice. Teacher learning could also happen during interactions with learners, which implies learning is an active process (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Shulman, 2004).

Participants indicated that they have a need to learn should there be courses for multi-grade teaching in institutions. Juvane (2005) argues that teachers should be skilled to handle combined grades. Teacher learning could be through ‘self-study’ where one registers at an institution to study for a qualification or status (Evans, 2002). The following extract shows that teachers are aware of the need to upgrade their skills.

**Teacher A** said: *“I have never heard of courses in any institution which are specifically intended for multi-grade teaching, but should there be any available I could register and study so that I could enhance my teaching practices”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“I thought of registering to upgrade my studies, but I’ve never heard of multi-grade courses”*.

Institutions of higher education could develop courses for multi-grade teachers so that they could develop themselves through self-study. Teachers highlighted that they realised a need to upgrade their studies. They only attended workshops in the single-grade context so that they could familiarise themselves with new developments in teaching and learning.

#### *4.6.4. Structures that support multi-grade teaching in the school*

##### *4.6.4.1 Support from stakeholders*

The findings suggested that there was little support given to multi-grade teachers. The functionality of the school was different from normal single-grade schools. Usually in schools, teachers meet to discuss difficulties, challenges and issues pertaining to their teaching. It is where they brainstorm, share ideas and views, and develop one another. In this school, teachers agreed that they did not meet for any discussion or sharing of ideas as staff. This was evident from the following:

**Teacher B** said: *“I go out, meet with teachers from other schools and discuss issues where I need assistance”. “The management of our school does not have any plan to support or encourage multi-grade teaching. They could have sought for assistance from other multi-grade schools. They could also have invited subject advisors to give guidance and support”.*

**Teacher A** said: *“My school does not have books for all grades. I requested the principal of my former school to borrow me some books. She was very kind and willing to help me as she gave me three books for each grade. The management in the school has done nothing to support us as teachers”.*

Participants highlighted that the management of the school did not encourage staff meetings for discussing issues of development or the interests of the school, including planning. The individual teacher had to arrange for assistance in planning if she felt that there was a need. She also had to source material to use in her classroom. Teachers visited colleagues of neighbouring schools as individuals to discuss or get clarity on issues pertaining to teaching and learning. Meeting with colleagues from neighbouring schools helped participants to plan their work and teach more confidently. The management did not bother about arranging or organising meetings for teachers.

Teachers in the study viewed the Department of Education as unsupportive towards them as multi-grade teachers. Teachers received no support from all stakeholders concerned. This included management in the school, the departmental officials, and parents of learners. Participants felt that the school was neglected because of its status and condition, in addition to being situated in a remote rural area. Officials from the education department could be reluctant to visit the school because of poor road infrastructure. Due to geographical peculiarities and other socio-economic oddities, multi-grade schools constitute a neglected aspect of education systems (CMGE, 2010).

#### *4.6.4.2 Support amongst colleagues*

Teachers in the study affirmed that there were no structures or processes that supported multi-grade teaching within the school. The individual teacher had to seek any kind of support that they needed. Participants confirmed that they did not have formal staff meetings where they met

to discuss, share ideas or talk as staff regarding their work and classroom practice. Lesson planning was done by individual teachers. Teachers assisted one another only when requested and when there was a need. The following was evident from the findings:

**Teacher A** said: *“At school we do not meet as multi-grade teachers to discuss and plan our work. I usually ask my colleague when I need clarity in some issues. She always helps me”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“No developmental workshops within the school. Attending workshops tends to benefit the teacher and the class. No one has organised internal workshops to develop us”*.

The school principal was responsible for ensuring that teachers had regular meetings with an aim of discussing issues that would bring about development and welfare of learners. Teachers needed to source information and other help on academic issues where ever they felt they could get some. Team teaching is key to the success of learners and should be encouraged.

Involvement of people from other sectors like health, social work and other NGOs should be encouraged.

#### *4.6.4.3 The school governing body and parental support*

Teachers argued that the role played by the SGB and parents in education is too limited. Parents put more responsibility on teachers because the majority of parents are illiterate. This is evident when learners are given homework and parents are unable to help them. Parental involvement was a major concern because of their poor attendance when invited to school meetings. All that parents did was to send their children to school and pay school fees for those who can afford. At the very least, they knew that sending their children to school would be of benefit in future.

These are some of the teachers’ concerns:

**Teacher A** said: *“Most parents of children of this school are illiterate. They see no need to visit school when invited”*. *“In rural communities, most parents rely on teachers and trust them for education of their children”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“Some parents live far away from home where they are employed. Some children live under the guardianship of relatives or grandparents”*.

Teachers should be familiar with strategies that help to develop relations between the school and the community/parents. This would strengthen networks and norms of reciprocity between

teachers and community/parents. Parents need to be involved in the teaching and learning of their children. This could help them realise a need to attend to matters that pertain to the school when they feel they are important and recognised in the smooth running of the school. The majority of parents who happen to be educated work in remote big cities like Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. These parents could not attend issues related to education of their children because of working in areas far from home.

Strategies of motivating parents to attend meetings could include sending out letters well in advance where they would be required to state whether they would be available or not. Because the majority of parents are illiterate, their children who go to school may help by reading letters to parents. This may make learners to be aware of what occurs at their school and also help remind parents about dates of the meetings. Another strategy would be to disclose in the letter the agenda of the meeting that requires active participation and decision-making by parents themselves. Issues that require input by the general community that surrounds the school may also be included. This could make everybody feel part of the school. If parents continued not attending meetings, community leaders like Inkosi and Izinduna may announce that results of learners may be withheld by the school. Results of learners' progress might only be collected by parents and a meeting may be held on the same day as that of collection of results.

The lack of support by parents of the learners may be due to high levels of illiteracy amongst the parents. The impact of illiteracy has resulted in poverty and hunger (Jordaan & Joubert, 2007). Some parents walk long distances to work on farms. They have to leave their homes very early and return very late. They do not have time to assist their children with school work. They sometimes do not know if the children attend schools regularly or not. They also do not earn sufficient wages to cover all their household expenses.

**Teacher A** said: *“Some parents are employed as casual farm workers”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“Most learners come from poor backgrounds. Parents are illiterate and do not have jobs. They depend on social grant for living. Some do not have grant and they depend on farming to sustain a living”*.

Teachers confirmed that in rural areas most parents depended on government grants and some of them do not have identity documents that could allow them to get a grant.

#### *4.6.5. Attitudes of teachers towards multi-grade teaching in rural settings*

Teachers' attitudes towards multi-grade teaching may be similar across the globe. In countries that render full support by giving teachers relevant training, pre- and in-service training, and ongoing support, attitudes of teachers could be positive. In countries such as South Africa where there may be little support, if any, teachers' attitudes may be negative. The conditions that these teachers face, which include poor living conditions, infrequent supervision, lack of resources and unavailability of incentives for their hard and demanding job, make them resistant to the idea of multi-grade teaching and reduce their enthusiasm for the task. This is the same in the case of the school in point.

**Teacher A** said: *"I hate this kind of teaching, we do not get any support and it means this is our own business. I even thought of looking for transfer to a single-grade school"*.

**Teacher B** said: *"This kind of teaching is demanding. Teachers who teach multi-grade classes should be paid more than those in single-grade classes"*.

This showed that the attitudes of teachers may be negative and sometimes positive. One pointed out that when looking at her learners' behaviour and performance, she sees multi-grade teaching as the best way of teaching where learners are easily motivated by others to perform to the best of their abilities. She further affirms that slow learners may easily catch up as they stay in a class for two years. The other teacher confirmed that she does not like to teach in such contexts.

**Teacher A** said: *"I really do not like to work in such context. It is a stressful kind of teaching, but if there could be a change in a way that we are trained and supported maybe I could change my mind"*.

**Teacher B** said: *"Multi-grade is good, it only needs support and guidance for it to be effective and make meaning to both teachers and learners"*. *"Should we get training and support we could have confidence and love teaching in these classes"*.

It is evident that if teachers in multi-grade teaching could get enough support and relevant training to teach multi-grade classes, their attitudes could change.

#### *4.6.6 Opportunities in multi-grade teaching*

Participants highlighted that there are more opportunities for the learners than for themselves. The grouping of learners across grade and age boundaries is beneficial for learners both socially and cognitively (Berry, 2001). The advantages for children in mixed age settings encouraged development of wider friendship among groups. This could reduce competition and aggression among learners. Again learners could remain with one teacher for a two-year period which could help the weaker learners when repeating what has been taught in the previous year and enable them to catch up. Furthermore, weaker learners in the preceding grade may easily catch up because some teaching is geared towards the younger learners. The younger group of learners could be easily motivated by the older group. Multi-grade learners may have opportunities to interact together with mixed ability groups. This could lead to more co-operative learning and reduce low achievers. This is evident from the following:

**Teacher A** said: *“Slow learners have a good chance of catching up as they stay in a class two years, repeating one and the same thing which only differ in levels”*.

**Teacher B**: *“Learners in the younger group learn from the older group and are motivated”*.

Participants indicated little opportunities from the perspective of teachers. Usually there are promotional posts advertised per academic year. The posts include office based educator promotions and school based promotions for single-grade teaching. Teachers expressed that they never saw multi-grade educators’ promotional posts advertised. They insisted that they only have challenges rather than opportunities in multi-grade teaching.

**Teacher A** said: *“No promotions or rather incentives available in multi-grade teaching context”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“The Department of Education releases bulletin with promotional post yearly, which may be for office based educators, school based promotions but I’ve never seen any promotional post in the field of multi-grade context”*.

Since multi-grade teaching provides opportunities for learners to do peer teaching and group teaching, there is minimum interference from the teacher. A benefit is that teachers provide learners with a chance for self-discovery and learning becomes learner-centred. Teachers may also use group assessment or peer assessment strategies which are not as time consuming.

#### **4.7 Strategies used by teachers when teaching multi-grade classes**

Teaching and learning strategies in multi-grade classes may be best described as techniques or methods used to enhance teaching and facilitate learning in multi-grade classes. Strategies may be group teaching of learners, peer teaching, whole class teaching and allocation of activities that are relevant to the level of development of different groups. Group teaching helps to develop confidence and enhance communication skills among learners. In group teaching, a monitor or group leader may be used to monitor or guide exercise-based activities for their group. Group leaders have to be changed after a certain period so that all learners have an opportunity to lead the group. They all learn and acquire leadership skills as they practice leading groups. Teachers mentioned that they use different strategies as the level of intellectual development of learners becomes a guide. The Department of Education (2008) asserts that there is no single instructional programme that is efficient for learners. This is how the participants responded:

**Teacher A** said: *“I sometimes teach both grades separately. I used to teach the first group inside the class and give them activities to write, and go out with the second group to teach them outside in the school yard. But in that case group leaders have to monitor their groups to maintain order and they continue working in my absence”.*

**Teacher B** said: *“I teach groups differently, but I have to occupy one group with an activity and then work with the group I have targeted on certain aspects”.*

Peer teaching is when one learner teaches or assists another. This could be advantageous to learners who mostly struggle with reading. A learner teaches another learner by reading with him/her while pointing at words. Learners may have a better understanding of one another in a free situation as they usually fear teachers and sometimes are shy to express their views.

**Teacher A** said: *“It usually helps to group learners into pairs. Learners engage in peer discussion and the weaker one gains when the stronger one guides her/him towards the completion of the task that they do”.*

**Teacher B** said: *“In reading activities the good readers help the poor readers when they read as pairs”*.

Whole class teaching is when a teacher gives instructions to all learners for both grades at the same time and can involve one topic. Activities are given to learners after the discussion on what is expected of the different groups. Teachers grade and interchange activities as they are guided by the different abilities and capabilities of learners.

**Teacher A** said: *“I teach both of my grades simultaneously and give the first group an activity, and then continue to give instructions to the other group at an advanced level and then give them activities at different levels of abstract”*.

**Teacher B** said: *“In multi-grade classes we teach all learners of two grades at the same time and give them activities which differ according to the level of development of groups”*.

This indicates that there are different strategies of teaching used in multi-grade teaching which may vary depending on the needs and the level of learners. This also shows that approaches teachers used in teaching multi-grade classes vary based on what the teacher has planned to achieve or to be achieved by learners.

#### **4.8 Observations**

In addition to interviews with the participants, I conducted lesson observations. Each teacher was observed while teaching her multi-grade class. Each lesson observation took thirty minutes. Observation helps in discovering things that participants might not be free to talk about during interviews (Cohen et al., 2007). Cohen et al. (2007) further assert that observation methods are powerful tools for gaining insight into the situation (p. 412).

I observed participants while they taught their lessons with the aim of answering the research question which read ‘How do teachers teach in multi-grade classes?’. The following table was used to show responses of participants.

**Table 1: Teacher A Observation**

Time: 9:00-9:30

Class combination: Grades three and four

Learner enrolment: Grade three – ten learners and grade four – eight learners.

Lesson observed: Multiplication

Criteria	Frequency %				
	0	1-25	26-50	51-75	76-100
Lecturing different grades at the same time				•	
Classroom management			•		
Demonstration			•		
Use of teaching aids		•			
Independent class work			•		
Group and peer work		•			
Assessing learners as individuals and groups			•		
Managing different grades groups at a time		•			
Teacher praises the child				•	

**Key: 0 – not at all; 1-25 – very little; 26-50 – a little; 51-75 – a lot; 76-100 – majority of the time**

#### *4.8.1 Elaboration (recording of any relevant information)*

The teacher taught both grades at the same time. She first asked all of the learners to count in two's, in three's and in fours. She asked questions like "10 twos are equal to...?, 10 threes are equal to...?". Learners in both grades gave answers as she continued asking questions that were graded from simple to more complex. She then called both groups to come in front next to the chalkboard. She started writing a sum on the board. The teacher facilitated learning by asking learners of both grades some questions involving multiplication. All learners participated in calculation of the sums until the final stage. More sums were practiced in class. The teacher then wrote four sums for the first group on one side of the chalkboard. These were a two-digit number multiplied by a two-digit number. She then wrote five sums as an activity for the second group on the other side of the chalkboard. These activities differed in level, since the second group was given sums with three-digit numbers multiplied by two-digit numbers.

However some of the learners, who were not active during the presentation of the lesson, were not given more attention in terms of checking whether they understood what was discussed. The teacher did not attend to assessing learners by using group or peer assessment. Individual tasks were given and marked at a later stage.

The lesson that I observed showed that some sections of the syllabus were taught as a combined lesson rather than separate entities. All learners learned collaboratively a skill of multiplying as the lesson progressed. Combining lessons is a strategy for reinforcing and consolidating work and thereby giving slow learners more time for comprehension. This could be a useful strategy for managing a multi-grade class where the planning takes into consideration sections that can be combined and those that need to be taught separately.

**Table 2: Teacher B Observation**

Time: 8:30-9:00

Class combination: Grades one and two

Learner enrolment: Grade one – nine learners and grade two – eleven learners

Lesson observed: Introducing phonic sounds ‘z’ and ‘nz’

Criteria	Frequency %				
	0	1-25	26-50	51-75	76-100
Lecturing different grades at the same time				•	
Classroom management		•			
Demonstration		•			
Use of teaching aids		•			
Independent class work				•	
Group and peer work				•	
Assessing learners as individuals and groups			•		
Managing different grades groups at a time			•		
Teacher praises the child			•		

**Key: 0 – not at all; 1-25 – very little; 26-50 – a little; 51-75 – a lot; 76-100 – majority of the time**

#### 4.8.2 Elaboration (recording of any relevant information)

The teacher taught both grades at a time. She introduced the phonic 'z' to both groups. She first asked learners to read the sound that she had written on the board. They all responded. Then she asked the groups to name all the words they know with the sound 'z'. All learners were given a chance to name words that they remembered. Learners mentioned words like *izulu*, (heaven) *zonda*(hate), *izitha* (enemies)and others. The teacher wrote words on the chalkboard. She asked learners to construct sentences using the words that were written on the chalkboard. Learners constructed sentences eg '*Izingane zibhukudaesizibeni.*' (Children are swimming in the dam.); '*Ngiyazizonda izitha zami*'. (I hate my enemies.)and others, and the teacher wrote them on the chalkboard. The teacher together with learners read the words and sentences on the chalkboard. They continued reading interchangeably, in groups, in pairs and individually.

Thereafter the teacher instructed the grade one group to copy words and sentences into their workbooks. She then continued with the second group. From the sound 'z' she put the sound 'n' to make 'nz' and asked them to read the new sound. The learners were then instructed to give words and sentences using the new sound 'nz'.Learners mentioned words like '*amanzi*(water)*izinzipho*(nails), *inzika*(residue) and others. They continued constructed sentences. eg *Wenze inzuzo eningi.* (He made a lot of profit.); *Ngiphuze amanzi abandayo.* (I drank ice water.) and others. The teacher wrote all the words and sentences on the chalkboard. The learners read the words and sentences as groups, pairs and individuals.

While the teacher was busy with the second group, the first group was becoming disruptive. Some learners walked up and down within their group, and some were playing. The teacher tried to discipline them by shouting at them but it did not help. The learners looked disturbed as some concentrated on the second group's work.

I noticed that the teacher struggled to maintain discipline in her class, but tried to maintain order with those who were being disruptive. Both classes' settings were in a well organised setting where learners in each grade were seated together. Both classes consisted of small learner enrolment.

During the lesson observation I noticed that learners were actively involved. This was evident when learners pronounced sounds and when they gave examples of words that involved ‘nz’. Learners were also active when they constructed sentences using ‘nz’.

Observation revealed that the teachers had prepared well for their lessons. This was shown by some teaching aids that had been brought to class. The teacher who introduced sounds first engaged learners with reading activities before she introduced the lesson. There was a chart referred to as a ‘Phonic Chart’, which has been handmade, displayed on the wall. Learners read words on the chart. All learners learned collaboratively the skills of word recognition and pronunciation.

I noticed that there were no books available for learners to read. The classroom was not conducive enough for learning. The reason I say that is because there were a few old books, and a few unattractive charts displayed on a wall. It is evident that shortage of resources may cause difficulties in teaching and learning of children.

In the school, books, including reading and writing activity books are unavailable. From these observations I could conclude that both teachers work very hard for the benefit of the learners of the poor rural community. They always try something to assist these learners (who are black South Africans) in a multi-grade school in a rural setting.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the analysed data was presented and discussed according to five themes. It is important to highlight that both teachers regarded multi-grade teaching as important and needing more attention for it to function effectively. Teachers highlighted that their major problem is that they were not trained as multi-grade teachers. There is a need for them to get proper training in multi-grade context.

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## **Chapter Five: Summary of Findings and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the experiences of teachers who teach multi-grade classes in rural settings. Furthermore, recommendations are made based on findings of the study.

### **5.2 Summary of findings**

There were both challenges and opportunities that arose from the findings and are discussed in this section. This answers the critical question ‘What are the challenges and opportunities presented to multi-grade teachers in schools/classes in rural settings?’ Findings revealed that teachers in multi-grade contexts experience some challenges with regard to the institution, resources, curriculum, professional status, structures that support multi-grade teaching in schools in rural settings and support from stakeholders in the rural community.

### **5.3 Institutional challenges**

Findings show that the conditions of the school are not conducive for teaching and learning to take place effectively. The two multi-grade classrooms provide many challenges relating to size, space and occupancy. The size of the school compromises efficient administration, while limited space compromises quality of engagement in effective teaching and learning. Classrooms have small, unopened, up-build windows. Classrooms are very small, and packed with boxes and office equipment and also serve as a storeroom.

Crowding presents occupancy challenges as it brings other discomforts experienced by both teachers and learners. These discomforts are as a result of packaging since classrooms also act as storerooms as explained above. The space for teachers to move about between learners when teaching and for individual attention is compromised due to crowding and packaging. Grouping of learners for discussions needs adequate space. This becomes problematic when occupancy is limited.

In the literature, UNESCO (2003 and 2005) indicated that multi-grade classes are smaller and can be established more cheaply than complete schools.

I recommend that the Department of Education allocates funds to multi-grade schools including the school in my study so that there are enough infrastructures for effective teaching and learning to take place. Teachers should also have meetings where they discuss activities they need to prioritise. To eliminate crowding and deal with the problem of space, teachers may need to consider platoon classes. This could be a solution.

#### **5.4 Resource challenges**

Findings suggest that there is a lack of resources which is one of the factors that impact on the effective delivery of multi-grade teaching in rural settings. The school does not have enough resources which include teaching and learning aids, reading and activity books, stationery and others.

The literature reviewed shows that lack of resources is a problem affecting most multi-grade schools in rural areas across the globe. CMGE (2010) and Emerging Voices (2005) argue that the unavailability of resources which are human and material in schools in rural settings is a major problem.

I recommend that there should be a budget that is allocated for multi-grade schools to enable them to buy enough resources and ensure efficient delivery of education. The Department of Education should design required graded resource materials and teacher support materials for multi-grade classrooms. Teachers need to be encouraged to adopt team teaching strategies so that they become familiar with how they can handle the problem of insufficient supply/availability of resources. Sharing of resources may be maximised as a result of team teaching.

#### **5.5 Curriculum challenges**

The curriculum that teachers implemented was primarily intended for mono-grade schools. Teachers were struggling with adjusting mono-grade curriculum to suit multi-grade classes because there was no assistance or guidance by the departmental officials or supervisors. This has created problems as they had to spend time comparing material for two grades to get

activities for different levels of learners. The syllabus that they used was not structured for multi-grade classes.

The literature I reviewed indicated that most countries have nationally prescribed curricula which are almost the same for primary schools in urban and rural areas including mono-grade and multi-grade schools (Birch & Lally, 1995; Juvane, 2007). Studies have revealed that the curriculum and their associated lists of minimum learning competences have not been specifically designed for multi-grade classes. The school plan, instructional material and methodology guidelines are difficult to apply to multi-grade teaching situations by the teachers in this context.

I suggest that the Department of Education should make clear curriculum guidelines available, unpacked into components as required for multi-grade education schools or classes. Curriculum developers and policy makers could identify relevant and common policies specifically for multi-grade schooling so that multi-grade teaching is effective and teachers are supported towards innovative methods and strategies of content delivery. The curriculum may have to reflect the culture of local community so that learners can relate to what happens in their community and what they learn at school. The curriculum may also be structured such that it resembles what takes place within the community so that learners make sense of what they learn at school with their daily practices at home. This makes learning meaningful and enjoyable which may have a favourable impact on learner performance. Miller (1991b) argues that the environment in which the community lives, the history and culture and the utilisation of skilled people in the community for improving quality of education should be emphasised.

## **5.6 Professional status of teachers**

Findings indicated that participants were not trained during initial teacher education to teach in multi-grade classes. They were trained to teach in mono-grade classes. Teachers feel that they are not professionals because of the conditions in which they work. They also feel that they are undermined or neglected. Participants highlighted that in-service and pre-service training in multi-grade teaching is not offered to them. Participants confirmed that they do not know any institution that offers multi-grade courses. They feel they could register and study towards a

multi-grade teaching certificate/diploma or a degree. This could help equip them with skills and knowledge that they need to teach in multi-grade classes effectively and with confidence.

I recommend that teachers need to be trained to be specialists in multi-grade teaching. In-service and pre-service training should be facilitated by trainees who are specialists in the field of multi-grade teaching.

The literature I reviewed highlighted that there are countries that have developed training courses or modules for multi-grade teachers in both pre- and in-service training. Some countries have arrangements of preparing and supporting multi-grade teachers for effective teaching. Birch and Lally (1995) reported that in countries like Vietnam, teacher training modules for multi-grade teachers have been developed for use in teacher education institutions; in Nepal, in-service and teacher training have been conducted; in Zambia, in-service training courses in multi-grade teaching were developed; and in the Caribbean, four manuals that give guidance to multi-grade teachers were developed. These manuals cover features like classroom management, instructional strategies, planning from the curriculum, instructional materials and school and community relations.

The literature revealed that in the South African context the initial training for multi-grade teachers does not exist. However, new developments have been made regarding courses for multi-grade teachers. These are short courses and certificates for multi-grade teaching, as well as post-graduate degrees in rural education, offered by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Only one province has shown interest in multi-grade teaching by establishing these new courses to help multi-grade teachers. Each province has its own rural areas, and multi-grade schools/classes seemingly appear in all provinces, thus it would be beneficial if each province develops its own strategy to help multi-grade teachers within the province.

I suggest that institutions that have training courses for teachers who want to pursue the teaching profession could include multi-grade teaching courses as well. Professional development for multi-grade teaching should include pre-service and in-service training. There should be a specialist in multi-grade teaching to develop teachers. As it has been revealed in the literature that there is an institution which offers multi-grade courses in one province, I could suggest that

each province should liaise with institutions like universities and colleges to design programmes that include multi-grade teaching courses, as is the case at Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

### **5.7 Stakeholders and structures that support multi-grade teaching in rural schools**

To answer the research question ‘What school structures and processes support multi-grade teaching in rural settings?’ I considered stakeholders from inside and outside the school. The support to rural schools is minimal from the Department of Education, parents, community and other schools. The findings also suggested that there is little support given to multi-grade teachers by the stakeholders. Findings indicated that the management of the school did not encourage or support multi-grade teaching. They could have invited subject advisors to visit the school to guide teachers on effective ways for multi-grade teaching. They also could have sought assistance from other multi-grade schools in the district.

The Department of Education officials did not render enough support to teachers in the school. Officials could have organised workshops to assist them in planning, assessment, classroom management and other issues regarding their needs in their context. Participants highlighted that this contributed towards developing negative attitudes towards multi-grade teaching.

I suggest that the Department of Education should support all schools equally whether single or multi-grade. There should be workshops that are specifically designed for multi-grade teachers where issues of common interest and concerns are discussed.

The parents of learners did not offer much support to teachers in the school. The majority of parents of learners in the community around the school were illiterate. They usually could not assist their children with school work. Some parents do not attend meetings at school when invited by teachers to discuss the progress of their children. Only a few attended parents meetings. The majority of parents did not show willingness to involve themselves in the education of their children, for instance attending parent meetings. They put more trust and responsibility on teachers.

Considering the fact that the majority of parents are unemployed, I recommend that parents should be involved more in terms of moral support to school matters, by attending meetings and

making suggestions regarding improving education for their children than financial support. This will make parents realize that they play a significant part in the development and management of the school. Learners will also realise that their parents have an interest in their education if parents attend to matters pertaining to the school.

The literature I reviewed indicated that there appears to be lack of support for multi-grade teachers in terms of meeting their needs and those of the learners involving effective delivery of teaching and learning. It is highlighted in the literature that in Pakistan there is no concept of multi-grade teaching and no special professional preparation. Teachers who possess the Primary Teacher Certificate (PTC) are appointed for teaching at multi-grade learning schools (Birch & Lally, 1995:60).

Mulryan-Kayne (2006) noted that in most teacher education programmes, all teachers are provided with the same courses, without specific support for multi-grade teaching. She further argued that when an in-service training is offered, it is often of poor quality with inadequate support and follow up programmes available to teachers. It is further noted that multi-grade teachers, particularly in deep rural areas, are subject to particular deprivation in terms of personal and professional status (Birch & Lally, 1995). These may include salaries and promotions. They argue that there are no financial incentives for teachers to take promotional positions in isolated multi-grade situations. Also there are no promotional incentives for positions in multi-grade education.

It was noted that support structures, which were necessary to ensure that quality teaching in multi-grade teaching occurred, were not available. Support structures could include multi-grade teaching workshops, subject advisors who are specialists in multi-grade teaching, multi-grade courses offered by universities or colleges, multi-grade learners' activity books and teachers' guides, and parental support, which could include assisting learners with homework and school visits to discuss the progress of learners. There were no promotional incentives linked to multi-grade teaching positions. Birch and Lally (1995) argue that many national systems have inadequate provision for supervision of multi-grade teaching, to the disadvantage of the system in terms of improving the quality of its education, and to teachers in terms of promotion and the like. The literature also highlighted that in first world or industrialised countries, they have rendered full support to multi-grade schools. Multi-grade teachers were trained and supported for

effective classroom practice. Thus they have confidence in multi-grade teaching and their attitudes towards it are more positive.

I recommend that more workshops specifically designed for multi-grade teaching need to be organised. Ongoing support after workshops should be considered for effective multi-grade teaching. Clusters could be formulated for multi-grade teachers to be able to meet and discuss relevant issues, brainstorm, share ideas and help one another on issues regarding multi-grade teaching in schools. As motivation to encourage students to choose multi-grade teaching as a career in future, there could be incentives specifically set aside for multi-grade teaching. That could develop willingness for novice teachers to work in rural areas, for experienced teachers to move to multi-grade schools, and those who wish to pursue teaching as a profession to study in these areas. This could help in the change of teachers' attitudes towards teaching in multi-grade classes.

Teachers should be trained in approaches that help to develop relations between the school and the community/parents. Parents need to be involved in the teaching and learning of their children. They could be asked to act as a resource, the curriculum may extend out into the community or they could be asked to support the school in other ways. This could help them see the need to attend meetings at school when they feel they are important and recognised in the activities of the school.

### **5.8 Opportunities available in multi-grade teaching in rural settings**

Findings indicated that there were few opportunities compared to challenges in multi-grade teaching in rural settings. There were promotional posts advertised per each academic year. These included office based educator promotions and school based promotions for single-grade teaching. Participants have never heard of or seen multi-grade educators' promotional posts.

Participants highlighted that there were opportunities on the side of the learners. The grouping of learners across different grades was beneficial for them, both socially and cognitively. The advantages for children in mixed age settings encouraged the development of wider friendship groups. Learners remained with one teacher for a two year period which could help the weaker learners when repeating what had been taught in the previous year and enable them to catch up.

Furthermore, weaker learners in the upper grade may easily catch up because some teaching was geared towards the younger learners. The younger group was easily motivated by the older group. Multi-grade learners have opportunities to interact together as mixed ability groups. This leads to more co-operative learners and reduces low achievement.

The literature I reviewed indicated that there are opportunities available for teachers. Miller (1991b) argues that multi-grade classes were usually small size classes/grades, compensates many instructional difficulties. Age-wise heterogeneous groups are natural bodies where the members educate each other. The older learners in combined grades may function as instructors to younger ones. Teachers may have time to perform or complete the other tasks while learners are working on their own. According to Berry (2001), the grouping of learners across grade and age boundaries is beneficial for children, both socially and cognitively.

I recommend that in multi-grade contexts there should be promotional posts which include heads of departments, principals, subject advisors and other senior level promotional posts specifically for multi-grade teaching. There also should be incentives available for multi-grade teachers in rural settings. The fact that multi-grade teachers hold positions of teaching and managing different classes, I recommend that there should be incentives for both positions. The reason for these recommendations is that multi-grade teachers should enjoy all the benefits that all other teachers enjoy. They should not feel that they are isolated or disadvantaged.

### **5.9 Strategies used by teachers when teaching multi-grade classes**

To answer the research question ‘How teachers teach multi-grade classes in rural contexts’, I conducted interviews with participants and classroom observations. Findings from both interviews and observations indicated that there are different strategies that multi-grade teachers used when teaching in their classrooms. Strategies included grouping of learners, peer teaching and the whole class teaching and allocation of activities as per level of different groups.

For group teaching, mixed-ability groups were used as it shows that it could remove shame and hesitation among boys and girls in group settings. In group teaching a monitor or group leader was used to monitor or guide exercise based activities for their group. Group leaders were changed after a certain period for all learners to have an opportunity to lead the group. They all

learned and acquired leadership skills as they practiced being leaders in groups. Teachers mentioned that they used different strategies as the level of intellectual development of learners guided their practice.

Peer teaching is when one learner teaches or assists another. This may be advantageous to learners who have learning difficulties, particularly reading for learners who are in lower grades. A learner teaches another learner by reading with him/her while pointing at words. Learners understand one another much better in a relaxed environment as they usually fear teachers and are sometimes shy to express their views. When peer teaching occurs, it could be easy for learners to grasp new concepts, as they motivate and encourage one another. This technique may encourage learners to compete and surpass one another.

During the whole class teaching lessons teachers give instructions all learners for both grades at the same time pertaining to the topic of that lesson. Activities were given to learners after discussion depending on the level of the group. Sometimes it happened that after giving instruction to both groups of two grades, the teacher gave the first group activities and continued teaching the second group to give more guidance according to the level of activities to be completed by them.

The literature highlighted a study conducted by Miller (1991a) which reveals that schools have different ways of organising and teaching multi-grade classes. He has found that in some schools in lower level classes, teachers organised instructions around key concepts that could be introduced to all learners and then individualised to different levels in the class. For example the teacher explains his lesson to everyone (all levels group) at the same time. The other group consisting of the young ones are given worksheets to do and given instruction to follow when completing the task. The teacher continues to give instruction to the other group on the same concept but at the more advanced level as the first group and follows the task of the second group.

In other schools, teachers use two phase approach to group instruction. In the first phase, they introduce a concept to the entire class, across all grade levels. They argue that it allows for cross-grade interaction with the concurrent benefit of younger learners learning from older ones as they

participate equally in thinking, answering posed questions, reading, brainstorming etc. It is also more efficient of teacher's time.

In the second phase teachers had learners engaged in closed task activities at their respective level. Special events like holidays, field trips and activities that does not require strict grouping were organised around total class participation. They argue that this allows each and every member of the group to contribute and share equally. They learn to be responsible and self-directed, work independently, provide help to others and also receive help from others.

Birch & Lally (1995) have identified some of these teaching and learning strategies in multi-grade teaching that are best described as methods, techniques or devices used to enhance teaching to facilitate learning. The strategies include grouping of learners, team teaching, peer teaching, and innovative teaching as well as community involvement for multi-grade teaching to be effective. These techniques have been discussed in detail in the literature review. I recommend that teachers could be developed in strategies of teaching which include peer teaching, team teaching and subject teaching. The reason for my recommendation is that these strategies have been used in other countries with multi-grade teaching classes and have shown a high success rate.

## **5.10 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a summary of the findings and recommendations for this study which aimed to explore experiences of teachers teaching multi-grade classes in rural settings. The overall findings indicated that there is a need for teachers to be supported by means of conducting workshops, training and ongoing support. There is a need for resources including classrooms, school equipment, books and the like for effective teaching and learning to take place. Participants highlighted that there are opportunities in multi-grade teaching, provided it is supported fully by stakeholders and guidance by the Department of Education. Learners from rural communities could benefit from the teaching and learning encounter if resources are user friendly and make meaning to them.

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## APPENDIX A

13/05/2010

Informed consent

Dear Research Participant

This letter serves to request your participation in the study described below. A brief description of how the study will be conducted is provided.

I am a student studying at University of KwaZulu-Natal. As part of the requirements for this degree, I will have to submit a dissertation. I have chosen to do my dissertation on the topic: Teachers teaching multi-grade classrooms in rural settings. The study focuses on the experiences of teaching in multi-grade classrooms, challenges and opportunities that teachers who teach multi-grade classes may have.

The reason to conduct this study is to understand how teachers engage in multi-grade classes. This study will also create new spaces for us to engage with debates, understandings and knowledge of multi-grade teaching experiences. The study will also inform the stakeholders on strategies to implement multi-grade teaching effectively.

Part of the study will include producing of data about the experiences of teaching in multi-grade classrooms. You were selected based on the information that you are multi-grade teachers in rural contexts. Data will be generated using interviews and observations. The interviews will be audio taped to assist in capturing data produced during interview. Observations will be conducted in your classrooms for the researcher to observe practicality of teaching in multi-grade classrooms.

It is important that you as a participant for this study, understand that:

1. Your identity will remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms when reporting on the results.
2. If at any time during the period of the research you wish to withdraw, you can do so.
3. You are not obliged to answer any question you do not wish.

I can be contacted on 0835862876 or [902539679@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:902539679@ukzn.ac.za) or you may contact my Research Supervisor, Prof Labby Ramrathan on 031 2608065 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

If you fully understand the above and wish to continue to participate in the research study, please complete the consent form below.

Yours sincerely

Thandazile I. Ngubane

Student No. 902539679

Persal No.61271519

### **CONSENT FORM**

I------(name & surname in full) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this documents and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project entitled: *Teachers teaching in multi-grade context in rural settings*.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I desire.

Signature-----.

Date-----.

## APPENDIX B

18 Berrio Avenue

Kingsburgh

4126

13 May 2010

The Principal

Sbongujeza Primary School

Mthwalume

4280

Dear Madam

### **REQUEST FOR A PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL**

This letter serves to request a permission to conduct a study in your school. A brief description of how the study will be conducted is provided.

I am a student studying at University of KwaZulu-Natal. As part of the requirements for this study, I have to submit a dissertation. I have chosen to do my dissertation on the topic: *Teachers teaching multi-grade classrooms in rural settings*. This study focuses on the experiences of teaching in multi-grade classrooms, challenges and opportunities that teachers who teach multi-grade classes may have.

The reason to conduct this study is to understand how teachers engage in multi-grade classes. This study will also create new spaces for us to engage with debates, understanding and knowledge of multi-grade teaching experiences. The study will also inform the stakeholders on strategies to implement multi-grade teaching effectively.

Part of the study will include producing of data about the experiences of teaching in multi-grade classrooms. Your school is selected based on information that you are multi-grade school in rural settings. Data will be generated through interviews and observations. The interviews will be audio-taped to assist in capturing data produced during interviews. Observations will be conducted in classrooms for the researcher to observe practicality of teaching in multi-grade classes.

The information that will be provided will be used for research purpose only.

I can be contacted on 0835862876 or [902539679@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:902539679@ukzn.ac.za) or you may contact my Research Supervisor, Prof. Labby Ramrathan on 031 2608065 at the University of KwaZulu- Natal.

Thanking you

Yours faithfully

Ngubane Thandazile Iris

Persal No.61271519

Student No. 209539679

## APPENDIX C

26 April 2010

The Superintendent General  
KZN Department of Education  
Private Bag x3437  
Pietermaritzburg  
3200

Dear Sir

### **REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON MULTI-GRADE TEACHING**

This letter serves to request permission to conduct research at Sbongujeza Primary School in Port Shepstone district.

I am a student studying towards a Masters degree in Education specialising in Teacher Professional Development, at the University of KwaZulu- Natal. As part of the requirements of this degree, I will have to submit a dissertation. I have chosen to do my dissertation on the topic: *Teachers teaching multi-grade classrooms in rural settings.*

The study focuses on the experiences, challenges and opportunities that teachers who teach multi-grade classrooms may have. The reason for conducting this study is to understand how teachers engage pedagogically in multi-grade classrooms. A deeper theoretical understanding through research will provide new insight into multi-grade teaching within South Africa. The study will allow me to gain deeper insight to the phenomenon of multi-grade teaching so that it may enhance my teaching abilities in rural contexts. The study will also create new spaces for me and participants to engage with debates, understandings and knowledge in multi-grade teaching phenomenon.

Participants in this study are primarily teachers and not learners. They will be no need to ask consent from parents since I shall be working with adults.

Data will be produced using interviews with teachers who teach multi-grade classrooms in rural contexts. The interview will be audiotape to assist in capturing of data produced during interview.

In addition observation will be conducted for the researcher to have an understanding of the practicality of multi-grade teaching in classrooms.

The information that will be provided will be used for research purposes only.

Thank you

Yours faithfully

Ngubane T.I.

Student no. 209539679

Persal no. 61271519

Cell no. 0835862876

Email: [209539679@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:209539679@ukzn.ac.za)

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Supervisor: Prof Labby Ramrathan  
School of Education and Development  
Faculty of education  
Edgewood Campus  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Tel: 031 2608065  
Cell: 0826749829  
Email: ramrathanp@ukzn.ac.za

## **APPENDIX D**

### Interview Schedule

#### **Experiences of teachers**

1. How long have you been teaching in the foundation phase?
2. How long have you been teaching multi-grade classrooms?
3. Have you been trained to teach in multi-grade context?
4. Tell me more about your educational attainments?
5. What do you understand about multi-grade teaching?

#### **Challenges and opportunities in teaching multi-grade classrooms**

1. Describe challenges you encounter in teaching multi-grade classrooms?
2. Describe opportunities you as multi-grade teachers may have?

#### **Structures supporting teachers who teach multi-grade classrooms?**

1. Describe the support you get from the school as teachers who teach multi-grade classrooms?  
(Management, colleagues, parents of learners, governing body and others)

## APPENDIX E

### Observation Schedule

Observation of teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms

**Critical Outcome 1:** How do teachers teach in multi-grade classrooms?

Criteria	Frequency %				
	0	1-25	26-50	51-75	76-100
Lecturing different grades at the same time					
Classroom management					
demonstration					
Using of teaching aids					
Independent class work					
Group and peer works					
Assessing learners individual and groups					
Managing different grades groups at a time					



## APPENDIX F



**MRS T I NGUBANE**  
**18 BERRIO AVENUE**  
**KINGSBURGH**  
**4126**

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar  
Date: 12/05/2010  
Reference: 0038/2010

### PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW LEARNERS AND EDUCATORS

The above matter refers.

Permission is hereby granted to interview Departmental Officials, learners and educators in selected schools of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal subject to the following conditions:

1. You make all the arrangements concerning your interviews.
2. Educators' programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, educators and schools are not identifiable in any way from the results of the interviews.
5. Your interviews are limited only to targeted schools.
6. A brief summary of the interview content, findings and recommendations is provided to my office.
7. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers and principals of schools where the intended interviews are to be conducted.

The KZN Department of education fully supports your commitment to research: **Teachers teaching multi-grade classrooms in rural settings.**

It is hoped that you will find the above in order.

Best Wishes

**R Cassius Lubisi, (PhD)**  
**Superintendent-General**

...dedicated to service and performance  
beyond the call of duty.

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL : Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa

PHYSICAL: Office G25, 188 Pietermaritz Street; Metropolitan Building; PIETERMARITZBURG 3201

TEL: Tel:+27 33 341 8610/8611 | Fax: +27 33 341 8612 | E-mail: [sibusiso.alwar@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:sibusiso.alwar@kzndoe.gov.za) / [sibusiso.sikhakhane@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:sibusiso.sikhakhane@kzndoe.gov.za)

## APPENDIX G



**kzn education**

Department:  
Education  
KWAZULU-NATAL

**MRS T I NGUBANE  
18 BERRIO AVENUE  
KINGSBURGH  
4126**

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Date: 12/05/2010

Reference: 0038/2010

### **RESEARCH PROPOSAL: TEACHERS TEACHING MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS IN RURAL SETTINGS.**

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the attached list has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educator programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The investigation is to be conducted from 12 May 2010 to 12 May 2011.
6. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s) please contact Mr Sibusiso Alwar at the contact numbers above.
7. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal of the school where the intended research is to be conducted.
8. Your research will be limited to the schools submitted.
9. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Resource Planning.

...dedicated to service and performance  
beyond the call of duty.

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL : Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa

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