CENTRE FOR RESEARCH & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

PUTTING PEOPLE ON TOP OF PROBLEMS

Seeking lessons for teacher professional development

A Pilot Research Project Conducted by the Centre for Research and Community Development in partnership with Practical Ministries For Joint Education Trust As part of the President's Education Initiative

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(i) Executive Summary and Recommendations

The aim of this six-month pilot research project was to support the national Department of Education's plans to implement whole school development, in order to improve the quality of teaching in South African schools towards the realisation of Curriculum 2005.

The research was intended to help meet the need for a first-hand understanding of the obstacles to teaching and learning in South Africa's schools in order to support the professional development of teachers so that they can most effectively implement the curriculum. The objectives were twofold:

1. To provide reliable data, through action research, to identify difficulties faced by teachers and learners in large, multilingual, multi-cultural and otherwise diverse classes.

2. To suggest possible strategies for addressing the problems identified.

The research was based on a questionnaire designed to be administered in seven selected primary schools in the lower South Coast region of KwaZulu Natal. The questionnaire was designed in three sections to be completed through interviews in school with three target groups: Principals, Teachers and Pupils.

While the research topic was concerned with obstacles to teaching and learning related particularly to class size and diversity, the study avoided pre-empting the views of the target groups on the relative significance of these obstacles compared to other problems the respondents faced. Therefore, the range of obstacles to learning and teaching that were mentioned in the interviews are covered in the findings to show how issues of class size and diversity rank alongside them.

Main findings

The main findings of the pilot project are that:

• The single greatest obstacle to teaching in the view of managers and educators is lack of resources

• Large classes and high pupil:teacher ratios are a major obstacle both to teaching and learning

• Diversity is a significant obstacle to learning and teaching but the key issues are: age ability behaviour and socio-economic background, rather than colour, culture or language.

• The major obstacles to learning experienced by learners are not related to resources and teaching methods but to the behaviour of fellow learners and educators.

- The glaring disparities of the apartheid education system still exist between the historically black and historically white schools, despite changes in policy.
- These disparities leave the most disadvantaged (rural) schools less able to absorb learning and teaching problems and with fewer options about how to address them.
- Therefore, the effects of problems of resources, large class size and diversity are more keenly felt in the poorest schools, both in terms of educational performance and teacher and pupil morale.

Recommendations

Possible strategies for *addressing* the problems identified

- Provincial and regional education authorities need to review budget planning processes to take greater account of local and regional disparities.
- Strategies, timing and resource allocation for all training and in-service training projects need to be revisited, particularly with regard to training in OBE and Curriculum 2005.
- Principals and other managers need to be trained in new management methodologies to take into account the need to transform the current command-style management culture in many schools.
- Lesson planning, subject allocations and workloads - especially in schools with large class sizes need to be reviewed. For example, in terms of resource constraints it would make sense to prioritise subjects that address key numeracy, literacy, technical, vocational and lifeskills needs of learners. At the same time exploring creative teaching methodologies could broaden and deepen the impact of the information transfer - eg visual and other sensory learning, through posters/newsprint and outdoor learning.
- Publicise, support and establish teacher support centres within reach of all, including the rural schools. These can bring training opportunities, tools for implementing the new teaching methodologies and professional/pastoral support to educators.
- Mobile training programmes should be considered as a way to build capacity among the many rural teachers not able to access or afford urban-based courses.
- In view of the well-known difficulties of trying to redeploy teachers and resources to the most disadvantaged schools, but given the urgent need to redress the inequities in education provision, it would make sense to invest in educators in under-resourced and under-achieving schools.

- Train and empower rural and township school managers and governing bodies to plan and budget in order to exercise more foresight and control over limited resources,
- Support and consolidate the role of School Governing Bodies and Parent Teacher Associations to make them more inclusive and to serve as a bridge between the school and the community it serves.
- Building a sense of community ownership of the school requires involving learners much more actively in identifying, taking some responsibility for and helping to solve problems.
- It is critical to support educators in recognising and developing alternative means of discipline. Bullying and corporal punishment are two issues that make school life a misery for many learners, particularly in rural schools. Corporal punishment is still seen as the only effective response to bullying and other forms of indiscipline and these two forms of violence, therefore feed on each other.

(ii) Analysis of findings

Background

The following schools were involved in the study

1) Gamalakhe Primary School
2) Gcilima Primary School
3) Merlewood Primary School
4) Port Shepstone Junior Primary School
5 Port Shepstone Senior Primary School
6) Shibase Primary School
7) Siphakamile Primary School

The respondents were

School Principals	5
Deputy Principal	1
Heads of department	1
Teachers (Grades 1-7)	55
Learners	392

The schools are located in the Lower South Coast Region of Education - in the surrounding townships of Port Shepstone and in the rural areas. The schools' environment is urban (two schools), township (two schools) and rural (three). They are under the following areas of jurisdiction:

Port Shepstone Transitional Local Council - 3 schools

Ugu Regional Council - 1 school

Traditional Authority - 3 schools.

The choice of the area for research was motivated by the fact that it is representative of the range of South African educational environments.

<u>Findings from interviews with School Principals/Managers</u>

The interviews with Principals and other managers were intended to produce quantitative data about the school environment and pupil:teacher ratios, and qualitative data about the obstacles to learning and teaching in each school, as perceived from a management or supervisory perspective.

In general we found that there was consensus among the teachers and Principal within each school, and between the teachers and principals/managers across schools, about the main obstacles to teaching and managing.

However, in response to questions about the effects these obstacles had and about the reasons for them, there were widely different views between teachers and Principals and between the different schools. In the section on problem solving, there was again some consensus on what should be done and by whom. This is discussed below but it points to the facts that conditions in each school are unique, that the way schools deal with problems depends on .the resources available to them, on the training, experience and motivation of the educators, and on the supervision and teaching culture in each school.

School environment and enrolment

Principals were asked to describe the make-up of their school population in terms of the catchment area and family background. Although we have already stated that two of the schools are in central urban areas (Port Shepstone) two in township (Merlewood and Gamalakhe) and three in rural areas (Gcilima, Siphakamila and Shibase), their school populations are not homogeneous. The schools have a wide range of diversity along ethnic cultural, religious, employment status and socio-economic background.

One principal described the school population as 'urban' only, one as 'township' only and one as 'rural'. Two schools were mixed 'urban and rural' and one mixed 'urban, rural and township'. Only one principal said the learners were of the same background. Two schools had learners of diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Four schools drew their learners from mainly unemployed households and one from mainly employed households Managers from three of the schools reported that the age group of pupils was uniform but teachers in all but two of the schools reported wide age ranges within their particular classes.

Pupil:teacher ratios - hidden disparities

The total enrolment of all the school in the sample for 1998 was 6252.

This represents an increase of 6% on the 1997 enrolment of 5881. The number of pupils enrolled had increased over the previous years with a significant jump from 4714 in 1995 to 5866 in 1996. However, the findings from learners in our sample showed that more had enrolled in 1998 than in previous years.

Three schools indicated that they have a waiting list for admission, while four have none. The waiting list is up to 400, and the duration of the wait up to two years.

The total number of teachers in the sample schools for 1998 is 169. This would indicate an average pupil:teacher ratio of 37:1. However, the aggregated average figures hide extreme differences in the class sizes and the pupil:teacher ratios *between* schools and between classes - the lowest being 19:1 and the highest 171:1.

If the two Port Shepstone Primary Schools are excluded, the average class sizes taught by teachers in the other five sample schools are as follows:

Grade 1 = 48

Grade 2 = 47.2

Grade 3 = 43.6

Grade 4 = 57.1

Grade 5 = 56.9

Grade 6 = 46.7

Grade 7 = 81.5 Senior Special= 49.6

So, the averages taken across the whole sample indicate that in the years since South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, the pupil:teacher ratios have successfully been brought down to below the level considered acceptable by the Education Department.

But on the contrary, the averages taken across only the township and rural schools give an aggregated mean of 53.8. One of the schools surveyed had four classes of between 146 and 171 learners.

When compared with the two urban schools, this shows that huge disparities remain. In fact, the inequality between schools in terms of pupil:teacher ratios continues to reflect the inequalities engineered by the apartheid system. Historically disadvantaged schools remain currently disadvantaged.

Teachers interviewed in one of the sample schools reported the numbers of learners in their classrooms, rather than the number of pupils for whom they were responsible, on the basis that several classrooms were shared by two (and in one case three) classes due to lack of space. Although the pupil teacher ratios were not high in every class, the lack of space caused a major problem of overcrowding and the teachers experienced smilar difficulties to their colleagues working with larger numbers of pupils.

Responses from principals, educators and learners indicate that all the schools face similar problems but that the formerly black schools are more severely affected by them and less well-equipped to manage them.

Educators are under pressure to 'transform' schools through adopting OBE and implementing Curriculum-2005. It is clear from the interviews with principals, teachers and pupils that many educators are too preoccupied with coping with large and diverse classes to be able to think creatively about outcomes other than keeping learners fn school and getting them through exams.

had led to 80% of the school population being absent for a significant period.

There is less visible diversity (in terms of colour, mix of cultures etc), in the historically disadvantaged schools. However, it is mainly diversity related to age, educational background and ability, and behaviour that teachers in most schools say is problematic. And the historically disadvantaged schools are less well-equipped to bridge these differences.

Lack of resources the main obstacle

All the principals/managers, including in the two well-resourced schools, indicate that the main obstacle to effective teaching and school management is lack of money/resources.

"There is lack of cooperation and assistance from the Education Department , for example ambiguously worded circulars and circulars arriving long after due date for submission of information"

- Principal 9 years' experience.

Five of the seven managers cite lack of co-operation and guidance from the Education Department around implementation of OBE/Curriculum 2005 and in addition one cites the reorganisation of the education system itself. Another complains of poor attendance at training courses on OBE and one of failure of educafon department officials to turn up to meetings on time.

Three managers complain of lack of staff, three of large class sizes and two of shortage of classrooms. The range of other problems listed highlights the great inequality between the schools. For example, one of the Port Shepstone principals says that apart from lack of money, there are no real obstacles to effective management. On the other hand, the Shibase management cite the fact that the school has no proper toilets or running water and no security. There are no obstacles mentioned by managers in relation to diversity in school population.

The obstacles listed are said mainly to be caused by lack of funds, reorganisation and lack of direction in the Education Department, and transport problems. Poverty and violence were also highlighted.

In relation to how the above problems affect teaching and management, there is no consensus. Answers ranged from 'no effects' to inability to finish the syllabus because parents could not afford learning materials and problems with discipline. Lack of involvement of parents in the affairs of the school, overcrowding and related inability to give individual attention were also mentioned. The fact that the same problems affect each school in very different ways shows that schools have different capacity to absorb the problems, related to their conditions, level of resources and

The Principals' responses to the question on the best ways to overcome the obstacles again reflect different levels of capacity and financial independence. Five p principals say simply that the Government must give schools more resources and employ more teachers. Two say school managers should use their own initiative and not rely on the education department. In addition, one says:

"The Department must have direction and make education first priority."

Of the managers who have put in place their own policies to address the problems, two say their boards have decided that parents should pay higher fees. One of these was Port Shepstone Senior Primary, which although relatively well-resourced reported problems in maintaining the school and paying staff. One has implemented a 'platoon system' of teaching to deaf with overcrowding, one is seeking help from its governing body and in another, educators are collecting local materials to help learners.

Asked for any additional comments, six of the principals/managers reiterated the need for more resources and one (Port Shepstone Junior Primary) commented on the good fortune of the school to have made changes early and to be 'very advantaged'.

The view from the `frontline' - findings from educators

Most respondents among the 55 teachers are teaching up to seven subjects and most are taking one class. However, seven teachers are taking up to ten subjects and several are teaching three classes. As stated above, class sizes range from 19 to 171. The subjects taught are reflected on the data sheet.

Obstacles to teaching

"There is just not enough time to attend to each pupil's needs."

When educators were asked about the single greatest obstacle to performing effectively as a teacher, lack of resources was at the top of the list for 23 respondents (41.8%). This was followed by large classes (20%) and diversity of pupils (12.7%).

Another 9% cited poor attitude/behaviour of some learners as the greatest obstacle to teaching and 5.5% lack of pre-school foundation among learners. Two respondents cited pressure of administrative duties and two (from the same school) the command-style management of the principal. Obstacles cited by individual educators were:

Lack of training;

Interruptions;

Poor security in schools;

Divisions among staff;

Poor understanding of

Absenteeism.

One teacher, from the former Model C school replied that there was 'no significant obstacle' to effective teaching.

The above mentioned obstacles are attributed to a very wide range of causes. The most common cause cited was `underfunding of education' in general (21.8%). However, an equal number of respondents (12) mentioned a range of more specific resource issues, namely shortage of schools and/or classrooms; shortage of teachers; lack of teaching materials; too many demands on teachers' time.

Poor discipline at home and in school was the cause cited by 7.4% of respondents. Dictatorship by the principal was given as the cause of the problem by three teachers from one school. Lack of motivation among pupils on one hand but 'more pupils seeking a better education' on the other were also cited as the reasons for the main problems.

Language difficulties, government not playing a vital role, the change to Outcome Based Education were among the many other causes of problems stated by individual respondents. The full list is given in the data sheet.

A very wide range of other obstacles to effective teaching were cited by educators. There was consensus about the most serious of these and many respondents reinforced the answers given about the single greatest obstacle to teaching. Behaviour problems among learners was the next greatest obstacle cited (by 21.8%) but an equal number said lack of learning aids.

Shortage of teachers, lack of stationery, language problems and overcrowding were ranked next as the greatest obstacles. The second set of answers included shortage of classrooms, mentioned by 6 respondents, and size of class. The next most frequently mentioned problems were lack of parental support; absenteeism and late coming of pupils; lack of libraries/ science laboratories; lack of communication between teachers and parents. Violence, vandalism and security problems were among the other obstacles mentioned.

"There is a lack of funds in the Department and at home; more mothers are having to go to work and children are left unsupervised"

HoD, Port Shepstone Junior Primary School

Several respondents gave the same reasons for different obstacles and different reasons for the same obstacles. Therefore, the reasons are not fully matched to the problems.

The main reason given was again lack of funds - cited by 21.8% of respondents as the reason for the four main shortages mentioned (lack of stationery, lack of learning aids, shortage of teachers, lack of library/science facilities). Lack of parental support and guidance and abolition of corporal punishment were the reasons cited for behaviour

problems. Violence was the next most common reason given, followed by household socio-economic problems and lack of discipline.

Towards a culture of cooperation

More than half (54.5%) of educators indicated they had taken steps to solve these problems. These primarily involved discussions with parents and the principals; involving the PTA and requesting the Governing body to assist

While a few teachers had resorted to industrial action, punishment and detention, many of the individual responses reflected a desire among teachers for greater cooperation between all roleplayers - teachers, learners, parents, the wider community, the governing body - to resolve difficulties.

On the question of what else could be done, by whomever, to resolve the difficulties, the most common responses emphasised this issue of cooperation.

20% of educators said it was necessary to 'involve, educate and communicate with parents'. Another 10% said PTAs needed to be formed. A further 10% said the community should play a greater role in the school. Several respondents said that communication between the Department of Education and teachers should be improved and others that their principal should respect and cooperate with the staff.

Class size as an obstacle to teaching

"A big class is not easy to control; even when they are divided into groups, while you are busy with one group, the others are disturbing you."

- Grade 3 teacher from Gamalakhe

"You cannot give individual attention. Lazy pupils tend to `hide in the crowd'; there is difficulty in controlling all the pupils here."

- Grade 4&5 teacher, Merlewood

In terms of the teacher work load, 25 respondents taught between 1-3 subjects; 22 taught 4 -7 subjects; 7 taught 8-10 subjects .

Most teachers (42) are trained in the subjects that they teach, while 11 others are trained in some, and only two are not trained in any of the subjects they teach.

Large classes represented a teaching problem for 37 (67%) of the respondents. Among these, discipline and academic support were the two main areas of concern. 24.3% of those experiencing problems said it was difficult to control a large class and a further 24.3% said there was no time to give individual attention and support. Another 13.5% complained of overcrowding and 10.8% of shortage of

textbooks. Individual comments were that educators could not finish their work in time and that OBE cannot be implemented.

Asked what lessons the 37 had learned from the experience of teaching a large class, the main responses were to be well-prepared and organised (21.6%) and to get the children to work in smaller groups, for effective teaching and learning (also 21.6%).

Other lessons were that teachers needed to provide more support for weaker pupils and needed to be patient (8%). Doing more classwork, being able to recognise and respond to different levels of performance and allowing children to work at their own pace were other responses.

Several respondents stated conclusions they had arrived at rather than insights they had gained. For example, 21.6% said they had learned that it was 'difficult to control overcrowding' and 18.9% said they 'couldn't control noise levels'. 8% said they couldn't reach their objectives. Other teachers noticed that learners were not positive about their work and that there was a tendency to ignore the brighter pupils. This last point is something that is picked up as problematic by several learners.

How teachers handle large classes

"Speak loudly and be fastl"

Clearly this approach, adopted by one *of* the rural school respondents, would not take account of the different learning and language levels found within many *of* the classes in our sample. The vast majority of educators did not resort to this but said that they grouped children according to ability . Grouping was used to manage large classes by 76% of the total sample, including those who had not reported problems of class size.

14.5% of respondents said they used a question and answer method. Other methods or techniques included allowing children to work at their own pace, story-telling and the 'OBE approach'. The different levels of resources and the different teaching cultures were reflected in the range of other approaches to dealing with large classes: 'Use videos', said one teacher; 'Lecture' said another.

A problem of resources rather than methods?

When asked whether anything else could be done (by anyone) to overcome problems related to teaching a large class, the most common responses were advocating additional resources rather than alternative teaching methods. Just under one third of educators (30.9%) said the answer was to employ more teacher in order to reduce the pupil:teacher ratio. A further 21.8% called for more teaching aids and 16.3% said building more classrooms would help. Three respondents said the Education Department should be stricter about enforcing the recommended pupil:teacher ratio but did not

specify whether they thought this should be done by employing more teachers, building more classrooms, refusing admission beyond a certain limit, or other means.

"As a teacher, I'm faced with a shortage of skills."

- Standard 5 teacher Shibase Primary School.

In terms of more appropriate teaching methods, 7 teachers (12.7%) said training in this area would be helpful. Three said giving learners self-correcting assignments would help. Three educators who did not experience problems teaching large classes recommended grouping by age and ability, and training pupil leaders within each group as the best way to manage.

Ages apart

In relation to age range within classes, 72.7% of educators indicated that children in each of their classes are not of the same-age. 36.3% of the sample said there were more than ten, pupils in their classes who were either two years younger or two years older than the expected average age for the grade. 32.7% said this applied to between sand ten pupils in their classes and 7% said up to five pupils were two years older or younger than the average.

Of the 40 educators who reported significant age differences, 28 reported that this caused problems in the classroom. In this case, the most significant problems did not relate to teaching but to discipline. Of those who reported problems, 78.6% said these were mainly matters of discipline, particularly bull iy bullying and teasing. One educator in a rural school added:

"Older pupils entice younger pupils into sexual activity".

Another said:

"Older boys say they are adults and don't do school work".

32 % of the problems reported were academic, particularly the lack of relevance of material to different age groups:

"You can't equate the interests of children of different ages",

said one educator.

Three respondents reported a high dropout rate among overage pupils and two reported problems related to interaction with other pupils, including:

"Older pupils are embarrassed when corrected."

The greatest number of respondents (11 out of the 28 - that is 39% were inclined to try to enforce discipline to overcome these problems. However, significant numbers looked for more creative and participatory means. Just over 28% said they grouped pupils according, to age and ability, 25% said they encouraged tolerance and sharing, including reassuring learners that their "Opinions really

matter". A further 25% said they preferred to use dialogue, discussing the problems individually with the children, parents, staff or principal, or taking the matter to the PTA.

Asked if anything has to be done, educators most commonly say schools should avoid mixing different ages of children in one class. They also call for more involvement of PTAs in the affairs of the schools, say principals should play a major role in problem-solving and suggest that pupils are tasked with responsibilities. Two educators used the same phrase:

"The kids need to be ukufundiswa, that is responsible for their actions"

Dealing with diversity

Just under half the respondents said that their learners came from diverse backgrounds.

The main issues of diversity were socio-economic/class (29% of the total sample cited this), cultural differences (25.4% of all respondents) and religious differences (23.6%). Other significant differences were ethnicity, language and geographic background. One educator mentioned political differences.

Just under half of those who said there was diversity within their classes reported that they encountered teaching problems as a result of the differences. These included that children from poor backgrounds suffered because of their poverty - their parents couldn't afford to buy them books, other children discriminated et d against them and, in many cases, their parents were illiterate and couldn't offer them adequate support with their schooling.

Equally significant among the problems described was the language issue. Educators said some children found English difficult to understand. Whenever the issue of English as a teaching medium arose with the educators in the interviews, it seemed to be viewed as a problem of the learners:

"Zulu pupils take long to cope with lessons"

was one comment on these lines

This contrasts with the perspective *of* leamers who *cited* language as a problem - their view was generally that it was a failure *of* the *education* system; inability *of* the teacher to communicate, or example.

The other main problems related to diversity were bullying of 'different' children and cultural sensitivity over subject matter. Teaching methods used by teachers to overcome the difficulties they mentioned are similar to the strategies used for dealing with large classes and age differences -group work, dialogue, promoting understanding and respect for all beliefs (for example, by teaching common values), using a a range of explanatory techniques, such as translation, illustration and dramatisaton; and streaming of classes.

Educators suggestions about what else could be done to address problems related to diversity included, once again, more resources - specifically, the government should supply more books, said three respondents. Promoting tolerance, treating pupils equally and involving the community were other suggestions that again highlighted the strong motivation among educators to seek collective problem-solving, particularly with parents.

Absenteeism

Significant levels of absenteeism were reported by 60% of educators, with 18% estimating at more t an ten days were lost per learner per term. The main reason cited was illness of the pupil (40%), which was particularly serious in the rural schools. Among the learners travelling long-distance school on foot, many suffer from poor nutrition which leads to tiredness and susceptibility to disease. Personal and family problems were the next greatest cause of absenteeism (29%). Responsibilities such as looking after siblings, attending funerals and weddings, and running errands such as helping to collect pensions were included here. Truancy was the third most common reason for absence (20%). Violence, parental illness and lack of transport were also mentioned by several educators.

The main problem related to absenteeism was that it became difficult for absentees to catch up with the syllabus, according to 38% of respondents. The effect on teachers was that they had to prepare lessons to take account of what had been missed and often had to teach the same lesson several times.

Again, when the question turned to suggestions for ways to overcome the problems, teachers frequently advocated a cooperative approach, alongside improved discipline. 23.6% said there was a need to emphasise to parents the importance of education and to get them to participate in school activities. 7.3% said the solution was to improve discipline and a further 7.3% said schools should be built within reasonable distances of homes.

Back to resources

The majority of additional comments made by respondents at the conclusion of the interviews tended to be further calls for additional resources and more support from government.

Eight teachers from a range of schools called for the government to motivate, support and respect teachers. The call for more resources specified, schools, classrooms, books, teachers and other facilities.

"OBE doesn't work because we have no facilities" -

was the message from one educator.

Teachers feel that education is not being given 'proper respect and attention' and say it should be prioritised. The variety of other comments by individual teachers once more reflects the wide range

of conditions in which teachers are working from one school to another.

For example, one teacher's main concern was for cultural and social workshops to help build unity among diverse staff and pupils, while two others appealed: "We want the Principal al to be nice to us". One was preoccupied with `enforcing discipline' while others were anxious to see accommodation provided on the school premises for pupils in areas affected by violence. Yet another teacher pointed out that free education in law should mean free education in schools.

Pupils' perceptions -findings from interviews with learners

The school population

A total of 392 learners from the seven target schools were interviewed. These were 205 female and 186 male (one respondent's sex was not stated).

The proportions of male and female learners in the sample were representative of the target population, as was the mix of ages and grades. The data has not been disaggregated to allow comparison of different age, grade or gender groups as the main focus of the research topic was identifying the most common obstacles to teaching and learning and then looking at class size and diversity specifically.

The data collected from the questionnaires administered to learners was analysed in terms of individual schools and in terms of the whole sample. In this analysis, we deal mainly with the findings from the whole sample and then highlight any significant differences between the schools.

As reflected in the enrolment figures provided by the school principals, which showed that enrolment had increased sharply from 1997 to 1998, the largest single group of respondents (80) joined their schools in 1998.

There had been a high turnover of the school population with only half of the learners interviewed having joined the school in Grade 1. The other half had moved to the school after starting their schooling elsewhere and more than a third (38.7%) had not studied at the school continuously since admission. Few pupils gave reasons for the break or change in their schooling but the most common reason cited among those who had been away for more than one term was violence (8%)

Travelling trends

The majority of learners interviewed travel to school on foot (72%). The aggregated figures hide the fact that only at the two urban schools do significant numbers of learners travel by other means than walking.

Of those who walk, the largest single group (121) take between 15 minutes and half an hour to reach school. There are 38 learners who walk for between half an hour and one hour to get to school, five who walk for between an hour and 90 minutes and two who take up to two hours.

Of those who travel by other means, most (57) come by car, with a maximum journey of up to half an hour. A further 26 travel by bus, with an average journey of up to 30 minutes but four of these take two hours to get to school. Fewer (19) travel by minibus taxi, with a maximum journey time of one hour. One respondent travels by bicycle.

Class size

The average class size in the sample schools was 42. However, as discussed above, this average is skewed by the inclusion of a former Model C school with much lower average classes.

The learners' responses show that 140 (35.7%) are in classes of between 41 and 50. Just over one third (133) said they were in classes of 31-40 but a significant minority (12.5%) said they were in classes of between 51 and 60. Eleven respondents said they were in classes of up to 80 learners. It should be mentioned here that the learners were giving their impressions of the number of pupils per class and their estimates did not always match the numbers registered as reported by the teachers.

Does size matter?

Do you consider this to be a large class, learners were asked?

"Yes, because we were already 19 and we've got a new girl."

-Grade 2 girl, PSJP

"No, because I hear from another school of classes containing 90 pupils."

- Grade 7 Shibase pupil in a class of 52

"No, because we are good."

- Grade 1 boy PSJP

"No, because when the teacher gives us a hiding, he finishes easily and is not tired"

-14-year-old Shibase pupil in a class of 36.

These quotes illustrate our findings that while, in terms of education policy, class size might be objective, in terms of the experience of learners and educators it is a subjective issue.

The survey revealed, as expected, that in general, learners in classes of fewer than 40 tended to perceive them as not large and those in

classes of more than 40 perceived them as large. (Almost 63% of learners in classes of 41-50 considered their class large). However, a very significant proportion of learners did not match that generalisation. 30% of learners in the smallest classes, of between 20 and 30, considered them large. By contrast, 47% of learners in classes between 51 and 60 did not consider them large, and some learners in classes of up to 80 did not consider them large.

The size of the classroom and how easily it could accommodate the number of pupils was a factor with many of the respondents. If everyone could fit in the space and had a chair, they tended not to think their class was large, even if they later mentioned learning difficulties related to noise, inability to get adequate attention from the teacher or inability of the teacher to control certain sections of the class.

Group teaching

One might expect that teaching methods and management of the class would be major factors in the perception of class size. Grouping of pupils by age and ability was cited by most educators as the best way to manage large classes. However, there was not a strong correlation between the responses of learners who considered their class large and responses on whether the class worked as a single group or in small groups.

Of the 196 pupils who considered their class, of whatever size, large, only slightly more than half (100) always s worked as one group while nearly the same number (96) worked in smaller groups Or in both single and smaller groups.

Of the 170 pupils who did not consider their class large, a higher proportion -61% - worked either in smaller groups or in both single and smaller groups while 36% (61 learners), worked always in one group.

"We know who is clever if we work in one group."

"The teacher can talk to everybody in smaller groups".

"Working in smaller groups works very well because our teachers can see our problems easily."

- Grade 1 girl, PSJP

"In small groups, we are free to discuss with other members of the group, withoutfear."

- Grade 6 boy, Siphakamile

Of the pupils who had experienced both methods, there was a fairly even balance between those who learned best in one group (45%) and those who learned better in small groups (48%) The remainder said either way was fine.

Still 'chalk and talk'

The learners were asked in what ways did they learn in their class. Most said they were taught in several different ways but the single most common learning method, cited by 88.5%, was 'copying from the board'. The next most common ways of learning were 'listening to the teacher' (83%) and 'reading from books' (82.5%). Two thirds the respondents ¯said they leamed from asking questions' and just over half (52.5%) said they learned by 'discussing things in class'

In terms of practical activities that might help develop learners with different abilities or levels of experience, less than half (45% said they also learned by 'making things' and this group was disproportionately represented in the C school. Less than q9%- of learners said that they learned by doing projects or assignments. Less than 14% cited other ways of learning, such as school excursions, playing and singing.

"I like it best when the teacher stands in front of the class and explains everything."

- Grade 3, PSJP, class of 22

When asked what they thought was the best way to learn 35% said 'listening to- the teacher'. 26% said copying from the board and 25.5% reading from books. 14% preferred discussing things in class and 2% asking questions. Obviously the range of responses here is limited by the fact that most learners had not experienced any practical learning methods with which they coulod compare their regular lessons.

"The best way I learn is by homework - because my family helps me."

Questions of diversity

The issue of diversity was addressed in two ways - through a question about age range within the class and questions about differences cited by the pupils without prompting.

Asked if most of the pupils in their class were the same age as them, nearly three quarters (73%) said they were not. The question regarding the size of the age gap produced confusing and inadequate responses and this data is not included.

If the 45 responses from Port Shepstone Junior Primary School are excluded from the question of age differences, the percentage of pupils who reported an age gap in their class goes up considerably.

"God made us different." - Grade 2 girl in PSJP

The learners were asked 'Would you say most children in your class are like you, or are they different?' The question was designed to be as open as possible and the interviewers were carefully briefed not to prompt the respondents by suggesting what might be meant by

'different'. This is because the aim was to find out what differences children tended to notice and which ones they regarded as significant and/or problematic.

73.5% of the learners said most of their classmates were 'different' from them. 23.7% said their classmates were the same as them. The remaining 2.8% did not answer.

Defining the differences

"I don't have time to study because I am always thinking about football."

- Grade 4 boy, Gamalakhe

"Some have got long hair and some have got blue eyes."

- Grade 3 pupil, PSJP

"Some are not wearing uniform."

- Grade 3 boy, Siphakamile

They were then asked 'in what ways' their classmates were different. The greatest number of respondents 35.7% cited differences in behaviour and attitude, and a further 34.7% said it was a question of Ability. Only 14.5% of respondents mentioned differences of Colour or appearance and none of these mentioned racial classifications - a few noted that classmates were darker or lighter in complexion than them.

The most noticed differences after these were in terms of Personality (7.8%). Language was the fifth difference (6.2%), then Culture (5.9%) and Economic Background (5.2%). Differences in economic background were reflected in comments by or about learners who could not afford to bring lunch to school or who did not have a school uniform.

Only 9 respondents mentioned religion. The majority of respondents having noted age differences in the earlier question, only 3 of them mentioned it here.

Each of the schools surveyed had a diverse population in different respects. All were diverse in terms of ability and all, except the former Model C school and the other urban school, had wide age ranges within grades. While the rural schools had uniform populations in terms of colour and economic background, they were diverse in terms of geographic background, language and culture (that is, schools which previously drew learners from the Zulu community currently have significant numbers of learners from the Xhosa communities of the Eastern Cape).

While the urban schools were uniform in terms of geographic and economic background and age, they were extremely diverse in terms of culture, language, colour and religion. One of the township schools was diverse in every way.

Do differences make any difference?

The focus of the questions on diversity to each group of respondents was to establish whether the perceived differences were problematic. While the ma of the learners perceived differences, only one third of the sample (33.6%) said these caused problems in school. This group cited an extremely wide range of problems but consensus emerged around problems related to different levels of ability.

Many pupils commented or complained that their teacher had to stop teaching to work with slower learners. They felt it was important that the teacher should `take care of' less able pupils but this meant brighter pupils were neglected and often felt bored. The issue of ability was clearly linked to the issue of different economic backgrounds. Several respondents from three of the schools noted that children from poor households did poorly academically because they could not afford books and pens and could not concentrate because they were hungry.

For example, a nine-year-old girl from Shibase said she had problems learning because of the shortage of books and the lack of food at home:

"When my teacher tells us something, I don't hear; I'm sleeping because I am hungry."

A classmate of hers noted:

"Children feel ashamed when they have no money to buy food." Some of the comments related to other differences were:

"I am a tomboy, so other girls do not like me."

"Some children have no respect for teachers."

"Teachers lose their temper because pupils are lazy."

"Some pupils fail at the end of the year ... only the clever ones pass."

"Children fight with each other."

"Some do not understand English."

Learning problems

When asked whether they had difficulties learning class, less than one third (30%) of the learners said they did. Only half of these respondents specified these difficulties. The most common problems were `Noise/bad behaviour' (13.5%) lack of individual attention problems with English (as a learning medium), shortage of learning materials, fighting, teachers striking, problems with particular subjects, hunger and overcrowding.

Most of these problems, and the reasons cited for them, mirrored the responses of the teachers interviewed. That is, behaviour/attitude of

"Sometimes I feel drowsy in the classroom ... It depends on the teacher; boring teachers make me feel dizzyl"

One school in particular has been very badly affected by political conflict in the community and a learner from this school said his learning problems were due to:

"Violence -I lost all my family and my books."

An 18-year-old girl in Grade 7 explained her slow progress:

"The first thing [difficulty] is the killing of my parents in 1994 and then the burning of my home ... These problems are disturbing me when I am learning at school."

Of the learners who said they had difficulties, most (71.4%) had talked about these with someone (usually their teacher) and the rest had not. Few commented on the response but typical replies were

"My mother talked to the teacher."

"Teacher said we should discuss the lesson"

"Nothing"

Solving problems

Just over one quarter (27%) of the respondents knew of any group at their school with responsibility for addressing such problems. 48% of these said Prefects or Monitors were responsible. 36% said the PTA should address the problems, five learners said it should be up to the teachers and four said the Principal. One school had a Learners' Representative Council (LRC) but only one of the respondents knew about this.

"I think teachers should also include pupils to solve the school problems."

- 11-year-old boy at Gamalakhe.

Of the 119 who had cited difficulties, nearly half (46%) said something had been done to solve them but very few specified what this was. More learners had opinions about what should be done to solve the problems. The most common views were that:

More classrooms were needed

There should be discussion with teachers

Corporal punishment should be continued

More teachers should be employed.

The best days of your life?

"What makes me happy is when my parents watch schoolsports."

To get further clarity on the kind of problems that learners experienced, we asked what made them happy at school, what made them unhappy at school and whether they would like to go to a different school.

All the respondents answered this question and the-single-most common answer by a long way was 'Sport!' This was the response of 201 (51.3%) of the sample.

"What makes me happy is to get a star on my work.", Grade 1 girl, Siphakamile

"To sit rather than to do housework." - Grade 6 girl from Shibase

Almost 37% (945 learner said 'Learning' made them happy, 12.7% said their friends made them happy at school and 10% said their class teacher made them happy. A significant minority (8.7%) said that 'Meals' made them happy. Most of this group came from one school, where the issue of poverty and hunger came up repeatedly. The final significant response to this question was 'Cultural activities' (7%). NB: Some respondents cited more than one factor

One child also answered that he is happy **"if no one hits me."**

The worst days of their lives...

Although many children said learning made them happy, when asked what made them unhappy at school, most complained about their treatment and their physical environment rather than anything related to the education they received (except for lack of books and paper). Despite the fact that corporal punishment has been banned in schools, 73 (18.6%) of learners said what made them unhappy was punishment and of these, 64 (16.3%) specifically complained about being hit by teachers:

"I would like to go to another school because they beat us badly at this school".

- Shibase pupil

"To be punished when you have no books to read."

- Grade 7 boy, Siphakamile

"If you come late, you get about eight lashes but if others come an hour later they get the same lashes."

- 14-year-old at Siphakamile

"I dislike singing while teachers keep on hitting us if we don't know how to sing note by note."

- 12-year-old at Gcilima

The overwhelming majority of pupils are made unhappy not by anything related to the academic learning experience but by the treatment they receive at the hands of other pupils and teachers, and by witnessing their classmates being badly treated.

The single most common reason for unhappiness was bad treatment by fellow pupils. 99 learners (25%) said 'Bullying and teasing' made them unhappy. Common complaints were stealing lunch boxes and being beaten up on the way home.

73 learners (18.6%) said the teacher shouting at them made them unhappy. A further 73 (correct) learners (18.6%) said punishment made them unhappy and of these, 64 (16.3%) complained of being beaten by their teachers. Learners in three schools reported that corporal punishment was still practised and while many children accepted this (indeed several said it should be continued as a way to solve problems of bad behaviour - see above), many more were very distressed by it. Several said that they were hit if they came late or were absent. The effect this had was to make them not want to come to school at all.

However, 19% of learners said nothing made them unhappy. The next most common response was 'Conditions in the school' (4.8%) including complaints about "Cleaning the toilets".

The next highest ranked complaint was lack of food. Hunger was mentioned by 18 learners (4.6%). Although this represents a fairly small minority, it is significant since they are mostly from one school, as mentioned above.

The other main reasons for unhappiness were:

Lack of books/paper

Children stealing

Failing exams

Seeing other children fighting

Among the wide range of other answers, two learners from different schools said "Teacher drinking" made them unhappy.

One reason cited for unhappiness, which probably reflects a wider range of problems, was "Waking up in the morning."

A more poignant reminder of the conditions in which children from the lower South Coast have grown up was this comment from a 10-year-old girl attending Gamalakhe school:

"Sometimes I feel unhappy when I hear other pupils talking about their families, as my mother and other family members were killed in the violence."

Almost 22% (86) of learners said they would like to change schools, compared to 67.5% who said that, given the choice, they would remain in their current school. The remainder (10.5%) did not know.

Of those who said they would prefer to go to a different school, less than 50% gave reasons. Of that group, 43% said it was because of lack of learning and sporting facilities. A further 26% cited poor conditions and the desire for a better education. The next most common reason given was that the school is too far from home. Although only four learners in our sample mentioned this, the long

distance traveled by many learners was cited by educators in the majority of the sample schools as a significant obstacle to learning and teaching. The fact that learners are travelling up to two hours to reach school reflects the absence of schools in many areas and the fact that many more pupils (especially from former 'homeland' areas) are enrolling in existing schools, having previously been excluded. This is clearly linked to the problem of overcrowding.

Four learners also cited high school fees as a reason for wanting to change schools. Some responses indicated that despite the integration of education services, learners recognise resources are still not equally spread: "I want to go to an Indian school for a good education" and "I want to team in a multi-racial school" were among the comments.

Language problems and racism were cited by two respondents but no detail was given.

Several pupils praised their school and teachers and even said their schools had "good rules".

The President's problem?

"I want President Mandela to address the problems in our schools"

Finally, we asked learners whether they had any further comments on anything related to their school life. Nearly 25%of the sample made comments and of these, nearly one third (30 learners) said:

"The school should write to President Mandela about the problems."

"I want the President to visit our schools and stop the violence," another said

A further 31% stressed the need for pupils to be serious about their school work and to respect their teachers.

The need to improve conditions and facilities in schools was repeated by 18% of those who made comments.

One said:

"We want good teachers, food, books, telephones, lights and security in our school."

"I will be glad if we can have water here in our school because the water in the tanks has insects in."

- Grade 2 pupil, Siphakamile

By contrast, there were only positive comments from the two central Port Shepstone schools. For example:

"We have got everything at our school, including the best education."

- Grade 4 pupil at Port Shepstone Senior Primary.

The responses from learners show that their preoccupation is not with how many pupils are in their class or whether they are from the same community, but with how their fellow learners and their teachers behave towards them. If they are not bullied or beaten, can

sometimes play soccer or netball and can be assured of a little attention in class regardless of how bright they are, they are likely to cope better with shortages of learning aids and other resources in the short term.

Looking to President Mandela to solve all their problems indicates the need of many pupils to feel that people in authority care for them and have the means and the power to improve their learning environment.

(iii) Profile of the target schools

The schools that participated in the pilot study are located in the Lower South Coast, the Port Shepstone Education Region - in Port Shepstone, the surrounding townships and in the rural areas of Izingolweni. They show a wide range of diversity along ethnic, cultural and religious lines, and socio-economic background of families.

1) **Gamalakhe Primary School: situated in Gamalakhe Township on a boundary between ANC and IFP-dominated areas.**

The school is involved ed in the National Education Pilot on OBE and is the only participating school in the Province of KZN. Pupils are from Black, Coloured, and White backgrounds, the majority being Zulu speaking pupils. The school is situated in a previously violent area. Gamalakhe is a predominantly African township school with a measure of cultural mix in terms of Zulu and Xhosa speaking pupils. This is one of the meagrely resourced schools and interviews with teachers and pupils indicated that lack of resources is one of the greatest obstacles facing school effectiveness. The school has a total enrolment 1165 and 28 teachers and several classes have- more than 50 pupils

2) **Gcilima Primary School:** is in kwaXolo Tribal Authority. It is perhaps a typical rural school - run-down, severely lacking resources and teaching materials, and with overcrowding in several grades due to very high enrolment. There are currently 1340 pupils registered at the school, with 30 permanent and 4 temporary teachers

Most of the respondents from this school indicated that lack of resources was the major obstacle to teaching and managing education. Despite this, morale at the school seems relatively high.

3) **Merlewood Primary School:** is situated in Merlewood, which is a formerly Coloured township near Port Shepstone. The school population is a mixture of rural and urban. The total enrolment is 840 pupils and there are 23 teachers. The school has a waiting list of 400 and a long wait.

The main identified obstacle to teaching and school effectiveness is lack of teaching and leaming resources - especially textbooks - for the large classes. In response, educators and learners have been active in fundraising. In addition, school fees have been increased to be able to provide more materials. The latter is an option not open to other township and rural schools due to the levels of poverty in their catchment areas. Other obstacles were cited as low morale of teachers.

4) Port Shepstone Junior Primary School

An urban school, the most highly resourced of all those in the sample. Formerly a Model C school, it is now also more racially mixed than the other schools surveyed. The level of fees and fundraising efforts mean the school is well-equipped with computers, library and other learning resources.

The school has the lowest class sizes among the sample, with the following class averages:

Grade 1	28
Grade 2	33.5
Grade 3	29.3

5) Port Shepstone Senior Primary School

The senior primary school is also well-resourced although it faces problems trying to balance affordable fees with raising sufficient funds to maintain the buildings and meet running costs. The school draws its pupils from a wide area and some pupils are often absent because they cannot pay transport costs.

Enrolment is 780 pupils with 30 teachers. Although the school does not have large class sizes, there are significant age differences within grades and the school experiences teaching problems related to this, as do the rural schools. Here, the main obstacle to teachinig/managing is stated as lack of guidance from the Department and uncertainty over OBE. Language is also cited as a problem, both in terms of teaching and communication

All the pupils who are respondents in the two Port Shepstone schools indicate satisfaction with education quality and school conditions.

6) Shibase Primary School: is a rural school in the Nodalane area, in KwaXolo Tribal Authority (Izingolweni). The catchment area of the school is very wide and composed of mainly rural unemployed households.

The school is under-resourced. It is in an area where the roads are in a very bad state and this affects attendance. The school becomes inaccessible to some pupils in the rainy season. Most pupils travel to school on foot many walking for at least an hour, crossing flooded rivers. This situation, together with political violence, are cited as the main causes of poor attendance.

The school has a relatively low enrolment which fluctuates up to 630 pupils and is staffed with only 15 teachers. Despite the low enrolment, there is overcrowding due to shortage of classrooms. At the time of the research, 15 classes were sharing 11 classrooms.

(*since the research has been completed, four additional classrooms have been built but there are still few facilities).

There is no running water and the school has only rudimentary toilet facilities. Teacher morale is low and many pupil respondents complained of corporal punishment.

7) **Siphakamile Primary School:** is also a rural school in an area of political violence in Izingolweni. Recently the school's administrative and management offices have been destroyed, allegedly by political arsonists The school is also highly under-resourced. It has an enrolment of 1069 and 27 teachers.

The main obstacle to effective teaching and managing identified was again lack of resources.

(iv) Report on research design, methodology and process

Research design and Methodology

General

The study was designed to document the obstacles to teaching and learning as experienced directly and articulated by educators and learners in the classroom.

It was based on the assumption That there is a need for a first-hand understanding of obstacles to teaching and learning in our schools in order to support effectively the professional development of teachers. The research was conducted in primary schools because these are the basic level of formal education, the most formative stage of the educational process.

Research instrument

The study was based on a detailed pre-tested questionnaire administered through standardised one-to-one interviews in schools. The questionnaires were designed to elicit quantitative data about teaching and learning conditions in the target schools, and qualitative or attitudinal data about responses to those conditions among school managers, educators and learners.

Of prime concern was the need to keep questions open so that respondents were not 'led' in their interpretation of the questions or in their answers.

For example, while our purpose was to identify obstacles to teaching and teaming related to class size and diversity, we did not have an agenda to prove that these were in fact obstacles, or that they were the only or the biggest obstacles. Therefore, we formulated the questions in such a way that respondents were asked to identify for themselves the obstacles/challenges they faced and then asked to consider issues of class size and diversity in that context.

The questionnaires were administered by trained community-based researchers who were familiar with the target region, fluent in the home languages of the target population and aware of the educational issues affecting them.

Sampling

Target area: The target area was the lower South Coast region of KwaZulu Natal. This is part of the Port Shepstone Education Region.

It is a mainly rural area, with one main urban centre (Port Shepstone and several peri-urban/township settlements.

Method: the method of sampling used was representative targeting,, based on the type and number of primary schools in the target area (broadly the area of operation of Practical Ministries, for purposes of access and prior knowledge of the conditions and whether the schools meet the criteria).

Criteria: in order to derive a reasonable sample, the following criteria were used:

- Diversity in the school population, for example, in terms of culture, language and so on
- Large class size, (in objective terms, classes with more pupils than the regional average; in subjective terms, classes that the teachers and pupils consider too large for effective teaching)
- Regional representivity in terms of urban, peri-urban/township and rural environments
- Regional representivity in terms of level of resources, services, etc.
- Geographic spread of the schools in the area.

The Process

Phase One (planning, drafting of questionnaire, recruitment)

A schedule was drawn up at the outset of the project with timelines and responsibilities set out.

Planning involved:

- Applying for written permission from the Provincial Department of Education in Ulundi to approach the Regional Director of Education in Port Shepstone and receive his cooperation on the project
- Establishing working links with a representative of the Regional Education Office, who could perform a liaison, consultative and advisory role to the project
- Agreement on the terms of reference, working arrangements and budget allocations with our partner organisation, Practical Ministries
- Drawing up criteria for selecting sample schools in the target area
- Identifying schools that met the criteria
- Introducing the project to the target schools
- Drafting the questionnaire

- Testing the questionnaire with teachers and pupils in a primary school in the target area
- Recruiting the community-based researchers and the three unemployed teachers to be trained as researchers.
- Drawing up a training programme for the researchers

The sample for the pilot study was composed of seven primary schools within the target area that met the criteria. The following schools constituted the sample:

Gamalakhe Primary School: peri-urban, situated in a township previously beset by political violence that has not completely died down. It has a few learners of Indian and Coloured background, the majority being Zulu and Xhosa speaking.

Gcilima Primary school: rural, historically Black school, also in an area that has been badly affected by political violence. There has been a high level of population movement, displacement within and migration from the area due to the conflict.

Port Shepstone Junior Primary School: Diverse, previously mainly White population, situated in an urban environment. Former Model C school.

Port Shepstone Senior Primary School: Diverse, previously mainly White population, situated in an urban environment.

Merlewood Primary**:** a highly diverse school in a formerly Coloured township, close to Port Shepstone town centre.

Shibase Primary School: rural, situated in the violence torn area of Izingolweni

Siphakamile Primary School: rural, about half an hour from Port Shepstone. It is a formerly Black school and has a high enrolment

The Questionnaire

Drafting

The questionnaire was drafted by. CRCD, in consultation with its partner agency, Practical Ministries, and with input from the Department of Education, a teacher trainer and representatives of SADTU. The questionnaire was divided into sections for the three groups of respondents - teachers, pupils, school managers.

Testing

The questionnaire was tested in one of the target schools. Merlewood school is in a formerly Coloured township, with mainly Coloured staff but a predominantly African (Zulu and Xhosa-speaking school population). One head of department, one class teacher, one Grade 3, one Grade 4 and one Grade 7 pupil were interviewed using the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was tested for:
clarity

inclusivity

acceptability

completion time

Feedback

Feedback from the teachers and the pupils was generally very positive. Having completed the interviews, ail the respondents expressed the view that it had been good to talk about their problems. They thought it was important that someone should ask teachers and pupils about problems in schools and how to solve them.

While very few amendments had to be made, following input by respondents on clarity/ambiguity, the testing exercise highlighted the importance of ensuring that the interviewers did not influence the opinions or judgment of the respondents.

For example, on the question of diversity, the pupils were asked (individually) whether they considered that most of the pupils in their class were 'different' from them, or the 'same' as them. The interviewer is not supposed to suggest what the differences might be, as this is a matter of perception.

The Grade 7 pupil asked what was meant by the word 'different'. It was explained that it could cover anything that she felt set other pupils apart from her, whether it was behaviour, ability, interests, religion, colour, wealth or whatever. She then responded.

The two younger children did not ask what was meant by 'different' but answered the question immediately. Interestingly, all three responded that they thought most of the children in their class were different from them only in terms of attitude, because:

"If someone is rowdy in class, most of the other pupils don't speak out. I confront people and I am alone in my opinions." - Grade 7 pupil

"Many of the other children don't listen to the teacher. " - Grade 4 pupil

Other children don't do their homework and then they want to copy your work."

- Grade 3 pupil

The three were asked if they thought there were any other differences between them and other pupils and all replied that there were none.

This was interesting because three pupils were from local English-speaking Afncan, Indian and Coloured families and the majority of pupils at the school are said by the teachers and pupils to be Zulu and Xhosa speaking from outside the area.

When the questions about obstacles to learning were asked, two pupils mentioned language as a problem - the fact that significant numbers of the pupils in their class had English as a second-language and that the teachers had to frequently stop and explain things for them in Zulu, or by writing or drawing on the blackboard.

However, the two pupils said that they did not consider that language made people different, it was just a problem in terms of learning.

The Grade 7 pupil said there were differences in belief and religion among the pupils but:

We have our community in common. We can talk about colour and culture in class. For example witchcraft: some children from the township believe in it and the Coloured children don't but we have discussed it and everyone understands why everyone believes what they do."

The interviewing of the teachers highlighted h strong differences in perception of problems. For example, both teachers taught classes of more than 40 that were diverse in terms of pupils' economic and ethnic background and home language. One teacher highlighted diversity as a problem; the other, who was multi-lingual, highlighted only class size as a problem.

The interviewing process using the questionnaire took about 30 minutes each for the pupils, including introductions, and 45 minutes each for the teachers. In terms of the number of questionnaires (450) to be completed by the researchers (15) in the time available (6 weeks), at the budgeted rate (R25/30 per questionnaire), and in terms of minimising disruption in the schools, it was decided to try to keep the interviews within these limits.

Translation

The questionnaire was translated into Zulu, for use with pupils who were not comfortable themselves in English. It was only printed for use in the schools after the training of researchers, to allow for alterations to be made following feedback from the trainees.

Interviewing and selection of the researchers

A group of 12 community based researchers was selected. The researchers' role was to conduct interviews in schools with educators, learners and educational managers.

The researchers were recruited from a group of 24 that were previously trained as community-based researchers by one of the project managers with Practical Ministries. They were selected on the basis of:

- level of skills and experience
- knowledge of the target area and conditions
- personal qualities - eg. ability to interact well with adults and children from diverse backgrounds
- fluency in English and Zulu

Three unemployed qualified teachers were also selected for training as researchers and as team coordinators, from a group of five interviewed. The teachers' role, as trained, was to head the three teams of four researchers each and to ensure the smooth running of the interviews on a daily basis within the schools.

Names were supplied by Practical Ministries and the regional education office and the teachers were interviewed by CRCD. All the applicants were women and the trainees selected were: Mandisa Kepu, Balungile Mkhwanazi and Patricia Ntozakhe Bhele. All three are trained teachers who have undertaken teaching practice in KwaZulu Natal and all are involved in focal community work and church activities.

Training plan

A plan was drawn up for the training of the teachers and the joint briefing of the teachers and the 12 community-based researchers. There was a strong focus on role play, to help bring out some of the practical problems the researchers may encounter. The training took place from Monday 13 July to Thursday 16 July, in Durban. It covered the following:-

- the background to the research
- the aims and objectives of the research
- the schools and stakeholders involved
- the research techniques to be used
- interviewing techniques
- the use of the questionnaire
- the timelines and individual responsibilities

Phase two - Training of community based researchers, fieldwork

Training

The main areas of training are highlighted in bold and the training experience is reviewed below these headings:

Discussion of OBE and Curriculum 2005

Each of the trainees had some background knowledge of Curriculum 2005 and quickly understood this as the context for the research.

Briefing on the background, aims and objectives of the project

While the group found the aims and objectives of the project clear, it took some time to explain and clarify the relationship between themselves and CRCD, CRCD and Practical Ministries, CRCD and JET, JET and PEI, and between all the players and the Department of Education. While we did not want any of the researchers to deliver a thesis to Principals about the background to the project, we felt it was important that the coordinators could respond clearly and confidently to specific questions. We issued the coordinators with letters of introduction to the schools and each team was accompanied by a CRCD project leader or by the Projects Manager of Practical Ministries on their first visit to schools.

Experiences and perceptions of class size and diversity as obstacles to teaching

Each of these trainees related their experiences of studying in and teaching classes of more than 40 pupils. In their teaching practice, they had all encountered classes that were diverse in terms of:

- age (up to six years' difference in one class)
- culture
- language (different home languages and varying language skills)
- background (religious, economic, geographical)

The group felt that problems related to diversity and to large classes were relative to the skills, experience, resources and personality of the teachers

Role and responsibilities of the research team coordinators

This session took the form of guided discussion to encourage the trainees to draw up their own lists of the skills and qualities essential to performing the tasks outlined.

Explanation of the research methodology

The trainees were given an overview of research approaches and techniques and then introduced to the research instruments for this project - namely a survey conducted through interviews based on a questionnaire. Emphasis was placed on the rationale for sampling and the sampling methods to be employed (representative and self-selection). This was important as the coordinators were to be responsible for negotiating the sample of respondents with the target

school principals. The guidelines for this were summarised as a handout to the trainees.

Briefing on timeframes for project

It was stressed that although a period of six clear weeks was allowed for conducting interviews in schools, the start and finish dates were fixed, because they coincided with schools opening and closing. Also, the research teams should set up their interviewing schedules as soon as possible to ensure that they could complete their quota of questionnaires without disrupting the school timetable (for example, although there were 75 interviews to conduct over 30 school days, it might only be convenient to a particular school for the researchers to be present one or two days a week, or only in the afternoons).

Review and analysis of the questionnaire

The trainees were led through the questionnaire and the purpose of each section was discussed in detail. The meaning of each question was tested on the trainees to ensure there was complete clarity about the information required.

Discussion and role plays around introducing the project in schools

The CRCD team took part in mock interviews to give the trainees a chance to practice introducing the questionnaires to 'principals', 'teachers' and 'pupils'. The 'respondents' asked for explanations, to test the trainees' understanding. This process was important to highlight areas where information or confidence was lacking.

A question and answer session to review the work to date

The trainees were asked to spend their spare time reflecting on what they had learned and discussing any queries or problems they had. These related mainly to explaining the link between all the role players in the project and being able to reassure respondents (particularly teaching staff) that the research was not connected to the ongoing dispute between the Education Department and the teaching unions!

Role plays to administer the questionnaire

Again, CRCD staff participated in mock interviews to give the trainees the opportunity to practise administering the questionnaire. The 'respondents' were briefed to be difficult in various ways - for example, by gving only Yes and No answers, or by talking too much, or by asking for detailed explanations.

This process helped to iron out any remaining misunderstandings about the objective of questions and boosted the trainees'

confidence. It also provided confirmation of our assessment of the time required to complete interviews with the different categories of respondent. Equally important, the trainees had to tune their skills of listening and recording relevant information simultaneously.

Briefing of all community researchers

A briefing day for the research team coordinators and the researchers was held immediately following the three-day training. Twelve community-based researchers had been recruited. However, only 11 of these, all women, attended this briefing and the twelfth was therefore excluded from the project.

The briefing was structured so that the three research team coordinators introduced the project to the 11 researchers. The researchers had all conducted research in rural areas of the lower South Coast of KwaZulu Natal, based on interviews using questionnaires. They were trained in the relevant research methods and are experienced in approaching respondents of different backgrounds and ages. Their main need was to understand the background and purpose of this project, and to become familiar with the questionnaire.

There was a detailed discussion of the two main concepts behind the research questions - large class size and diversity (as factors in teaching and learning problems). We focused on what was meant by 'large' and by 'diverse' in both objective and subjective terms. A handout on diversity was produced and participants were encouraged to discuss aspects of diversity and examples of problems related to diversity, in their groups.

The second half of the day was devoted to role-playing the questionnaire. This time, the whole group were put into pairs and conducted mock interviews on a rotational basis, to ensure everyone had the chance to ask and answer the questions paired with a researcher, 'principal', 'teacher or 'pupil'. Here, the role of CRCD was to observe the interviews and make notes of points to correct or commend. In the report-back session, the researchers were asked to identify any difficulties or questions that arose in the interviews, and the CRCD staff reported their observations and gave advice on problems.

Deferment of final briefing due to problems of violence in Mvutshini

The researchers travelled to Durban by public transport. They had been notified in advance of the duration of the briefing session, from 9am to 4pm. However, participants from the Mvutshini area requested to be excused early. They said sporadic violence made it dangerous to travel there after dark. CRCD had made arrangements with Practical Ministries for the researchers to be provided with transport from the Port Shepstone taxi rank to their homes if they returned late

but the Mvutshini group said it was not safe to enter their area late even if transport was provided.

In response to this, it was agreed that the whole group would reconvene in Port Shepstone on the following Wednesday. We had not budgeted for this but it was essential to complete the report-back on the mock interviews, trouble-shoot any problems, and make arrangements for the deployment of the research teams.

Final briefing and deployment

Three members of the CRCD project team visited Port Shepstone on Wednesday 22 July, to complete the briefing session. The researchers interacted more freely and took part more actively in the exercises in the spacious hired hall than they had in an office environment.

The research teams were deployed to achieve the best mix of experience and to match researchers where possible to their closest schools to keep down travel costs. The team allocated to Port Shepstone Primary school was also chosen on the basis of greatest fluency in English as the vast majority of its pupils are first language English speakers.

In order to be as time and cost-efficient as possible, we tried to combine the final briefing and deployment with introductory visits to some of the schools. (Participating schools had been visited previously but were awaiting confirmation of start dates and introduction to the coordinator of the research team). With assistance from Practical Ministries, we managed to visit three of the schools.

Final school selection

All the participating schools were visited by the research teams and interviewing began in some as scheduled in the week beginning 27 July. However, one school had to be substituted at the last minute because its Principal informed us that it was not convenient for interviewing to start until the week beginning 14 September (three days after the whole process was due to be completed!). The school had not expressed any concerns over the time frame before this and did not give any explanation. Since it had been stressed from the outset that participation in the project was entirely voluntary and that it should not interfere in any way with the running of the schools, we did not engage on this issue but wrote to the school thanking them for their cooperation and regretting that we would not be able to include them in the pilot due to time constraints.

As an alternate school, we approached Merlewood Primary School, where we had tested the questionnaires. The Principal was very happy for the school to be included in the pilot project.

Field work

A total of 454 interviews were completed in the seven schools, on average 75 in each school. The respondents were made up of educational managers/school principals, educators and learners. The interviews were carried out in all the schools with full acceptance and cooperation from all educators and learners.

The interviewing process was completed on schedule, with all questionnaires submitted by the due date of 11 September.

The interviewers had been selected bearing in mind their ability to relate easily to children and to approach the questioning in a sensitive and non-pressurised manner. Even the Grade 1 learners did not appear to have any difficulties understanding or responding to the questions. The researchers met the challenge of introducing themselves and explaining the aim and objectives of the research to all respondents.

Even though the teams had not previously worked together before, they cooperated and supported each other very well

None of the researchers reported any problems in administering the questionnaire

Overall the interviews were conducted to a high standard and the questionnaires properly completed.

The time allocated allowed us to overcome several anticipated - and unanticipated - obstacles.

Firstly, access for the researchers to the most remote schools was dependent upon availability of Practical Ministries off-road vehicles and on weather conditions. This meant there were several days on which the teams deployed to the rural schools could not work.

Secondly, none of the researchers had permanent jobs and this project would only provide them an income over two months. Two of the researchers left the area to seek work/attend interviews. These researchers did not inform us in advance of their intentions and did not report their whereabouts for several days. Although this did not affect completion of the interview process, it did interfere temporarily with the smooth running and supervision of the project.

One of the absentees was away for a few days and continued her work on her return. The other was a team coordinator and left after completing her 30 interviews but before her group had finished the work in both schools. Her team took the initiative to elect another team member to serve as coordinator after she left.

Monitoring and supervision

CRCD monitored and supervised the fieldwork with the assistance of Practical Ministries.

This process involved visits to the researchers in their allocated schools, meetings with research team coordinators in the Practical Ministries' offices and examination of the first questionnaires as they were submitted.

It was difficult to keep in contact with some of the researchers, specifically those operating in the rural schools, as there were no telephone lines. Practical Ministries put in considerable time and effort with logistics.

This experience of the `absentees' highlights the fact that even where there is supervision and monitoring, if people are involved in field work, a high degree of self-discipline is required. It is understandable that since this was only temporary work, the researchers would be anxious to have employment after the project ended. However, it should have been stressed in the terms and conditions that researchers must be available until the conclusion of the project.

Focus groups

Two focus group meetings were to be conducted once the data was processed, to help test our conclusions and to seek explanations for any inconclusive or contradictory data.

In the event, no contradictory data emerged from within the target schools. Although there were contradictory responses between the target schools, these are easily explained by the objective differences between these schools leg in terms of resources, location, composition etc).

By the time the data was collated and analysed, the schools were closed for the summer holidays and it would not have been possible to organise any meetings before the deadline for submission of the final report. However, both the findings and the process were discussed with the Projects Manager of our partner agency, Practical Ministries, at a meeting in Port Shepstone, before the final report was drafted.

Transport

The rural schools targeted were inaccessible during rainy weather and very poorly served by public transport. Researchers often had to stop work early to chase transport back home. This meant they needed to make more trips than budgeted. They also needed to be provided with allowances for lunch and drink .

In order to conduct an appropriate level of supervision of the field work, to deal with the substitution of one of the sample schools for another and to have efficient liaison with our partners in Port Shepstone, CRCD staff also made more field visits than expected. As a result, we exceeded our budget line for transport.

Partnerships/communication

The partnership created prior to and during the project between Practical Ministries, Port Shepstone Regional Office of Education, the schools, Joint Education Trust and CRCD enabled us to carry the process forward smoothly on a daily basis.

Initial efforts of setting up the partnership were quite problematic in terms of communication. For example, it was difficult to link up with the Provincial Department of Education.

Maintaining the links with the stakeholders and keeping the project on track required some intensive planning meetings and school visits. This again meant travel and communications costs that had not been fully budgeted.

Phase three - collation and analysis of data *Data Capture and collation*

One of the community-based researchers was available to help with establishing the data collation system and briefing other staff on how to administer it in preparation for further processing and analysis. The system used combined manual collation of the individual results with computerised collation of the aggregated data and both systematic and random checking.

The work of data collation proved far more time-consuming than anticipated, especially since we were building capacity among staff members who did not have previous experience.

Analysis of findings

The data was collated by school and by target group. The individual school data was then aggregated and analysed by target group. In certain cases, the data was disaggregated to take account of differences between particular schools.

In one sense, the two urban schools, Port Shepstone Junior and Senior Primary, were used as control groups as they did not meet the criterion of schools with large classes. However, the data from these schools was generally aggregated because the sample group as a whole was representative of the region.

Sampling the findings

The information gathered in the questionnaires was collated and processed by CRCD during September and October. Some striking responses were immediately noticeable.

- Responses from rural schools referred to violence as an obstacle to learning
- There was widespread confidence that the government (in particular the President) was the source of all possible solutions to the problems highlighted: "write a letter to the President, telling him about the school problems..." said some pupils.
- There were varying perceptions of 'diversity'. The following were commonly found in the responses:

Related to family or economic background
Related to ability

Related to physical appearance but not colour"
Related to behaviour

*Pupils did *not* identify colour, culture, religion and language as differences between themselves unless they were specifically guestioned on these issues. Even then, they did not see these differences as obstacles in themselves - they often saw them as a challenge to the teacher and the teaching system to provide better support.

In relation to class size, some learners perceived this in terms of how full the class was - absence of empty desks; size of the classroom rather than numbers of pupils. For example, one responded: "[Our class is] not big because some children do not usually come to school.

Project Management

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