

**GRAPPLING WITH LARGE CLASSES:
EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATORS, HEADS OF DEPARTMENT AND
PRINCIPALS IN THREE RURAL SCHOOLS IN KWAZULU NATAL.**

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DEDICATION

To my dear parents,

The late Devendra (David) Kumar and Russi

MAGANAL

For inspiring me to study

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis, presented to the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) as a partial requirement for my Master of Education degree is my own original work. All sources have been acknowledged and referenced. The research was undertaken under the supervision of Dr.V. Chikoko.

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Gayatri (Grace) Baruth

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Date

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ABSTRACT

The South African Education system has gone through much transformation and seen significant changes in the past decade in order to provide quality education and reformation. However, many under-resourced schools, such as rural schools, still face unacceptably high teacher-pupil ratios and large classes in their schools (Prinsloo, 2006). Rathogwa (2006) confirms that rural schools have been historically disadvantaged with limited resources and poor infrastructure.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions and experiences of educators, Heads of department (HODs) and principals about how they coped with large classes. The study was conducted in three rural primary schools situated in the Inanda Area. The study adopts a qualitative research approach. Within this approach, a case study design was adopted. The data collection methods comprise of observations and semi-structured interviews with educators, HODs and principals.

The overall findings of the research show that these schools are faced with a plethora of challenges because of their large classes. The findings show that large classes result in poor achievement levels, poor quality of work and disruptive behaviour amongst the learners. Furthermore the educators are faced with heavy workloads which increase teacher apathy, teacher stress and low teacher morale amongst the educators.

The schools attempt many strategies as a means to overcome their challenges. Some schools employ the following strategies: they have a strict code of conduct; they reward appropriate behaviour; they counsel difficult learners, they engage in co-operative learning, they employ qualified staff members and engage in group work. From the data collected, principals motivate staff members by having weekly staff meetings to resolve their staff conflicts. Moreover some schools have more strategies than other schools.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

HOD	Head of Department
PPN	Post Provisioning Norm
SGB	School Governing Body
DOE	Department of Education
NCES	National Centre for Education Statistics

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1. Background of the Study

This study is about how educators, HODs and principals cope with large classes and explores their experiences and strategies in large classes in rural schools in KwaZulu Natal. Large classes have resulted from the historical background of South Africa. Prior to 1994, South Africa was under an apartheid government. South African Society, under the apartheid rule, was considered by Marais (2001.6) as one of the “most unequal societies on earth.”

White South Africans were the ‘only beneficiaries of every policy within the apartheid regime’ (Seekings et al, 2006.55). This emphasized differential and elitist education. The apartheid government segregated the education system for the different racial groups. As a result, the education system was deeply rooted with inequalities, imbalances and injustices (Steyn, 2003). The past apartheid years affected the state of the rural schools. One of the injustices of the past apartheid government included high learner-teacher ratios in the previously disadvantaged schools. The learner-teacher ratios were aimed to benefit whites only. The table below shows the average learner-teacher ratios for the different races, prior to 1994.

Table 1.1. Average learner-teacher ratios prior to 1994

RACE	Learner-Educator
Whites	20:1
Blacks	75:1
Indians	35:1
Coloureds	40:1

Source:SAIRR(1996)

The first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 brought an end to apartheid. The new democratic government committed itself to eliminate all inequalities of the past and ensure an efficient, equitable and quality education for all South Africans (Steyn, 2003). The government introduced many policies that underpinned social justice, equality, equity, democracy, human rights, non-racism, non-sexism and accountability, in an effort to transform and restructure our former education system (Jansen, 2001).

One of those policies was the Post Provisioning Norm Policy (PPN) that was implemented to alleviate the injustices of the past by lowering the learner-teacher ratios in all South African schools. The Post Provisioning Norm (PPN) is a nationally approved formula or model that is used by governments to calculate the number of state-paid educator posts in a school. This ratio is derived by dividing the number of learners by the number of state-paid educators at a given school (Department of Education, 1998).

Officially the Department of Education (2009) claimed the provincial learner-teacher ratio in KwaZulu Natal to be 31:1. Therefore, the expectation of the number of learners per class would be averaging 31 to 40 learners per class. However, when the model calculated the number of state-paid educator posts per school, it failed to take into account the number of management staff members who do not take on a full teaching load. Moreover, the Post Provisioning Norm (PNN) failed to take into account the fluctuating learner enrolment and the varied curricula offered at each school (Jansen, 2001). As a result, schools were appointed with fewer educators. It became challenging for schools that were now faced with overcrowded classes and a diversity of learning needs. I contend that, although this policy aimed to address the inequalities of the past, it failed to be effective at school level, as it did not take into consideration the number of manager posts and changes in enrolment year after year as well as the varied curricula offered at different schools (Mahamed, 2001).

The rebirth of the South African school system brought in decentralisation and the notion of self-managing schools. The School Governing Body (SGB) was now given the power to levy school fees (Department of Education, 1998). This gave schools more power and autonomy to resource themselves with minimum support from the provincial departments. On one hand, many affluent schools were able to employ additional staff from the high school fees they levied, whereas the previously disadvantaged black schools suffered, as parents were not able to pay school fees in these poverty-stricken areas. As a result, the previously disadvantaged

schools were faced with the insurmountable problem of fewer educators and large number of learners, which inadvertently resulted in large classes (UNESCO, 2005).

This impacted greatly on rural schools that were already under-resourced: without financial funds and lacking qualified educators. I asserted that transformation in South Africa since 1994 has been very slow, especially in quality delivery, resulting in South African Education still being in a state of crisis (Jansen, 2001). Furthermore, large classes were also impacted by the rebirth of the new South African Education System in 1994, as the new education legislations moved towards decentralisation and the notion of self-managing schools (Bush et al, 2005). As a result, schools are still in a state of crisis with large classes, even though it is over a decade since apartheid has ended (Seekings et al, 2006).

1.2. Purpose of the Study

South Africa has fought to provide access for every learner and now the focus is shifting to try and improve each learner's success. Although access is being provided, there is still a desperate outcry that the quality of education in South Africa is low and large classes are still a challenge to quality education. Our South African education emphasises quality education and the question that arises is whether quality education can be achieved in large classes. Given this outcry for quality education, my research endeavours to provide an in-depth understanding of the challenges that arise in large classes. The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of educators, HODs and principals who face large classes. I have engaged in this study to investigate the impact of large classes on the quality of education in South Africa.

Given this background to my study, the reason for pursuing it is because rural schools have often been overlooked and neglected by the government. Therefore, this study provides an opportunity for educators, HODs and principals to describe their experiences in large classes in rural schools. I intend that my proposed study will better inform national and regional policy makers of the financial and professional implications of large classes on the principals, HODs and educators. It will also create an awareness of the plight of rural education in the South African school context.

As an educator, I have personally experienced teaching in large classes and found it very challenging with regard to providing quality education to my learners. Due to my experiences, I have decided to move away from teaching in large classes, to teach in schools with smaller classes. However, I have always been interested in finding out how other educators, HODs and principals grapple with large classes. This study will be able to provide insight, guidelines and in-depth understanding to other educators, HODs and principals in a similar situation.

1.3. Context of the Study

The study was located within the context of large classes, with particular focus on three rural schools in the Inanda District of KwaZulu-Natal. The schools are all situated in the same geographical area. Rural schools are defined as schools distanced from towns, having limited access to services and facilities such as electricity, water and sanitations (Rathogwa, 2006). Furthermore, they were sparsely populated with no proper roads and bridges (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). Rural schools are outside the urban and peri-urban areas. I have provided the details of the three schools in Chapter 4.

1.4. Focus of the Study

The focus of this study was to explore the extent to which schools were coping with large classes.

The researcher will focus on the following research questions:

1. What key challenges do schools face with large classes?
2. What strategies, if any, do schools use to cope with large classes?

1.5. Research Methods

I have used a qualitative research study to investigate the experiences of principals, HODs and educators in large classes. This research entailed a case study. The details of the methodology will be explained in Chapter 3.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

In a small-scale qualitative study of three rural schools, my study focused on how schools were grappling with large classes and therefore could not be generalized to the entire body of rural schools. The major disadvantage of this study was that the sample was small, being limited to these three schools and could not represent the entire population. Hence the findings could not be generalised. Moreover, the opinions and experiences of the participants may vary. Thus this study has methodological and theoretical limitations. However, I emphasise quality rather than quantity and endeavour to provide in-depth information from this small sample.

1.7. Structure of the Study

The project has been divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter providing a brief overview of the background of large classes and their impact on education, as well as the purpose, focus and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 examines the literature related to large classes, referring to the rural context in particular. The chapter examined the characteristics of large classes and rural schools; implications of large classes on the quality of education; possible strategies used in large classes; school effectiveness and school improvement theories as well as use of effective leadership in large classes.

Chapter 3 presents the research design, the participants, research instruments, process of data analysis, sampling procedures and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of data and the actual challenges and strategies that school managers and educators experience in large classes.

Chapter 5 summarises the findings of the research and makes conclusions and recommendations.

1.8. Conclusion

This research aimed to look at the experiences and strategies of principals, HODs and educators who faced large classes. The next chapter examines the literature on large classes, focusing specifically on the literature directly connected to this study. It is suggested in the literature that if schools are to be transformed into effective learning organisations, then there needs to be greater emphasis on school effectiveness, school improvement and effective leadership theories. Therefore, in the next chapter we take a closer look at the literature studies and theories that are associated with an effective learning school.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The issue of classroom sizes has been researched for many decades. The aim of this study was to investigate how educators, HODs and principals coped with large classes. The research questions investigated the experiences, perceptions, challenges and strategies of school managers and educators in large classes. The literature review provides a summary of existing literature written about large classes. This chapter reviews literature on theories such as school effectiveness, school improvement and effective leadership. I intend identifying its characteristics and its contribution to schools grappling with large classes.

2.2. The Large Class

I have surveyed literature about large classes. A class size is characterised by the number of learners in a class. According to NCES (2000) a class is large when the number of learners in a class is larger than the number of learners a class is designed to accommodate. In South Africa we are guided by the post provisioning norm. According to the post provisioning norm, the provincial learner-teacher ratio in KwaZulu Natal was 1:31 (Department of Education, 2009).

According to Mchunu (2009), MEC for Education in KwaZulu Natal, the learner-teacher ratio has been reduced from 34:1 in 2004 to 31:1 in 2009. That means the average number of learners in schools has been reduced. However, Mchunu (2009) says that, even though the learner-teacher ratio has been reduced, South African schools are still faced with the problem of large classes. Despite the Post Provisioning Norm policy's aim to lower the learner-teacher ratios in all South African schools, schools are still facing large classes and teaching overloads (Department of Education, 2009). Therefore it must be pointed out that the learner-teacher ratios were no indication of the actual class sizes at school level. Another important factor that has led to large classes is the lack of infrastructure at previously disadvantaged schools (Butera *et al*, 2005).

Internationally, the World Education Report cited in UNESCO (2005) it has pointed out that the world's primary school-age population has grown from 600 million to 648 million. Due to a phenomenal increase in the population, this has inadvertently exerted tremendous financial pressure on the governments. As a result of governments' not being able to cover the rising costs in education, schools were faced with fewer educators and increasing numbers of learners (Lee *et al*, 2002). The staff complements have been affected by the financial constraints of the governments. Schools could not afford to employ additional educators to cater for their growing needs, hence creating large numbers in the classroom. Moreover, there are some developing countries that have up to 100 learners per class (Benbow *et al*, 2007). Santiago (2001) points out that teacher shortages and large classes are worsening in Sweden, Germany and New Zealand.

In essence, rapid population growths, reduction of school fees and migration have resulted in overcrowded classes in under-resourced schools (Lee *et al*, 2002). This has created a poor learning environment. According to International Development in USA, a large class is defined as any class with 40 or more pupils in one class, giving a learner-teacher ratio of 40:1 (Benbow *et al*, 2007). Research has shown that large classes have been a national and international problem as they hindered the quality of teaching and learning (Lee *et al*, 2002). The UK International Development pointed out that more and more parents would have to cover the rising costs in education, as schools are strained financially to meet the growing needs of the nation (Benbow *et al*, 2007).

Nationally, in this country, Chuenyane (2008) confirmed that there are more than 6 000 schools out of the 27 000 South African schools that have a class size of 45 or more learners per class. There are more than 12 000 classrooms needed in our South African schools (Department of Education, 2008). There is a greater need for additional classrooms especially in rural schools (Appelgate, 2008). So what we are experiencing here in South Africa with large classes is indeed a national, and even an international, problem. Drawing from the above national and international definitions, I define a large class as any class with 40 or more learners. This forms a framework for my study.

2.3. The Rural School

Rural schools have been considered as historically disadvantaged schools as they were neglected during the political and educational struggles in South Africa prior to 1994. Rathogwa (2006) states that rural schools were historically disadvantaged with limited resources and poor infrastructures. Rural schools also include farm and church schools in poor, isolated and impoverished areas (Appelgate, 2008). It has been reported that at least 60% of black schooling takes place in rural schools in South Africa (UNESCO, 2005). Therefore, rural schools are characterised as previously historically disadvantaged schools as they have limited parental support; high learner absenteeism; inadequately trained staff members; lack of resources and materials; poor infrastructures, high failure rates; limited access to the area and lack of classroom facilities (Appelgate, 2008).

Furthermore, they are in isolated, sparsely populated communities, with no proper roads and bridges (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). Rural schools are termed “rural” because of their remoteness. Rural schools are defined as rural because they are poverty-stricken, have little or no access to resources, lack parental support and a proper school culture (Appelgate, 2008). These aspects have serious implications for the quality of education. The Human Sciences Research Council and Education Policy Consortium (2005) reported that rural schools have been grossly neglected by the South African government. The literature review has revealed that rural schools lag up to seven years behind the urban schools (ibid). Moreover, the consequences of the inequitable distribution of educational resources to previously disadvantaged schools before 1994 greatly disadvantaged these rural schools. Rathogwa (2006) argued that rural school education takes place under trees due to an overcrowding in classes and lack of classroom structures.

Drawing from the above national and international definitions, I define a rural school as a historically disadvantaged school that lacks facilities, is poorly resourced and found in poverty-stricken areas. South Africa has urban, peri-urban and rural schools. Rural schools are outside the urban and peri-urban areas. In my study I went to three rural schools.

2.4. School Managers

In the context of my study, school managers refer to principals and deputy principals.

2.5. Implications of Large Classes for Quality Education

Large classes have been an on-going issue in the education system. There are more than 100 empirical studies that have been done on the issue of large classes and their impact on the quality of education. According to Tennessee's Project STAR research study that comprised more than 12 000 pupils over a period of 10 years, it was concluded that smaller classes in primary grades are academically beneficial and have a positive impact on learner behaviour (Finn *et al*, 1999).

Gibbs (1992) concluded that large classes have limited teacher and learner interactions, creating fewer hands-on experiences for learners, and that this has resulted in underachievement. Authors Rivera-Batiz (1995) and Marti (1995) report that between 2% and 9% fewer students passed reading and mathematics proficiency tests in large classes compared with learners in smaller classes.

According to a large-scale longitudinal study by Blatchford (2003) in Britain, it has been concluded that learners achieve better in literacy and mathematics in smaller classes compared with large classes. Large classes impact on the quality of education in our South African schools. In large classes educators complained about the poor quality control and the lack of group cohesion that has resulted in low achievement levels. Authors such as Belsky (2004), Booth-LaForce (2004), Bradley (2004), Brownwell (2004), Campbell (2004) and Clark-Stewart (2004) all agree that the poor economic conditions of the learners such as large classes have resulted in poor performance in learners and limited their educational opportunities. In other words, smaller classes would result in higher achievement levels.

Research has shown that smaller classes improve the learner performance in mathematics, technical studies and reading in the first four years of schooling compared with larger classes (Vally and Spreen, 1998). Greater emotional support and higher quality instructional education are being offered by educators in smaller classes, thus learner performance has improved in smaller classes compared with learners in large classes (Finn *et al*, 1999). Research has shown that a learner-teacher ratio of 25:1 contributes towards higher learner achievements in the class (Vadi, 1998). Learners in large classes also experience problems in visibility and acoustics, creating further learning problems (Jenkins, 1992). In other words,

educators are able to spend more time with learners who are facing difficulties in a smaller class compared with learners in large classes.

Educators have expressed their frustrations and difficulties in catering for the individual needs of the learners in large classes and this has created frustrations amongst the learners (Oliver, 2006). We can therefore say that large classes impact the culture of teaching and learning negatively (Jenkins, 1992). This has resulted in the learners showing little interest in their work and has contributed to the low achievement levels amongst the learners (Thurlow, 2003). Educators are faced with a diversity of learners in large classes and they do not know how to handle the learning needs, thus creating teacher stress and teacher apathy (Oliver, 2006).

It becomes very difficult for educators to get to know the needs of their learners and therefore, little or no individualised attention is given to learners in large classes (Blatchford, 2003). As a result, the relationship between the learners and educators is strained and no meaningful relationships are developing. Learners, especially with learning needs, are easily frustrated in large classes as they require the educator's attention (Blatchford *et al*, 2003). It is frustrating for learners who cannot get the attention of the educators. To add to this problem, many of the learners come from dysfunctional homes where they lack parental support and look to educators for emotional support. This creates a negative learning atmosphere as learners do not get the attention and support of the educators. As a result, behavioural problems, high absenteeism and high failure rates arise amongst learners in large classes (Gibbs, 1992).

Research has shown that educators experience disciplinary problems in teaching large classes. Learners experiencing a lack of space in the classroom feel cramped, frustrated and stressed (Oliver, 2006). Research has shown that learners in large classes, who are easily frustrated and congested with the overcrowding in the classroom, become despondent, discouraged and have a negative attitude towards school (Gibbs and Jenkins, 1992). This inadvertently leads to disciplinary problems, whereas in smaller classes, learners are less frustrated and are more attentive to the learning instructions. In this way educators are able to maintain discipline (Belsky, 2004). Furthermore, teachers spend more time on classroom behavioural management than instructional time, thus affecting the quality of learning (Gibbs and Jenkins, 1992)

Blatchford (2003) argues that educators in smaller classes interact more frequently and personally with the learners and that this has maintained discipline, whereas in large classes the learners relate extensively to their peers instead of the educator, resulting in chaos and inappropriate behaviour in the classroom. (Blatchford, 2003; Bassett, 2003; Goldstein, 2003; Martin, 2003). Educators have complained that they are unable to maintain discipline in large classes. Furthermore, educators say they have more contact with learners in a smaller class, and are therefore able to handle the disciplinary problems that arise compared with in large classes (Belsky, 2004; Booth-LaForce, 2004; Bradley, 2004; Brownell, 2004; Campbell, 2004; Cox, 2004; Friedman, 2004). Research has shown that learners in large classes are inattentive, have behavioural problems and show little interest in their work (Finn *et al*, 2005).

Authors such as Belsky (2004); Booth-LaForce (2004); Bradley (2004); Brownell (2004) Gibbs (1992) and Jenkins (1992) all agree that large classes place tremendous pressure on learners, teachers and school managers. Research has shown that large class sizes contribute to teacher stress and undue pressure among teachers and learners (NCES, 2000). Handling large classes has resulted in high teacher absenteeism, teacher burn-out, teacher apathy and teacher stress (Gibbs and Jenkins, 1992). Due to the undue pressures in the classroom, many educators resort to staying away from schools. Principals who are already burdened with the rising financial constraint do not have the funds to employ substitute educators for the large class. As a result, many of these large classes are left unattended or are managed by a volunteer parent. All these challenges impact negatively on the culture of teaching and learning, and inadvertently lower the quality of education. Hence the quality of education is at stake in these large classes.

The debate of whether large classes impact on learner performances has been an ongoing issue and is still a controversial issue (Lee *et al*, 2007). However research has shown that the effect of class size on academic performance are also influenced by grade levels; pupils' background; subject areas; different teaching methods; pupils' characteristics and learners' ability levels (Benbow, 2007). Therefore it can be argued that large classes are not the only deterrent of quality education as there are other combined issues that affect learner performances in the classrooms such as teacher quality and reconstructed curriculum changes (Finn *et al*, 1999).

It can also be argued that large classes' can be beneficial to the schools as a whole. Research has shown that large classes assist schools financially as the number of educators will be reduced (Belsky, 2004). Furthermore large classes' benefit schools in terms of subject specialisations and resources as there are a larger number of learners that are allocated to one class (Lee *et al*, 2007). Large classes would also be beneficial to schools.

2.6. Possible Strategies used to cope with Large Classes

Gibbs & Jenkins (1992) argued that effective teachers provide support to the diversity of learners. An effective, innovative educator would be best suited for a large class. According to Moore (1998) an effective educator is one who energises the learners to learn and gain knowledge. An effective educator improvises ways to ensure learners are receiving a quality education, despite the lack of resources. In addition, effective educators monitor and maintain discipline in the classroom.

Jenkins (1992) argued that educators who face large classes need to employ structured lessons-operative learning and group work as strategies to overcome the problems related to large classes. However South African educators have argued that group work is not working in large classes (Jansen, 2001). Another strategy that is commonly used in schools is the use of small groups. Small groups promote group discussions as this gives them the opportunity to share their ideas and, in this way, make sense of their ideas. It can be controlled by the educator and this makes the educator available to them. Furthermore, group work involves reflections and collaboration (Whitaker, 1984).

Lecturing has been another method that has been used by many educators in large classes as it saved time and promoted instructional teaching (Moore, 1998). Demonstrating experiments and allowing learners to observe also aroused the learners' attention in the class (Whitaker, 1984). Peer teaching was highly recommended by authors such as Gibbs & Jenkins (1992) and Whitaker (1984) as learners were able to express themselves freely to one another. The use of field trips and outdoor activities helped educators use the space inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, a variety of assessment tools were used to overcome the heavy workload and alleviate the marking (Gibbs & Jenkins, 1992). Furthermore, whole class teaching, with frequent testing and structured projects, was among the strategies employed (Gibbs, 1992).

Benbow *et al* (2007) confirmed that team teaching, peer teaching and shift instruction were ways to overcome problems associated with large classes. In order for a school to become a learning organisation, shared teacher collaboration and a productive learning culture is imperative (Cailtz, 2002). A closer pupil-teacher interaction is imperative to meeting the educational needs of the learners (Kyriacou, 1994).

Large classes pose many challenges to schools. Therefore, school managers need to look at ways to deal with the situation. In order for schools to cope with the many changes in our South African school context, they need to become effective learning schools. I would like to look at the theoretical framework of what constitutes an effective learning school. I will be discussing the theories of school effectiveness and school improvement, coupled with effective leadership.

2.7. Theoretical Frameworks

2.7.1. School effectiveness

School effectiveness is useful to my study as it provides a wealth of knowledge when dealing with large classes. To promote progress in our South African schools, school effectiveness is the tool used to advance this process. Research has shown that school effectiveness attempts to examine related factors that explain the different achievement levels at schools, as it focuses on learner learning processes (Thurlow, 2003). According to Hopkins (1994:75) cited in Thurlow (2003:9) school effectiveness can be described as:

Establishing valid measures of performance for educational institutions, and subunits within them in order to assess the extent to which they are meeting the objectives, which may be determined by internal and external groups.

Based on Sammons *et al* (1995) as cited in Thurlow (2003), an effective school epitomises a strong learning environment with emphasis on quality learning through staff developments programmes and improvement plans (Harris, 2004). Effective schools nurture a culture of teaching and learning as well as monitoring the student performance so that higher levels of outcomes for their students will be achieved (Hargreaves *et al*, 1993). In other words,

effectiveness of schools relates to the effect of inputs (e.g. textbooks) on the outputs (e.g. learner achievement (Jansen, 2001). Bush *et al* (2003) point out that effective schools are actually learning schools where the school managers and educators themselves become learners to keep themselves updated with the new trends and processes in society.

Educators are encouraged to be continuous learners themselves, and in this way develop themselves (Moloi, 2002). In this way, the educators grow and develop, acquiring new skills and methodologies that are necessary in our changing South African education system (Reynolds, 1997). As a result, evaluating school performance improves schools significantly. Effective schools embrace purposeful teaching, proper management, a well-defined framework and pupil independence (Reynolds, 1997). Hence school effectiveness is geared towards improving the quality of education, learner performance and learner achievement.

Caldwell and Spinks (1992) define an effective school as a place where staff members, learners, parents and the wider community are empowered. An effective school makes known its goals to its staff members and, in this way, promotes shared decision-making and empowerment (Morrison, 1998). Schools that focus on empowerment inadvertently achieve their goals.

Furthermore, school effectiveness is enhanced by the building of relationships between staff members and principals. If staff members do not feel part of the organisation and are not part of the decision-making, they eventually feel left out, and this impacts negatively on the culture of teaching and learning (Reynolds *et al*, 1997). Inadvertently, this leads to low staff morale, and this poor attitude on the part of educators impacts on the learners, resulting in poor performance (Bush *et al*, 2003). If relationships between principals and staff members are strengthened, then schools become effective in fulfilling their goals (Bennett *et al*, 1992). If staff members are not motivated to do their work, then they become less productive (West-Burnham, 1994).

How the managers handle staff conflicts is critical to the state of the staff morale. Therefore, it is crucial that effective school leadership be at the centre of any effort to transform a school into a learning organisation. An effective school creates effective leaders that focus on shared decision making, collegiality and teambuilding which ultimately makes a school effective (Stoll & Fink, 1996).

If this is what school effectiveness is, then this is what rural schools need to focus on in creating a positive culture of teaching and learning. Therefore Bush (2004) confirms that school effectiveness will play an important role in reconstructing South African education in terms of quality education, class size and learner performance. Therefore school effectiveness is important to my study as it is imperative to upgrading South African schools and making them effectiveness.

2.7.2. School Improvement

According to Jansen (1995), he refers to school improvement as school quality. School improvement focuses on qualitative evaluation and change processes that are necessary for the improvement of school organisations (Jansen, 1995). According to Hopkins *et al* (1994) school improvement is defined as an educational change that enhances student outcomes and accelerates learner achievement. Basically school improvement aims at quality education and looks for ways to ensure quality education is offered.

According to Miles and Ekholm (1985) as cited in Thurlow (2003) school improvement is defined as:

A systematic, sustained effort at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively.

Through school improvement studies, schools become learning organisations whereby changes can be made and the school developed (Thurlow, 2003). In other words, school improvement examines the learning processes in the classroom and its impact on the achievement levels (Jansen, 1995). School improvements examine the factors that directly or indirectly improve the achievement of the learners, such as the professional development of the educators (Hopkins, 1994). In other words, school improvement looks at the necessary changes that will ensure improving the quality of education and aspiring higher learner achievements. This kind of school improvement also impacts on learners positively, making the organization an effective learning organization (Stoll and Fink, 1996). There is a definite link between school improvement, leadership and the culture of the school (Thurlow, 2003).

2.7.3. Effective Leadership

School effectiveness and school improvement largely depends on the leadership of the school that would drive the organisation into greater success. We are in an era of transformation, and therefore we need leaders who will drive this change to bring improvement to the organisation. Leadership is viewed as an important aspect of school effectiveness and school improvement. The leadership role of the principals affects the performance of the school (Calitz *et al*, 2002).

Authors such as Owens (1998); Bennet (1992) and Lumby (2005) agree that leadership is associated with “influence” on the group to attain desirable goals. Bush *et al* (2005) says that a leader is one who can lead others to lead themselves. These authors argue that leadership is not confined to appointed leaders, but rather exists in each individual. My study is largely influenced by Owens (1998) and Lumby (2005) who say that leadership is a matter of influence over stakeholders’ attitudes and actions and is not limited to persons in official positions of authority.

Literature has shown that transformational leadership theoretically and conceptually leads to school improvement and school effectiveness (Leithwood *et al*, 1999; Senge, 1990, Owens (1998). In decentralized systems, transformational leadership has been strongly recommended for our changing times. Leithwood *et al*, (1999) confirm that transformation influences the school culture positively by reinforcing purposeful learning, encouraging shared decision-making and this way empowers teachers.

Mulford (2004) says that transformational leaders set long and short term goals, check progress of subordinates and give positive reinforcement. Sterling (2000) adds that a leader must be flexible, not be overpowering, but be sensitive to the changing needs. This kind of leadership promotes the culture of teaching and learning at South African schools. This is imperative in schools handling large classes. Stoll *et al* (2003) confirm that there is a need for leaders that set clear goals; avoids nepotism and favouritism and shows appreciation to staff members and learners. In this way leaders influence the organisation positively.

Beare *et al* (1989) emphasise the importance between leadership and vision. Leithwood (1999) confirms that building school vision is the key dimension of leadership together with

goals and structure. According to Bush *et al*, (2005) vision is articulated and set by the leader. Razik (1995) confirms that transformational leadership looks for new ways to expand and advance the organization. Transformational leaders set high expectations for teachers and, in turn, teachers aspire to higher goals. They enhance teacher commitment, effort and job satisfaction. A transformational leader provides a vision for the school, motivating staff members to share the vision of the organisation (ibid).

Fullan (2001) suggests that an effective leader transforms the organization by displaying positive energies, enthusiasm and open communication. Transformational leaders promote teamwork, and teamwork improves the interpersonal relationships between one another, helping them overcome a low staff morale and demotivation. Teamwork also helps reduce the effects of work overload, and, in this way, improves their skills and abilities as they learn from one another (ibid). Leithwood *et al* (1999) points out that teamwork allows staff members to be empowered and that the concept of teamwork is at the heart of empowerment.

2.8. Conclusion

School effectiveness, school improvement and shared leadership are all necessary for the development of our changing South African schools. In this chapter I examined what constituted a learning school, an effective school and an improving school, under the influence of transformational leadership, and its relation to managing large classes. In the next chapter, we look at research methods that will be used to establish the extent these schools are grappling with large classes.

CHAPTER 3:

RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This research study aimed to explore the experiences of educators, HODs and principals in large classes in three rural schools. In this chapter I elaborate on how I collected, interpreted and analyzed the data for this research study, in order to explore the experiences and perceptions of the educators, HODs and principals in large classes. This chapter presents the research design, research questions, and research methods and how the data was analyzed.

3.2. Research Design

According to Henning (2004) the purpose of the research influences the type of research design a researcher utilizes. I have utilized the qualitative approach to answer the research questions, as it allows the researcher to capture real-life experiences of the participants and take into consideration their context (Cohen *et al*, 2007). Qualitative research is relevant to my study where the purpose of my research was to study phenomena without manipulation (Maree, 2007). The qualitative approach allows the researcher to get in-depth information from the subjects being studied so as to understand the subjective experience of the phenomena (Patton, 2002).

The research took the form of an interpretive case study. I chose an interpretive framework as it focuses on “capturing the lives of the participants in order to understand and interpret meaning” (Henning, 2004.19). I chose the case study as it portrays the real experiences in real situations and builds interaction between the researcher and the participants, as well as illuminating the truth through an in-depth study (Cohen *et al*, 2007). According to Henning (2004) a case study is a “systematic inquiry into an event or set of related events which aims to describe and explain phenomena of interest.” A case study is described as an in-depth analysis of a “bounded system” (place and/or time) within a period of time (Cohen *et al*, 2007). The case study took place through in-depth data collection methods such as observations and interviews, whereby the researcher reflects and analyse theory meaningfully (Muijs, 2004).

An interpretative data collection tool has been adopted in the study to explore the experiences and perceptions of the school managers and educators. I used a qualitative, descriptive, phenomenological research design to explore the experiences of the educators, HODs and principals in large classes (Cohen *et al*, 2007). It was phenomenological as the phenomena were interpreted by the responses and meanings that were created by the participants (Maree, 2007). This was achieved by in-depth phenomenological based interviewing.

I have adopted an interpretative paradigm as it allows me to take into consideration the subjective experiences, beliefs, attitudes and views of the participants and, in this way, allows me to understand the phenomena (Henning, 2004). I thus reviewed and analyzed the data meaningfully to gain a better understanding of the situation.

3.3. Participants

According to Cohen *et al* (2007. 114) purposive sampling is a feature in qualitative research, whereby researchers handpick the cases in the sample on the basis of the specific characteristic that they possess. In this case, I chose schools with large classes; an educator from each school who taught a large class; the HOD of the department; and the principal of this school. According to Maree (2007) purposeful sampling simply means that participants are selected according to defining characteristics. I used purposive sampling as I wanted access to the educators, HODs and principals associated with large classes, so that I could retrieve rich data and in-depth information (Cohen *et al*, 2007). Therefore, the study involved one educator and one HOD and principal from each of the three schools, resulting in nine participants.

3.4. Research Instruments

3.4.1. Semi-structured Interviews

With regard to interviews, Cohen *et al*, (2007.349) mention that an interview is a flexible tool for gathering information, discussing interviewees' interpretations and understanding their experiences. For this reason, I chose semi-structured interviews as one of my research

instruments to give participants an opportunity to express their views, opinions and experiences. All the participants completed a letter of consent form whereby their confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed and their consent to participate in the research study was granted. All the interviews were done on a one-to-one basis and were conducted in the principal's office, ranging from 50-60 minutes. All the participants agreed to be audio-taped.

The basis of the interview was to explore the experiences of the educators, HODs and principals in schools with large classes. I interviewed one educator, one HOD and the school principal in each school. All the participants were willing to disclose information about their large classes. The questions were structured in such a way that participants were able to relate their actual experiences in the classroom and school in an unrestricted manner. Most of the questions were open-ended and this encouraged the respondents to analyze and explain matters in their own way (Henning, 2004).

I probed the participants to explain issues further where it was necessary. Through the use of the interviews, the respondents were able to reflect on what they were actually observing and experiencing in the classroom. I chose semi-structured interviews as it allowed for flexibility and provided opportunities for explanations and clarifications. In this way I gained insight into the study (Patton, 2002). Just listening to the participants' experiences allowed me to understand their situations.

3.4.2. Observations

According to Henning (2004) observation is a systematic process of recording behavioural patterns. I chose observations as I was able to observe the non-verbal behavior patterns of the learners and educators in the large class over a certain period of time, in terms of their reactions, language tones and attitudes (Henning, 2004). I observed and recorded the appearance of the classroom; learners' behaviour and attitudes; educators' interactions with the learners; learners' class work and books; educators' journals; and teaching methods. I was able to gather "live" data from a natural setting (Cohen *et al*, 2007). During the observations, I sat at the back of the classroom and made myself as inconspicuous as possible. I did not limit myself to the specific questions, but allowed myself to observe what was actually taking

place in the classroom (Cohen *et al*, 2007). I listened and watched closely, and what I saw, I recorded. In this way, I was able to generate rich data.

3.5. Process of Data Analysis

Firstly, I asked permission from all my participants to use the audio tape during the interviews. All the participants permitted the use of the audio tape. The data was then transcribed and numbered numerically. Field notes were taken from the observation and were documented. Audio-taping and transcribing discussions are important to the researcher as it allows the researcher to reflect and review data (Henning, 2004). I created a file for each participant, using pseudonyms to document participants' responses. Data was also checked against tape recordings for accuracy.

3.6. Trustworthiness

Reliability and validity are important to a qualitative research study. Reliability refers to the degree to which the same methods are used by different researchers that produce the same results (Henning, 2004). Reliability ensures consistency and accuracy in a study. To ensure reliability in my study, the transcribed notes and field notes were made available for verification. Furthermore, I have the audio-tapes to verify the actual spoken words of the participants. Validity in a study endeavours to establish accuracy in the findings. According to Henning (2004) validity underpins quantitative methodology, and ensures accountability and open communication throughout the research process. I have ensured validity by recording all interviews, transcribing all notes and keeping a detailed journal.

3.7. Ethical Clearance

I sought the permission of the principals and Governing Body for the following: observations of the classes and schools; interviews with the educators; interviews with the HODs; and interviews with the principals. All the participants were asked to sign letters of consent. The participants were assured that all information that was disclosed would only be used for research purposes. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured. I have submitted all documentation and research instruments to the UKZN ethical clearance committee for approval.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter provided a discussion of the research methods that I have employed. It has outlined the research instruments that I used to collect the data and the suitability of the qualitative research for my study. I used observations and interviews as they were the best data-gathering tools to retrieve the experiences of educators, HODs and principals who were all grappling with large classes. I will present, discuss and analyze the data emerging from the respondents in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected from the three rural schools. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with one principal, one HOD and one educator of each school, as well as school and classroom observations. I presented the data according to specific themes that have emerged from both the literature review and the data. The themes are as follows:-

- **Handling of learner discipline**
- **Learner achievement and quality of work**
- **Handling space utilisation**
- **Planning for large classes**
- **Staff Motivation**
- **Staff Conflict**
- **Educator and learner resource materials**
- **Educator workload and marking**
- **Teaching methods in large classes**

This chapter begins by a description of what I observed in each of the schools. Most descriptions related directly to large classes, while others do so indirectly. For purposes of school identification, I have given each of the three schools a pseudonym. They are as follows:-

- School A will be referred to as Jabulani High;
- School B will be referred as Bayeti Primary
- School C will be referred as Woza Primary.

Finally I provide an overall conclusion based on all the findings.

4.2. Observation about each school

4.2.1. Jabulani High

Jabulani High was situated about 45km from Newlands. It have a school enrolment of 456 learners. It is a no-fee school so learners do are not required to pay school fees. There were only 6 wooden classroom structures in this high school. A grade 8 educator was teaching up to 90 learners in a class. This meant that the educator was teaching more than double the number of learners expected. This was above the teacher-pupil ratio of 1:31 (Department of Education, 2009) and, therefore, we can say that this is a very large class. There was a shortage of 6 classrooms in this school. To accommodate all the learners, 2 classes took place outside under the shade of trees, 2 classes shared the shelter in front of the school and 2 classes used the classrooms at Bayeti Primary as negotiated by the principals.

The school was in a dire need of: toilets; a library; computer room; and science laboratory. The 6 classrooms that are in use have broken window panes, dilapidated cupboards and too few learners' desks and chairs. The school did not have the basic facilities such as electricity, flush toilets and water, nor a staffroom for the teachers. There was only a tiny room in front of the school that was being shared by the principal, heads of department, educators and secretary.

4.2.2. Bayeti Primary

Bayeti Primary lies adjacent to Jabulani High. Bayeti Primary is a feeder school to Jabulani High School. Bayeti Primary has a school enrolment of 398 learners. The school has a brick structure of 7 classrooms. It is in desperate need of 4 more classrooms, toilet facilities, a computer room and library. A grade 4 educator was teaching up to 71 learners in a class and was therefore teaching more than double the number of learners in a class. The remaining classes were taught under trees in the front of the school, depending on the weather. The school is in a deplorable condition as the roofs of the classrooms are leaking. As a result, the classrooms are flooded after heavy rains and cannot be used. There are no electricity, water or toilet facilities at this rural school.

4.2.3. Woza Primary

Woza High is situated about 15km from Jabulani High School. Woza High has a school population of 380 learners. The school has a brick structure of 5 classrooms. The school is in need of 5 more classrooms, a computer room, toilet facilities and a library. The teachers use a shelter outside the school to teach the learners. The learners walk long distances to get to this school as there is no transport to this school. The school building is in a deplorable condition and needs major repairs. The school buildings are not painted and there is graffiti on all the walls. The school looks untidy and messy.

4.3. How the schools grapple with large classes

4.3.1. Handling of Learner Discipline

I asked about the learner discipline in the context of large classes. In this regard, all the principals expressed their frustrations and said that they were challenged.

The principal of Woza High said

It becomes a nightmare to handle such a class. There are many challenges in attendance. Out of the 62 learners, only 27 came. This is a big challenge. This is definitely a big problem if the female teacher is handling the subject in a large class, the learners get rowdy, and they become chaotic. It's a nightmare.

The Principal of Bayeti Primary responded,

There are major disciplinary problems. There's nothing I can do! We are just trying but failing. We are encountering problems with late coming and high absenteeism.

Similarly the HOD of Bayeti Primary added,

It is very difficult to discipline them because they are very badly behaved.

All of the educators that I interviewed had a similar response. They concluded that it is very challenging for educators to teach in large classes because more time is being spent on disciplinary issues than on actual teaching.

Furthermore, educators are unable to cater to the individual needs of the learners due to large numbers in their classes. All the educators found that high absenteeism, late coming; disruptions in the class, lack of interest in their schoolwork and poor concentration were major disciplinary issues they had to deal with on a daily basis.

The educator of Woza High said,

Absenteeism is the first problem that we experience here. Then they used to abscond from school without a reason because parents are failing to motivate their learners.

I observed that the learners were overcrowded in this class. They had no space to move around, and appeared to be frustrated. I observed during the lessons that the learners failed to listen to the educator and this was becoming frustrating to her, as she did not know how to handle the situation. I observed that many learners walked into the classroom 25 minutes after the lesson had begun and looked tired and exhausted. This caused disruptions in the classroom as the learners looked for chairs, tables and books. I observed that the educator did not keep a register to record the number of absentees in the class.

The schools tried a number of strategies to maintain discipline in the school.

The principal of Jabulani High has a strict code of conduct which is given to each learner at the beginning of the year explaining to them what is expected from them. In this way, learners understand what is expected from them. This strategy seems to work to a certain degree at this school. The other schools have no code of conduct.

The principal of Jabulani High had the following to say,

As soon as we admit these learners, we give the school rules to the learners so that when they come in January, they know what is expected from them.

At Bayeti Primary, the HOD called in the parents to address the disciplinary issues in this school.

She had the following to say,

A little interest is shown by the parents. They don't want their children to attend school. They are ignorant.

This strategy failed to work due to a lack of parental involvement at this school. A lack of parental involvement was common at all the schools.

All the schools use reward certificates for appropriate behaviour at the end of each quarter. This works effectively at all the schools.

The principal of Woza High said,

Apart from talking to them on how they should behave as learners. We also motivate them with awards every quarter. We award the best behaved group in such a large class.

The educators of Jabulani High and Woza High strive to investigate the “root” problem of their learners and in this way attempt to counsel their learners. This strategy works well but it is time-consuming as the educators engage in one-to-one counselling sessions. It requires that the educators work over the weekends to help learners deal with their emotional, financial and learning problems.

The HOD of Bayeti Primary uses classroom chores such as sweeping and cleaning to discipline learners. The principal, HOD and educator detain learners after school.

The HOD had the following to say,

They have to sweep the whole class if they are late. They are given extra work and extra activities to do. They are responsible for cleaning the chalkboard. They are the last ones to leave the school.

This strategy failed to work as it increased learner absenteeism. The detained learners stayed away from school for long periods. It also posed a safety risk to the principal and educators who stayed long hours at school.

The educator of Woza High removes learners from the class and places them outside in order to discipline them. They are also given verbal warnings if their behaviour persists. The strategy works effectively only for a short period of time.

Jabulani High and Woza High seem to have more strategies that worked than Bayeti Primary which was not coping.

4.3.2. Learner achievement and quality of their work

All the participants that I interviewed reiterated that the large classes impacted negatively on learner achievement and quality of learners' work.

The Educator of Jabulani said,

I am not happy with the quality of my pupils' work. The learners are being piled and crowded in one class and this has been happening for a very long time since they have been in primary education.

The HOD of Bayeti Primary,

We don't know if time has changed, but the learners in this crowded class are not doing the work at school. Their attitude is not good.

The educator of Bayeti Primary

Even when I give them Homework, they don't come back with their books because their mothers use them for fires.

Moreover, I observed that the learners seemed uninterested in the lessons and did not want to co-operate. Many of the learners at the back of the class had their own discussions and were reading magazines while the lesson was in process. The educator in the front of the class was not aware of such activity.

Some of the strategies the schools used towards addressing the problem of poor performance include the following:

The Principal of Jabulani High confirmed that he brought in qualified educators, subject advisors and language experts to come and assist his educators. In this way, he ensured the learners were getting quality education. The Principal and staff of Jabulani High strive to improve the learner achievements in his school by getting expert advice to his educators.

These strategies worked effectively in the beginning, but it became more and more difficult to get advisors to the school in a rural area.

The principal of Jabulani High responded,

I used to ask the subject advisors, to come to my school, to assist my teachers, as my teachers have been teaching in a primary school, so as to acclimatise the new system of teaching. So in this way, I get a better performance in this school.

The principal of Bayeti primary reiterated that she motivates her educators to be diligent and in this way learners benefit from committed educators. The Principal of Bayeti primary encourages her staff members to be hardworking and positive in order to improve achievements levels of the learners. The educators keep the learners stimulated and alert in the classrooms by using questioning techniques and adjusting their voice tones. This strategy does not work fully as many staff members are demotivated to teach large classes.

The principal of Bayeti Primary decided to divide the number of learners in the large classes into two groups, namely, the learners who are coping and the learners who are not. The learners who were not coping worked inside the classroom under the supervision of the educator, whereas the learners who were coping worked outside the classroom under the supervision of a group leader. This strategy failed to work for all the learners, as the learners inside the classroom benefited whereas the learners outside the classroom felt neglected, and saw it as an opportunity to have “free time.”

The principal of Bayeti Primary added,

As a result, we take the children who are good outside the classroom so that we can deal with those who need help. We also make sure that those learners who are struggling can see the chalkboard and sit near the chalkboard.

The Principal of Woza Primary implemented the strategy to employ qualified staff to ensure that learners received quality education and new methodologies of teaching to stimulate learning amongst the learners. The principal of Woza High encouraged educators to engage in group teaching to accommodate learners with learning problems. They also concentrated on specific sections at a time so that learners can master what they are learning. This strategy failed as many qualified staff chose urban schools over rural schools.

The educator of Woza High quoted,

*We divide the big classes into groups and we put a leader in the group to monitor.
When I give them the activities, there's scribe, time-keeper and presenter.*

All three educators agreed that the only solution to improving the achievements levels of the learners was through group work; being positive and hard work. The strategies seemed to work in the primary school, but not in the high schools.

The principal of Woza High said,

*So that is why we say, it calls for dedication and selflessness on the part of teachers.
That is the attitude that the school has adopted.*

Here again some of the strategies that were implemented failed to work at the ground level. The strategies worked well with the primary school learners at Bayeti Primary compared with high school learners who had a variety of subjects.

4.3.3. Handling space utilisation

All the principals reported that space was a major challenge that they were facing. The principal of Jabulani High added,

There are learners who are learning outside the classrooms because we do not have enough classrooms. Classrooms are overcrowded. One cannot move around the classroom and observe each and every child.

Similarly, the HOD of Bayeti Primary said,

They don't even have room space and floor space to do their work. They don't have enough classes so they are much overloaded. They work in the kitchen where they store their lunch, because they don't even have a classroom. It is difficult for them to do their school work. But we try our best to do what is required from the Department.

The educator of Bayeti Primary reiterated that teaching a large class was challenging as they don't have the space to do activities. The classroom is not large enough to accommodate all 71 learners in this class size.

The educator of Jabulani High quoted,

It is very difficult to teach in such a school that lacks infrastructure and we find that the learners are piled in one classroom. One cannot move around the classroom, and even observe each and every child.

Similarly the educator at Bayeti Primary added,

I am talking mainly about the 71 learners in my class. It is very difficult because we don't even have the space to do whatever projects and activities I want to do.

I observed that the learners were cramped behind their desks and were unable to walk around in the classroom. The classroom was very small and, hence, the teacher did not have space to have a teacher's desk and a teacher's chair in the classroom. The learners did not have space to keep their bags in the classroom; therefore the learners' bags were kept outside the classroom. There was not adequate space in the classroom for all the learners in the classroom.

The schools attempted to address the problem through the following strategies:

The Principal of Woza High and Jabulani High wished to build new classrooms and had strategic plans in place. However this strategy had not worked due to a lack of funds. They continue to work tirelessly to raise funds to build more classes.

The Principal of Bayeti Primary had no plans in place.

We are hoping that the old buildings are renovated and new buildings be erected. I suggested mobile classes

Similarly the principal of Woza High added,

If we could get these classes built, more especially the special classrooms such as Science Class, Library for the school, maybe that will alleviate the problem of overcrowding in the classrooms because we know that we can split those classes into smaller manageable units in that way. That is what we are currently busy with from 2005 and up to today.

The principal and staff decided to combine certain classroom in order to utilise the space. This strategy did not work effectively because it was almost impossible for the one educator to teach two grades together in a class of 71 learners. So this strategy was failing.

The HOD of Bayeti Primary responded,

Because the classrooms are very large, we combine the grade 4 and the grade 5.

The principal of Woza High stated that having a positive mind and attitude was a strategy that would always work at his school. He said that, together with the staff member, he would do whatever it took to keep the school running to provide minimum education. Furthermore, he added that this attitude helped him cope with the many challenges at his school.

The principal of Woza High added,

We will do whatever we can manage to do in the space that we have.

I observed that the educator at Woza High used the space under the trees as a classroom to accommodate the overcrowding in the classes. He divided the class into 2 groups with group leaders to accommodate half the learners inside the classroom and the other half outside the classroom. I found that this strategy was not effective as the learners outside saw this as a time to socialise rather than learn. It benefited only the learners inside the classroom with the educator. As a result, the educators can only focus on the bare minimum in the learning programme.

I also observed that the educator at Jabulani High arranged the chairs and tables in such a way as to maximise space; they arranged 4 learners to a double desk to accommodate all the learners in their classes. This strategy was effective as all the learners were accommodated in the classroom.

Jabulani High and Woza high had more strategies, whereas Bayeti Primary was failing to cope with the challenges.

4.3.4. Planning for large classes

All the principals of the three rural schools spoke about the challenges they faced with a lack of qualified educators for their schools. There was also a shortage of administration staff members for their schools. They are also faced with complex problems of class combinations. Their responses were no different from the other participants:

The principal of Woza High said,

As you know this school is in a rural area. So the main challenge is recruiting suitably qualified educators to come and teach at this school due to the inaccessibility of the school. More especially the grade 10's is mostly overcrowded in the classes. Some of the problems teachers grapple with, is that the learners are too chaotic,

The principal of Bayeti Primary added,

We are in a rural area. There is no transport for educators as the place is very remote. Grade 6 has no teacher at this time of this year. They are left unattended and there's no teacher for the class. We don't have much to offer the teachers.

The principal of Jabulani confirmed that educators were afraid to teach at these schools due to the violence-related incidents; vandalism; poor working conditions; lack of facilities; lack of proper classrooms; lack of teaching resources; lack of respect amongst the learners; high transport costs and the very large classes.

All the schools were facing a mammoth task of rectifying the challenges they were facing. These were some of the proposed strategies that the principals implemented.

The principal of Bayeti Primary combined the grades 4 and grade 5 classes to ensure learners were getting an education. She also used the strategy to take on a formal Grade one class to alleviate the problem of a shortage of educators at her school. She said that she was both the principal and the grade one educator of 51 learners of Bayeti Primary. This strategy failed because the learners were left unattended when the principal had to attend workshops and go to the Department.

The principal of Jabulani High used the strategy of persuading the Department of Education to review plans for the building of new classrooms. He said that he continues to send letters to the Department of Education and other organisations pleading for help. This strategy failed to materialise as little or no progress has been made in the past five years. Another strategy he used to get staff to his school was to offer transport to suitably qualified educators to and from his school with specialised taxis.

The principal of Jabulani High had this to say,

We arrange specialised taxis to our school.

The principal of Woza High employed ex-students to assist educators in these classes. He said,

Sometimes I don't get the teachers in good time. But what I normally do, I start recruiting our former learners who were very good at school.

The proposed strategies have worked well, as the ex-students were substituted for educators.

4.3.5 Staff Motivation in Large Classes

I asked about staff motivation in large classes. All the principals, HODs and educators of all three schools agreed that motivation is much needed in their schools as they work under very stressful and frustrating situations. Large classes, combined classes, lack of classroom space and a lack of resources were the contributing factors for their stress.

Some of the strategies they implemented were as follows:

All the schools have weekly staff meetings to discuss all their concerns, problems and stress-related activities.

The HOD of Woza High said,

Every Monday, we have a staff update and we sit together and discuss the problems and they try to resolve problems. If a person has had an achievement, we congratulate that person. We have a party for that person.

The principal and HOD of Woza High School motivated his staff members by rotating staff duties. In this way, staff members shared the burdens of very large classes. The principal also had an Appreciation Register to record all the appreciation of staff members who had gone beyond the call of duty. Furthermore, the principal gave out certificates, cards and flowers once a term to acknowledge outstanding staff members. Some of the strategies worked in some schools and others did not.

The principal of Woza High added,

We rotate the responsibilities for these large classes. We also have a register in the school, which is called an Appreciation Register and the HOD sends a card to the teachers who have done something in terms of what is beyond their call of duty to say thank you very much.

The principal of Bayeti Primary encouraged the staff members to attend workshops and used her experiences to motivate her educators. She said,

I used to tell them to attend the workshops. Even if it is not an educational workshop, I tell them that they must go and attend. And that they must further their studies.

The principal and HOD of Jabulani High tried to motivate their staff members by bringing experts and specialists to speak to the staff and motivate them. He also used motivational speakers at their workshops to motivate the staff on becoming “nation builders”

The Principal of Jabulani High added,

We motivate the teachers by saying to them, that what they are doing, is for their nation. I only invite people who are expertise in terms of teaching and learning, to motivate my staff. I just approached another person who has just passed his PHD to come and motivate my staff members.

All the strategies were effective at the schools. However, Jabulani High and Bayeti Primary had little or no strategies in place.

4.3.6. Staff conflicts in large classes

I asked about the staff conflicts that arise in a school with large classes. All the principals confirmed that conflicts do arise as the educators argue about who would be teaching the large classes in the school, the lack of resources and unequal division of work. This leads to stress, heavy workloads and staff divisions.

The schools tried a number of strategies to overcome the staff conflicts in the school. The principal of Jabulani High argued that he promoted equality in the school and a high level of fairness amongst his staff members.

He said,

I used to make sure that all the problems are solved in an amicable manner. I am not bias. People are all equal to me. That's the only way I manage my staff.

The HOD of Bayeti Primary stated that one of the strategies they have used of overcoming grumblings, conflicts and complains amongst the staff members, was to pray together as a staff in the morning. She confirmed that prayer changed the atmosphere in her school and has made it a more peaceful school.

The HOD of Bayeti Primary quoted,

Fortunately we don't have this problem because we meet regularly as a team and then we pray together. So that I believe that if we pray, we can stand together.

The principal of Bayeti Primary stated that she immediately resolved a conflict that arose instead of allowing the problem to become bigger. They shared all the responsibilities equally amongst staff members. She also treated all staff equally. As a way to alleviate her staff members, she is the principal as well as the grade 1 educator of 51 learners.

The principal of Bayeti Primary added,

I am a grade one teacher teaching 51 learners in my class. I am the Principal and teaching 51 grade ones at the same times in one class. In this way, there is less stress. To handle conflict, I tell them the truth at all times. I don't take sides. I don't have a

teacher who is my friend. We resolve the problems immediately.

4.3.7. Educator and Learner Resource Support Materials

The principal of Jabulani High expressed their difficulties and the crises that they were experiencing in the schools.

The Educator of Jabulani High had the following to say,

This affects us in a very negative way, since we do not have enough resources. Since we are in a deep rural area, we don't even have electricity, and then we find that we have to make some copies for our learners, we find that we cannot work. In terms of resources, I need to have manuals, curricula's and hand-outs. We do not have enough monies.

The HOD of Bayeti Primary said,

We have a very big problem here, because we do not have resources. We don't have a library in the school and in the community. So if we need something, the teachers will have to go to the library, and find the information. We then make copies and give the learners. We are not able to make worksheets but write on the chalkboard. Now we are having the problem. Now we are in a crisis.

The Principal of Woza said,

The problem we are having with the finances is that, it is a non-fee school. So the learners do not pay fees at all. So sometimes the allocation that comes from the Department becomes too little to be able to buy all these necessary learner and teacher support materials.

I have observed that the schools have very limited resources in these “large” classes. There were no charts on the walls; the learners did not have enough textbooks; there were no writing materials for the learners; in some classes educators did not have chalk to write on the chalkboard; and 4 learners were sharing one textbook. The educators do not have sufficient science equipment and chemical materials to perform the experiments. Furthermore, the

classrooms were not well lit up for the learners to see the chalkboard. The teacher had very limited teaching resources or materials. There is no evidence of pens, chalk, rulers, pencils and writing materials. I observed that there are very few resources and these have to be shared amongst the many learners.

The schools attempted to address the problem through the following strategies:

The principal of Jabulani High has approached large companies for donations and assistance, and the educators and learners are asked to use what they have instead of complaining. He said,

Although we do not have sufficient resources, I ask the teachers to use what they have. I encourage them not to ask, but to rather use what they have wisely.

The principal of Woza High stated that positive thinking made the difference in his school.

Another thing that has made me so proud about the school, as much as we are suffering, but all my teachers are positive; they are willing to face the strong storms.

The principal, HOD and educator of Woza High had a book recovery system or a book in place to protect their books and to ensure that their books come back in the proper condition.

*We have a book **recovery programme or a book retribual system** in place. When books are issued at the beginning of the year, they are managed properly by the learners. In this way when the books come back the learners get awarded with R10 for every book brought back properly.*

The Principal of Bayeti Primary networked with the neighbouring schools and worked in clusters as a way to overcome their challenges. All the strategies seemed to have worked in all three schools; instead of them waiting for a miracle; they made do with what they had with a positive mindset.

4.3.8. Workload and Marking

I asked them about the workload in large classes. All the participants had similar responses:

The educator of Woza High said,

There is too much work for educators in a large class. There is too much marking, teaching, and paperwork at the same time. There is too much work. I think if I had another educator, in the class or an assistant is very good.

The educator of Bayeti Primary also had the following to say;

There is too much work for educators in a large class. There is too much marking, teaching, and paperwork at the same time. It is almost impossible to cope with the demands. Learner assessment in large classes is a very tiresome and demanding task for us all.

The HOD of Bayeti Primary had the following to say,

As the only HOD in this school, there are a lot of difficulties because I have to assess all the learners. I do not have enough time, because I have to go into the classrooms. But I do try to look at the teachers' assessments and the learners' assessments, but not as often as I should.

The schools attempted to address the problem through the following strategies:

The educator of Jabulani used a variety of assessment strategies such as projects; oral discussions; prepared speeches; argumentative speeches; and written assignments, to cope with the large numbers in the classes.

The Educator and HOD of Bayeti Primary divided the workload amongst the subject educators.

I used to divide them and I used to help them, if they don't meet the standards. Like you know, we teach in IsiZulu in grade 1, 2 and 3. So if they don't cope in grade 3, I used to make an adjustment class to help them with their teaching in large classes.

The principal of Jabulani High said that they came to school an hour before the official starting time to cope with their workload, and conducted classes on Saturday mornings and afternoons to overcome the workload. They did most of their assessments after school hours to overcome the demands of a large class.

The principal of Jabulani High said,

The teachers are very excellent. They even conduct classes on Saturdays, they stay behind in the afternoons, and they come early to school at about 7am to start the classes.

The educator of Woza High responded,

We also do teach backs and this saves time to mark. We do peer marking and group projects instead of written work.

However, the strategies that were implemented did not seem to work in two of the schools, as many difficulties were still being experienced with regard to learner assessments.

4.3.9. Teaching methods in large classes

I enquired about the teaching methods that were used in large classes. All the educators in the three schools gave a similar response: that it was almost impossible to attend to all the learning needs of the learners in their classes. They added that the learners are easily distracted in large classes owing to a lack of concentration, and that, therefore, it was imperative that they used a variety of teaching methods instead of limiting it to the “chalk and teach” approach.

The schools attempted to address the problem through the following strategies:

The educators tried to use a variety of teaching methods, depending on the nature of the lesson and the content, such as class discussions, a lecture approach, textbook approach, board games, plays, dramatisations, teach-backs and group teaching. However, their efforts to implement these strategies failed due to a lack of space and disciplinary problems.

4.4. Emerging Issues

After examining the data, we can now say that the three schools with large classes are facing many challenges. One of the major challenges in these schools was maintaining discipline. Principals and HODs were saddled with major problems with learner discipline which the educators do not know how to handle. They have become frustrated with the lack of interest

shown by the learners which has created chaos in the classroom. Educators, HODs and principals have complained that learners have become disruptive and almost impossible to handle. They have spent more time disciplining learners than actually teaching.

As reported in the literature review in Chapter 2, Blatchford (2003); Bassett (2003); Goldstein (2003); Martin (2003); Blatchford *et al* (2003) and Oliver (2006) say that large classes create chaos in the classroom and educators are experiencing disciplinary problems as a result. Learners in large classes are inattentive, have behavioural problems and show little interest in their work (Finn *et al*, 1999). Data has shown that educators, HODs and principals have tried to maintain discipline through the following strategies: having a strict code of conduct; rewarding appropriate behaviour; counselling difficult learners; and detaining learners.

These are some of the strategies these three schools employed. As reported in chapter two, Whitaker (1984); Jenkins (1992) and Gibbs (1992) argue that co-operative learning and group work were some of the strategies employed to overcome the problems related to disciplinary problems in large classes. According to Gibb (1992) and Jenkins (1992) closer interactions between the educator and learners would improve the concentration in the classroom.

The lack of space was another major challenge that these schools encountered. Principals and HODs are challenged about the lack of classrooms for their learners and educators. Although many plans had been initiated by the schools, they are still faced with financial constraints. Classrooms need to be built to accommodate all the learners in the classes. Principals, HODs and educators expressed their frustration at the lack of space for their books and work tables.

As shown in the literature review in chapter 2, smaller classes improve learner performance in mathematics, technical studies and reading in the first four years of schooling (Vally and Spreen, 1998). The need for space is important for effective teaching in the classroom. The smaller the class size, the more effective learning becomes. It is recommended that schools look at sponsorships and donations to build more classrooms.

Poor learner performance was a major concern for all three schools. From the data collected, it is evident that the quality of work has been affected negatively in large classes. Educators complained that they were not able to give learners individual attention. Principals

complained that the learners show very little interest in their work. The learners do not bring their books and stationery to school. As discussed in chapter two, authors Rivera-Batiz (1995) and Marti (1995) reported that between 2% and 9% fewer students passed reading and mathematics proficiency tests in large classes, compared with learners in smaller classes.

A large-scale longitudinal study by Blatchford (2003) in Britain concluded that learners achieve better in literacy and mathematics in smaller classes than in large classes. This has been supported by Jenkins (1992) and Gibbs (1992) who say that large classes impact on the learning process in the classroom and will eventually impact on the quality of work of the learners. Large classes result in poor teacher-learner interactions, which eventually result in high failure rates (Gibbs, 1992 and Jenkins, 1992).

From the data collected, schools tried to remedy the situation by employing qualified staff members; engaging in group work; being positive; and working hard (Whitaker, 1984, Gibbs, 1992, Jenkins, 1992). Some of these strategies failed to work because of the inaccessibility of the schools to attract qualified staff members. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, it is argued that co-operative learning, peer teaching and group work are some of the strategies employed to improve the achievement levels of the learners in an overcrowded class (Benbow *et al* (2007).

The principals were faced with the problem of teacher stress and teacher conflicts at their schools. Principals, HODs and educators were stressed about the learner disciplinary problems; lack of facilities; the lack of teacher and learner resources; the heavy marking workload; and staff conflicts. As reported in the literature studies in chapter 2, Gibbs (1992) and Jenkins (1992) argue that overcrowded classes place tremendous pressure on learners, teachers and school managers. The data collected reflects that educators are not coping with the heavy workloads in the classrooms. Research has shown that overcrowded class sizes contribute to stress and undue pressure among teachers and learners. (NCES, 2000)

As discussed in the school effectiveness literature, Benbow *et al* (2007) argue that team teaching and shift instruction are ways to overcome the stress levels associated with overcrowded classes. From the data collected, the educators shared the marking and workload with the other staff members as a strategy to overcome their heavy workloads. From the data

collected, principals motivated staff members by having weekly staff meetings to resolve staff conflicts.

4.5. Summary

This chapter focuses on the presentation and analysis of data. The main aim of the research was to explore the experiences of the principals, HODs and educators in large classes. The researcher conducted the research with a sample of nine participants. The researcher has collated, interpreted and presented the data through semi-structured interviews and observations. The conclusions drawn are presented in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5:

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges and strategies of school managers and educators in large classes in three schools in Inanda. This chapter focuses on 3 issues, namely: it summarises the entire study; secondly it provides conclusions; and lastly provides recommendations.

5.2. Summary of the Findings

The study was intended to explore the experiences of principals, HODs and educators in large classes. I run through the entire study and what took place in each chapter. Finally, I provide an overview of the study and will include the implications of this study.

Chapter 1 describes the problem and its setting and explains the research questions. The first research question asked is what challenges were experiences in large classes and the second was what strategies were used to cope with the large classes.

Chapter 2 highlights the literature review and defines large classes, rural schools and school managers. Thereafter, I look at international and national perspectives on large classes, the implications of large classes; strategies used to overcome large classes; and lastly, I discuss the theories of school effectiveness, school improvement, a learning school and effective leadership in relation to large classes. Literature on this subject suggests that one of the ways to overcome the challenges in large classes is when schools become learning schools and promote learning (Sterling, 2000). School effectiveness and school improvement is geared towards improving the quality of education and learner achievement in the classrooms. Lastly, effective leadership, which is equipped with improved skills, attitudes and knowledge, is imperative to meet the demands and challenges in our South African schools. Literature has shown that transformational leadership impacts largely on school improvement (Leithwood et al, 1999; Senge, 1990, Owens, 1998). The extent to which schools make progress depends much on transformational leaders who are visionaries and excellent communicators.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design and examines the purpose and type of this study. I reviewed the research site, the research sample and the research instruments that I used to collect data. I used research instruments such as observations and semi-structured interviews to collect the data from the nine participants. Lastly, I highlighted the processing of data, the limitations of my study and the reliability and validity of the research study itself.

Chapter 4 presented the observations at each school and described what I actually saw at these schools. I then looked at the plethora of challenges that were experienced and some of the strategies that schools were using to cope with their situation. I presented the themes relating to the handling of learner discipline; learner achievement and quality of work; space utilisation; planning for large classes; staff motivation; staff conflicts; educator and learner resource materials; educator workload and marking; and lastly, teaching methods in large classes. Finally, I merged the findings with the literature review.

On the basis of the summaries in all the chapters; I am making the following conclusions:

5.3. Conclusions

The major findings of my study are that the challenges facing school managers and educators are overwhelming, and coping with large classes appears to be a daunting task, especially in these schools. There is a plethora of challenges that these schools are facing and these challenges include: disciplinary problems; lack of learning space; poor learner achievements; poor working conditions; lack of classroom facilities; lack of proper classrooms; high absenteeism; inadequately trained staff members; teacher stress; lack of teacher/learner resources; and staff conflicts.

From the findings, it is noted that the schools with large classes are facing major disciplinary problems. There is evidence of these findings in all three schools and these challenges have been recounted by all the participants. Learners are feeling frustrated at being cramped in overcrowded classes, educators are at their wits ends about the disciplinary problems and school managers do not know how to handle their situation. The literature says that learners experiencing lack of space in the classroom feel cramped, frustrated and stressed, and this results in disciplinary problems (Oliver, 2006). Research has shown that learners in large

classes get easily frustrated and congested with the overcrowding in the classroom (Belsky, 2004).

As a way to overcome this challenge, the schools tried to maintain discipline in large classes by having strict codes of conduct. This worked at Jabulani High but not at the other schools. The schools tried to detain the learners and give them extra duties to do to curb their undisciplined behaviour. This strategy failed because the learners stayed away from school, creating high absenteeism. Rewarding appropriate behaviour and counselling frustrated learners were strategies that worked as learners were given an opportunity to express themselves. Moreover, some schools disciplined learners with verbal warnings, detention and giving them chores to do. These strategies failed to work as learners became even more despondent. Whilst schools were trying, they were not coping with the deviant behavioural problems they were experiencing on a daily basis. Some schools had more strategies than others.

According to Oliver (2006) educators have expressed their frustrations and difficulties in catering for the individual needs in large classes and this has created frustrations amongst the learners. From the findings it has been concluded that large classes impacted negatively on teaching and learning in the classroom. Poor learner achievements were prevalent in large classes. Learners were feeling robbed of individualised teaching from the educators. Educators found that the learners were distanced from them. Principals were concerned about the poor quality of work that was being done by the learners in large classes. It has also been concluded that school managers and educators face an enormous task of teaching learners in large classes. This has resulted in the learners showing little interest in their work and has contributed to their low achievement levels (Thurlow, 2003).

The findings also support the view that large classes affect the learners' achievements and quality of work, whereas smaller classes improve learner performance in mathematics, technical studies and reading in the first four years of schooling (Vally and Spreen, 1998). The findings have been supported by Lee et al (2002); Gibbs (1992) and Blatchford (2003). Thus, learning is being affected by the "largeness" of the classes.

In the light of the above statement, schools have made many attempts to overcome their challenges. School managers have endeavoured to bring in suitably qualified staff members

to their schools to raise the standard of education. Due to the inaccessibility of the school, qualified educators were not easily attracted to this school. Principals have encouraged educators to engage in group work. Educators complained that this strategy failed to work because not all the learners were supervised. Therefore, it is correct to say that school managers and educators have endeavoured to find suitable strategies to overcome the challenges in large classes. They have tried, but the complexity of the problem is overwhelming for them. The strategies that have been implemented by the school managers and educators have been beneficial in Jabulani High and Woza High, but they did not seem to work in Bayeti Primary school.

From the findings, it can be concluded that large classes impacted on the well-being of the learners, educators, HODs and school managers. Learners have become frustrated and this has resulted in little or no interest in their work. Educators are also bearing the consequences of large classes and heavy workloads, resulting in teacher stress, teacher apathy, teacher conflicts, high absenteeism and low staff morale. The educators are also experiencing conflicts due to staff differences. Principals are also highly stressed about the prevailing situation. This is supported by the literature discussed in Chapter 2. Authors such as Gibbs (1992) and Jenkins (1992) all agree that large classes place tremendous pressure on learners, teachers and school managers. Research has definitively shown that large class sizes contribute to teacher stress and undue pressure among teachers and learners (NCES, 2000).

However, schools have tried to look at ways to overcome the challenges faced by their staff. Some have tried to motivate their staff members by having weekly staff meetings to discuss matters of concern. Principals have looked at different motivational techniques to create a positive atmosphere at school. Some schools have tried to have stress management workshops, as well as bring in motivational speakers to address their staff members. Some schools promote team-building, team marking and shared workloads to help alleviate the stress amongst the educators. Some schools focused on being positive, despite the circumstances, while Bayeti Primary resorted to praying together as an endeavour to overcome their challenges.

As a way to overcome their challenges, school managers and educators have tried to implement strategies to overcome their challenges. However, there were still many challenges that could not be addressed due to the complexities of the problems experienced.

The concerns that have emerged from my studies, are that, though there are many strategies that have been implemented by the school managers and educators; schools are falling into a “no-care” attitude and a sense of failure is emerging, for example at Bayeti Primary. It is evident that these schools are failing to cope with the prevailing situation. On the basis on these conclusions there are certain things that I would like to recommend.

5.4. Recommendations that arise from these findings are:

- that schools with large classes receive greater support and guidance from the Department of Education on how they can cope with their situations
- that specialised training be given to educators, HODs and principals in rural schools
- that in terms of combined classes, every effort should be made to workshop these strategies so that educators know how to cope with teaching two classes at the same time
- that more workshops be directed towards stress management and staff motivation
- that educators attend teacher training workshops and professional developments
- that the Department of Education make a greater effort to assist schools that lack classrooms
- that schools with few or no classrooms structures be a priority for the Department of Education and that more classrooms be built to accommodate all the learners.
- that educators adopt a positive attitude towards their circumstances and in this way overcome their challenges
- that educators and learner develop a more meaningful relationship where learners feel a sense of understanding and love.
- that the Post Provisioning Norm be addressed to take into account the practicalities in the school, especially in terms of the number of management posts that are required
- that educators, HODs and principals who work under these conditions be rewarded for the efforts by the government
- that further research be done regarding the impact of large classes on the quality of learning
- that parents get more involved with the schools in these rural areas

5.5. Reflections

On a personal basis, this research study has given me a greater “revelation” of the topic of large classes. It has also given me a greater understanding of the experiences of the school managers and educators in large classes. It has been an “eye-opener” to me. I also had an understanding at the back of my head that school managers were not affected as much as the educators. After my investigation and findings, I have found that school managers are equally as pressurised as educators in large classes. I also assumed that all schools were coping with their large classes. I have learnt from the first-hand experiences of the educators. My visits to the three rural schools have been most an enriching experience as I began to see, first-hand, the living conditions of the community and the level of poverty in this area. I began to identify with them and empathise with their circumstances.

I was not aware of the challenges the educators and school managers were experiencing, especially in poverty-stricken areas. I was also alarmed to see the high level of absenteeism, vandalism and unemployment in these schools and the community at large. I have come to salute and honour the educators and school managers working in these poverty-stricken areas who work with contentment and a positive attitude. None of the participants appeared to be bitter and angry about their circumstances. As an educator in an ex-model C school with a class of 36, I have come to appreciate and value my job. The research study has shown me how thinking positively, having perseverance and endurance, are keys to life challenges; be it in the classroom or out of the classroom. I have developed a deeper understanding of the ethical issues and skills that are required by school managers and educators in large classes. I have also realised, through this study that educators, HODs and school managers in this predicament have to be creative and think of new and innovative ways to deal with their situation.

5.6. Conclusion

From these findings, it is evident that schools are trying very hard to cope with the challenges they face in large classes. It has also emerged that being positive and having a positive mindset are recommended for educators when faced with large classes. “Make do with what you have in your hands” is the key to overcoming the challenges. Large classes are a

contested issue that need to be addressed as the quality of education is at stake in South Africa.

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ANNEXURE A

Consent to Participate in this Study:

University of Natal
School of Education
Durban
4041

20 March 2008

Dear Colleague

Re: Consent to Participate in this Study: How are “overcrowded classes” being managed in rural primary schools in the Durban region?

I am Mrs. Grace Baruth and I am currently completing my Masters Degree in Education Management. On the basis of my degree requirements, I intend conducting a research study on how “overcrowded classes” are being managed in rural primary schools in the Durban region. My research study is targeting rural schools and the impact of overcrowded classes in these particular schools. Five schools have been selected for my project.

I intend understanding the perceptions, experiences and viewpoints of the stakeholders facing overcrowded classes. My study involves observations and interviews of the stakeholders, which in this case are the teachers and principals facing overcrowded class situations.

Hence I write to request your permission to participate in this study research. All information provided would be treated in strict confidence and would be used for research purposes only. All participants in this study would be on a voluntary basis and at any given time you would be free to discontinue your participation. Furthermore confidentiality and anonymity is assured and names will not be disclosed.

Please find attached letter of permission granted to me by the Department of Education.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in this study. Please sign consent form if you are willing to participate in the study.

I, _____ hereby willingly participant in the above-mentioned study. I understand all the conditions in participating in this study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

I, Grace Baruth, the researcher, hereby declare that all information provided will be treated in strict confidence and for research purposes only.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

ANNEXURE B

Observation Sheet:

1. **School and its background:**
2. **Teacher:**
3. **Grade:**
4. **No of learners per class:**
5. **Size Dimensions:**
6. **Effective Use of Classroom:**
7. **Utilization of Teaching Resources:**
 - a) Textbooks
 - b) Charts
 - c) Teacher Support Materials
8. **Relationship between Educator and Learners:**
 - a) How do they relate to each other?
 - b) If not, then what strategies are in place?
9. **Learner Participation**
 - a) Are the learners actively involved?
 - b) If not, then what strategies are in place to motivate learner participation?

10.Learning Environment:

- a) Learners' attitude
- b) Learners' discipline
- c) Learners' assessment
- d) Learners' attendance
- e) Visibility in the classroom
- f) Acoustics in the Classroom
- g) Ventilation in the Classroom

11.Other:

ANNEXURE C

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 1 WITH THE EDUCATOR:

The interviewer will ask the educators how they manage large classes and what challenges they experience in these areas:

- 1. Utilization of Teaching Space:**
- 2. Management of Pupils' Activities:**
 - a) Quantity of pupils' activities**
 - b) Quality of pupils' activities**
- 3. Learner Discipline**
 - a) Nature of disciplinary problems**
 - b) Ways to cope with the discipline**
- 4. Learner Assessments:**
- 5. Learner Participation:**
 - a) Are the learners actively involved in the lessons?**
 - b) What measures have you taken to ensure your learners are actively involved in the lessons?**
- 6. Teacher's Workload:**
 - a) Are you able to mark all learners' books?**
 - b) What are you doing about the marking?**
- 7. Teaching Methods Used:**
- 8. Communication:**
- 9. Teachers Resource materials**
- 10. Other:**

ANNEXURE D
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 2 WITH THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT:

The interviewer will ask the Head of Department how they manage large classes and what challenges they are experiencing in these area:

1. Supervision strategies in this phase:

- a) Syllabus planning for this phase
- b) Learner Enrolment
- c) Number of classes
- d) Are there sufficient classes in the school
- e) Learners' attendance in this phase
- f) Learners' interest and attitude towards their work in this phase
- g) Learners' activities in this phase
- h) Learners' Discipline in this phase
- i) Learners' Assessment in this phase
- j) Learners' participation in this phase
- k) How are teachers coping with the workload in this phase?
- l) Teacher motivation in this phase
- m) Staff developments in this phase

n) Managing teachers' work in this phase

o) Managing of the Teaching methods in the phase

p) Managing of the Teaching resources in this phase

q) Other additional comments by the HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

ANNEXURE E
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 3 WITH THE PRINCIPAL

The interviewer will ask school managers, deputy principals and heads of department what professional development programmes are in place in their schools to help them manage large classes and what challenges they experience in these areas:

1. Strategic Planning processes in your school in terms of:

- a) Learner Performance and learner achievements**
- b) School Improvement Plans and Effectiveness**
- c) Planning school curriculum and instruction**
- d) Staff Planning in large classes**
- e) Staff Motivation**
- f) Attending to Staff Conflict**
- g) Development of Staff Workshops**

2. Management of School Finances

3. Management of Discipline

4. Management of Educational resources

5. Management of Parent Involvement

6. Management of Staff Appraisal and Evaluation

7. Other: