9 The boundaries of care: Education policy interventions for vulnerable children

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This chapter interrogates a growing vision of schools as sites of care and support for vulnerable children, especially in the context of HIV/AIDS. The chapter is based on two research activities: a desk review of projects working in the area of schools in the context of HIV/AIDS and poverty (Hoadley 2006); and documentation of a particular project in the Free State province of South Africa (Hoadley 2007). The author also considers the South African policy framework for schools and vulnerable children. The chapter begins by sketching out some of the major education policies pertaining to vulnerable children, especially in the context of HIV and AIDS. It then offers three cautionary notes in relation to the thrust of these policies, and those programmes attempting to implement them. The first is a consideration of the context of implementation – the schooling system. The second is the resourcing of these policies. The third considers policy visions of schools and teachers. How schools and teachers are conceptualised both in policies and programmes is problematised. The misalignment between the policies around schools and vulnerable children, the resourcing of these policies and their contexts of implementation as well as the implications for thinking about expanded roles for schools and teachers are brought into relief.

The role of schools in the South African policy context

In the context of HIV/AIDS, a vast number of policies promoting and supporting an expanded role for schools, particularly in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the need for greater care and support for vulnerable children, have emerged over the past six years. Some of the key policies advocating expanded roles and functions for schools are outlined here.

The *National Education Policy on HIV/AIDS for Learners and Educators* (DoE 1999) and the *HIV/AIDS Emergency: Department of Education Guidelines for*

Educators (DoE 2000a) both give schools a specific responsibility to develop school HIV/AIDS policies and accompanying health advisory committees to respond to the barriers learners face as result of the impact of HIV/AIDS.

The *Norms and Standards for Educators* (DoE 2000b: 4), which specifies the roles and competencies expected of teachers, includes the 'community, citizenship and a pastoral role'. It states: 'Within the school, the educator will demonstrate an ability to develop a supportive and empowering environment for the learner and respond to the educational and other needs of learners and fellow educators. Furthermore, the educator will develop supportive relations with parents and other key persons and organisations, based on a critical understanding of community and environmental development issues.'

The *Education White Paper 6 Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (DoE 2001a), or 'White Paper 6', supports schools in responding to all learning barriers facing children, including those resulting from disability, psychosocial disturbances or socio-economic deprivation. *HIV/AIDS: Care and Support of Affected and Infected Learners. A Guide for Educators* (DoH 2001) provides guidelines for educators on how to care for and support children infected or affected by HIV/AIDS in the school context; and *the National Integrated Plan for Children and Youth Infected and Affected by HIV/AIDS* (DoE 2001b) advocates inter-departmental collaboration between the DoE, DoH and Department of Social Development (DoSD) in responding to the needs of children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS.

The *National School Health Policy and Implementation Guidelines* (DoH 2002) encourages schools to establish school-based support teams to respond to the health and other barriers vulnerable children face. In 2002 it was reported that the National School Nutrition Programme fed about 5.2 million learners enrolled at 16 000 primary schools (DoE 2002). In 2005 this role was broadened to move beyond school feeding to setting up school gardens and teaching good nutrition and healthy lifestyle.

The DoE's *Tirisano Plan of Action (2003–2005)* (DoE 2003: 8–9) gives schools 'an active role in the identification and registration [of children] for child support grants' and other care and support functions in the context of HIV/AIDS. It also asserts that the school should be 'an indispensable centre for the wider community's educational, social and cultural needs and interests'.

The Education Laws Amendment Bill (DoE 2005) legislates that where people are living under poverty-stricken conditions, schools be declared 'no-fee schools' (implemented as of 2006). This Bill is a departure from previous attempts to alleviate fee burdens on schools and parents because it also increases the amount of money for recurrent expenditure to the poorest one-fifth of schools, making these schools less reliant on fees and thus able to feasibly abolish them.

It is clear from the number and coverage of the policies above that the policy framework for the care of vulnerable children in South Africa in relation to schooling is extensive. It is widely argued, however, that it persists in being largely symbolic. There are three policy documents that are of particular concern in relation to the concerns of this chapter: *Tirisano* (DoE 2003), *Education White Paper 6* (DoE 2001a) and the *Norms and Standards for Educators* (DoE 2000b). These are discussed in more detail below.

Education White Paper 6

Possibly the most significant of the policy documents advocating the care and protection of vulnerable children is the *Education White Paper 6 Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive education and Training System* (DoE 2001a). This White Paper marks a significant shift from previous inclusive education policy, recognising systemic as well as individual barriers to learning (Colling 2005). It notes that 'different learning needs arise from a range of factors including physical, mental, sensory, neurological and developmental impairments, *psychosocial disturbances*, differences in intellectual ability, particular life experiences or *socio-economic deprivation*' (DoE 2001a: 7, emphasis added).

Of crucial importance in this document is the policy directive that schools create site-based support teams in schools in order to address some of the effects of socio-economic deprivation and psychosocial disturbances for learners. The primary function of site-based support teams is to co-ordinate educator and learner support within the institution by identifying institutional, educator and learner needs and strengths.

Site-based support teams are also required to ensure that the support for educators and learners is properly co-ordinated. They are to 'invite expertise

from the local community, district support teams and higher education institutions' (DoE 2001: 6). Their precise purpose and activities are spelt out in the document:

> Site-based teams need to follow up the learner needs identified through Learner Profiles, accompanied by intervention strategies tried out in classrooms. They also play a crucial role in identifying institutional needs, and ensuring that there are on-going possibilities for professional growth, skills acquisition and support. Site-based support teams should be supported by management, which should provide regular times for meetings and planning sessions. These sessions could be facilitated initially by district support teams until the capacity of the site-based team has been enhanced. (DoE 2001a: 5)

In this way policy calls for the establishment of a number of activities in school to take place under the management of a new structure, with teachers and managers taking on new roles.

The Tirisano Plan of Action (2003–2005)

Tirisano (meaning 'working together') was a response to the persistent problems in education following South Africa's first five years of democracy (DoE 2003). A 'call to action' embodied in nine 'educational priorities' which were translated into operational programmes in '*Tirisano*' was issued by the education administration in 1999. These priorities set the tone of the educational policy implementation agenda for the years that followed. Two were notable in relation to the interests of this paper – Priority 3: 'Schools must become centres of community life'; and Priority 9: 'We must deal urgently and purposefully with the HIV/AIDS emergency in and through the education and training system'.

The policy stresses the opening up of schools to their communities, and responding to the problems and issues confronting children there. Although *Tirisano* set up the possibilities for structures and personnel to deal with HIV/AIDS, there were problems in the implementation (not least under-staffing), and national and provincial departments' lack of access to the expertise of people such as planners, demographers, economists, sociologists, anthropologists and care workers (Coombe 2000). Another problem was

inter-sectoral inertia, a problem starkly evidenced in relation to HIV/AIDS strategies and action plans more widely.

Norms and standards for educators

In overhauling and professionalising the teacher force, *Norms and Standards for Educators* (DoE 2000b) was an attempt to make pedagogic labour visible, and to spell out the competencies required of teachers. The document spells out seven roles and the associated competencies required of teachers.

One of the roles required of teachers is the 'community, citizenship and pastoral role', which includes the following competencies:

- Being able to respond to current social and educational problems, with particular emphasis on the issues of violence, drug abuse, poverty, child and women abuse, HIV/AIDS, and environmental degradation. Accessing and working in partnership with professional services to deal with these issues is also important.
- Counselling and/or tutoring learners in need of assistance with social or learning problems.
- Demonstrating caring, committed and ethical professional behaviour and an understanding of education as dealing with the protection of children and the development of the whole individual.
- Understanding key community problems, with particular emphasis on issues of poverty, health, environment and political democracy.
- Understanding the impact of class, race, gender and other identity-forming forces on learning.
- Understanding formative development and the impact of abuse at individual, familial and communal levels.

Norms and Standards for Educators blurs the boundaries between what it is that a teacher is required to do and be, and the functions that are best taken up by other professionals who have expertise in things such as abuse and violence (social workers and psychologists, for example), the impact of class race and gender (sociologists) or counselling (psychologists).

Let us examine the importance and impact of these three documents. *White Paper 6* places a large responsibility for the care of vulnerable children with the school. It requires that special structures be established to undertake the

work of identification, monitoring, support, training and capacity building regarding vulnerable children. *Tirisano* and the *Norms and Standards* documents blur the boundary between school and community, and between teacher and other professionals. The school is required to be open to the community, and the teacher is required to be and do a number of things outside of the conventional purview of 'teacher'.

Where does the notion of schools and teachers taking on new and different roles come from? How has their function come to be explicitly defined as including the care and support of vulnerable children? These questions are taken up in the next section.

Schools as sites of care and support

The notion of schools as sites of support for vulnerable children as presented in the policy review above is set against a much broader, global imperative to find ways of addressing the needs of children in distress. Starting in 1997, the Children on the Brink series of reports outlined five strategies for supporting orphans and other children affected by HIV/AIDS. These primarily revolved around strengthening children's environment and capacity to meet their needs. These strategies were endorsed by the UNAIDS Committee of Co-sponsoring Organisations in November 2001. Notable amongst these was the need to strengthen schools and ensure access to education, an issue of particular relevance to education ministries and their education partners. Conventional concepts of school roles and functions were challenged, and the idea that schools could operate solely as centres of learning was questioned. New approaches that included components of care and support for vulnerable children needed to evolve within the education system.

Further iterations to this commitment to the plight of orphans and vulnerable children in the context of HIV/AIDS include *The Framework for the Protection, Care and Support of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Living in a World with HIV and AIDS* (Unicef et al. 2004) and the *WHO/ILO/UNESCO Consensus Statement on AIDS in Schools* (Unicef 2004), which added to the urgent call for education systems to respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

It was in this context that the notion of 'schools as nodes of care and support' took hold in South Africa. In particular, civil society (and especially NGOs)

began to focus on the school as a site for support of vulnerable children. In the hearts and minds of many development practitioners, schools held the key to the alleviation of the crisis that faces children who are orphaned by HIV/ AIDS, are affected by the disease in other ways, or are vulnerable as a result of other causes.

Further, it increasingly appears that initiatives focused on school-based interventions to support vulnerable children have gained favour with grant-making organisations. In particular, those agencies concerned with education rights see the focus as an effective means of reaching children in need and guaranteeing a number of their legal entitlements.

Several substantial documents signalled the entrenchment of the conception of schools as caring and supportive places for vulnerable children in South Africa. In particular, the review by the Mobile Task Team at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Health Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division asserted that social protection was 'an integral function of education's mandate' (Badcock-Walters et al. 2005: xiii). The review report also made a strong argument that HIV and AIDS would intrinsically affect the 'role of education, organisation of schools, planning and management of the education system and donor support for education' (2005: x). The report cited Zambian educationalist Michael Kelly, who makes the same point in an emotive exhortation:

> Going further, so that we see the salience of the school as a multipurpose community development and welfare centre from which the community action on behalf of prevention, care, support, and impact mitigation would be energised, co-ordinated and driven, is an even greater challenge. Avoiding these challenges is a recipe for a bleak future. Confronting them promises hope. (Badcock-Walters et al. 2005: xiii)

Another important body in the growth of discourse around schools as supportive contexts for vulnerable children is the Children's Institute, an NGO located at the University of Cape Town, which asserted that schools were key institutions 'through which access to and delivery of much needed services to children could be strengthened' (Giese 2003: 3). Like other children's advocacy and intervention organisations, their work resonates with the government policies outlined above which aim to strengthen and promote service delivery through schools and create schools which are 'centres of community support'.

However, while suggesting an expanded role for schools, the Children's Institute were more circumspect as to what schools were able to take on, and also asserted that the core function of schools, teaching and learning should not be undermined through introducing these expanded roles. Not all projects and documents are as sober or realistic in their approach to schools, believing that schools hold promise as a 'social vaccine for HIV/AIDS' and as potential sites of a wide range of community interventions.

There is a significant amount of policy and legislation that advocates for schools supporting vulnerable children on paper, as well as a vast number of advocacy documents. There is also a proliferation of programmes in schools to make these notions a reality (see Hoadley 2006 and Badcock-Walters et al. 2005 for reviews). What is it about schools that drives the conviction that they are the ideal settings for addressing the needs of vulnerable children? A number of factors are identified in the literature which point to schools as crucial points of leverage for assisting vulnerable children. Schools are often the most stable and best resourced institutions within communities, with a level of infrastructure that makes them amenable to broader community use. Schools are focused on children, and the system in South Africa as a whole reaches approximately 12 million children and young adults (DoE 2007). Children spend a significant amount of time at school over many years. Schools represent places where children's vulnerabilities are potentially identified, and possibly remediated, and they also represent key spaces in which large numbers of children can be accessed.

There are three problems with this construction of schools as sites of care and support for vulnerable children. The first pertains to the context of implementation of these policies; the second to their resourcing; and the third to the policy visions of teachers and learners and the way in which schools, teachers and communities are conceived of in programmes.

In relation to the first of these issues – the contexts of implementation, to what extent are our schools able to take on additional roles? What is the current state of our system? The question is considered in relation to the large-scale research base on South African schools.

Contexts of implementation: The research base on the state of South African schools

Schools in South Africa are struggling to meet their current educational mandates in their three core functions: teaching, learning and management. A recent study on teacher workload shows that most of the teaching time in a school day is crowded out by other functions and duties that teachers are required to perform. On average, teachers spend only 46% of formal school time on teaching and learning, and in some schools teachers were found to teach as little as 10% of the time (Chisholm et al. 2005). Recent research into learner performance shows a crisis in student performance with the vast majority of students failing at most levels of the schooling system (see Kanjee 2005, for example). In the comparative international testing programme in mathematics and science, Timms, South African grade sixes performed the lowest out of 50 countries (Reddy 2006). Additionally, in the Unesco Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (Saqmeq) testing, South African learners perform among the worst in relation to six other sub-Saharan African countries, including those with lower GDPs per capita (Van der Berg & Louw 2006). Finally, a recent ministerial review of school governance shows that school management lacks the capacity to fulfill the functions allocated to them (DoE 2004).

At a systemic level education is failing. But at the level of the institution, or school, there are also a number of specific problems that arise in the identification, support and monitoring of children experiencing vulnerability. Poor schools are overcrowded and often poorly resourced. Teacher absenteeism is known to be high. The construction of schools in the policy documents bear little relation to the many different kinds of cultures that exist and make schooling tick over in hard times. In many instances, the school environment actually contributes to children's vulnerability. Studies on violence and sexual abuse in schools (Brookes et al. 2004; Human Rights Watch 2001; USAID 2003) indicate that many schools have established cultures that represent significant threats to children.

The construction of communities and their relation to schools is also problematic. Albeit qualitative, the work of Wilson et al. (2002) points to a number of issues we know to be true of many schools. Teachers often have poor knowledge of children's home circumstances, and there is mistrust between

teachers and caregivers, often exacerbated by circumstances surrounding the non-payment of school fees. Furthermore, there are low levels of attendance amongst caregivers at school meetings (sometimes because meetings are used as forums to put pressure on caregivers who have not paid school fees) (Wilson et al. 2002). Teachers often have low levels of knowledge about services at their disposal. There are insufficient people or organisations to whom orphans can be referred for assessment or support, and there is insufficient integration of other services, such as social and health workers, into the education system (Wilson et al. 2002).

Given the mandate that schools have been given in policy, and given the constraints in the system, what happens when an implementing agent attempts to use policy to create a supportive environment for children in schools? In the next section I consider some of the problems that arise in this context in relation to the resourcing of policies. The case study of a project running in the Free State highlights some of the problems of the misalignment between policy directives and ideals, the reality of conditions in schools and the resources to implement these policies.

The resourcing of policy: The Kind Schools Project

In response to the demand to support vulnerable children in schools, the Life Skills Department of the Free State Department of Education (FSDoE) obtained funding from the Nelson Mandela Foundation and contracted a group of NGOs to assist in implementing the Inclusive Education Policy. Central to this policy, as stated above, is the establishment of site-based support teams (SBSTs). The FSDoE found in the proposed Kind Schools Project the possibility for implementing the policy more effectively, and extending their support to vulnerable children. The Project has three central 'pillars': establishing SBSTs who write action plans for vulnerable children in their schools; placing two youth facilitators who identify and support vulnerable children and report to the SBST in schools; and forming children's groups where groups of about 20 learners are encouraged to adopt and befriend other children who may be in need.

At the level of the school, the idea is that each school has an 'action plan' which specifies the focus and plan of action regarding orphans and vulnerable children in the school. The project's intention is to support and strengthen the

establishment and functioning of the school's SBSTs. The co-ordinator of the SBST is identified as the person to manage and monitor the work of the youth facilitators. The youth facilitators in turn oversee children's group activities. In order to gain buy-in from the school, and to honour participatory decision-making, the precise function of the youth workers beyond children's groups is decided by the school.

The Kind Schools Project was, at the time of writing, being implemented in a pilot phase in the Thabo Mofutsanyana municipal district of the Free State province. The area includes the former homeland Qwa-Qwa, an area identified nationally as a poverty node. Thabo Mofutsanyana is characterised by high levels of unemployment, HIV/AIDS and other social problems, including alcohol abuse and violence. Because there is very little economic activity in the area, many adults seek work in towns and cities away from their homes, and child-headed households are common. According to the author's field notes, the population in the district is approximately 700 000.

Documentation of the Project (Hoadley 2007) shows a number of problems with its implementation. In general, youth facilitators in schools are poorly managed, insufficiently trained and have tasks and functions unrelated to vulnerable children. In other words, schools use the youth facilitators to meet their immediate needs. Those schools which faced the most challenges – where teachers were out of class during learning time, which were physically in a state of disrepair and which showed other signs of mismanagement – were the schools where the project had the least positive impact. These were also the schools where the highest number of vulnerable children were concentrated. In short, schools lack the capacity to take on the additional management of the youth facilitators.

The Kind Schools Project, as described above, has actively framed its intervention in terms of national and provincial priorities, and has sought in every way to align what they are doing in schools with what policy seeks to achieve in relation to orphans and vulnerable children. The Project has managed, albeit on a small scale, to make some important interventions in the lives of vulnerable children. In a more critical vein, what the project does do is highlight the paucity of resources, particularly in human resources, to implement the policy that government proposes. In addition, it highlights how in a resource-scarce context additional roles and responsibilities are given to schools, rather than giving them additional resources with which to

address problems. The resources most required would appear to be human resources.

Firstly, many of the schools lack the SBSTs that are required to manage youth volunteers and establish an action plan for vulnerable children. Because the legal requirement to establish SBSTs in schools has only recently begun to be implemented in schools, many of the schools have very weak SBSTs, or SBSTs that are not yet fully functioning or are not clear on their objectives and activities. The pressure for schools to establish these bodies also comes at a time when schools are coming to grips with sustainable school governing bodies, and (in the case of new Section 21 schools) developing capacity for taking on a range of new functions. The implementation of other new policies, including the new National Curriculum Statements, also compete for priority in schools. It would appear that in most schools the SBSTs and their functions are secondary to the core business of the school.

Secondly, the Kind Schools Project has struggled to gain and sustain the attention of the DoE and the district office of the DoE. There is a lack of capacity at the district level where district-based support teams and lifeskills facilitators are supposed to train SBSTs. The project has not managed to negotiate its agreements with the district so that they may be given priority. The DoE, likewise, has played no monitoring, management or oversight role aside from requesting an annual report. We have known since 2000 that the DoE lacks capacity in terms of personnel structures and programmes to implement policies for vulnerable children (Coombe 2000; Vally 2000), and at the time of writing little had changed in this respect.

Perhaps the most significant issue, however, is that youth facilitators who are unemployed, (generally unskilled) individuals taken from local communities, are asked to identify vulnerable children, refer them and engage in activities with them (including counselling). They are also expected to conduct home visits and negotiate with other social protection agencies such as the police, clinics and welfare. Although there have been cases of success in this endeavour, and incredible effort on the part of the volunteers, the project presents a prime example of using the poor to assist the destitute. There is a poverty of voice, of networks and of expertise to help vulnerable children in ways that make a lasting and crucial difference in their lives. What is ultimately required is not an overloaded teacher with divided attention, or a hard-working volunteer,

but rather a trained social worker or councillor. In the Thabo Mafutanyana district two social workers service 617 schools.

The observations from this case study echo those of Kendall and O'Gara from Malawi, Kenya and Zimbabwe. Their conclusion from case-study research was:

> The reality of education and schooling in the three case study communities is soberingly different than the rhetoric in international and state policy papers, where education plays a heroic role in the struggle against AIDS. The schools and educators here struggle to serve an increasing number of children with decreasing per-pupil resources. (2007: 16)

While resources, and the different types thereof, are of central concern in this chapter; what is also of concern is the policy constructions of schools and teachers. In the following section we ask 'What is a teacher?' and 'What is a school?' in order to identify not only what role the school is able to play in the context of AIDS and poverty, but also what role it should play.

Policy visions of schools and teachers

What is a teacher?

I have shown the difficulty of implementing policies for the protection of vulnerable children in schools, particularly those that relate directly to care and support. I do not intend to argue that schools do not have a role – the question is how that role is defined. What responsibility should the education sector in general, and schools and teachers in particular, carry with respect to the AIDS pandemic and caring for those who are affected? It is necessary at the same time to be realistic as well as firm about what educators are trained to do, where their expertise lies and where it should be strengthened. The teaching profession itself is experiencing a crisis. The erosion of the professional identities of teachers has attracted serious consideration (Hoadley 2002; Jansen 2001), and the need for the strengthening of teachers' instructional practice and professional identities has been stressed. The notion of proliferating teachers' roles and steering them into areas in which they are not expert and don't have training is particularly problematic at this juncture.

The *Norms and Standards for Educators* (DoE 2000b) has been subjected to extensive critique (see especially Shalem & Slonimsky 1999). This document 'inflates the work of teachers beyond the capacity of all but the exceptionally talented and obsessively committed' (Morrow 2005: 5). The policy's construction of multiple roles and competencies for teachers undermines their professional identity, and in practice creates unrealistic expectations, especially within the 'community, citizenship and pastoral role'.

Teachers' professional identities are defined first and foremost around teaching and learning. They view the identification, support and monitoring of vulnerable children as an additional and overwhelming task for which they are not equipped (Kendall & O'Gara 2007; Wilson 2002). In 2005 the HSRC conducted a national survey of 24 200 teachers for the Education Labour Relations Council on teacher attrition, morale and job satisfaction (Hall et al. 2005) – 60% of teachers reported that performing tasks not in their job description was a significant factor contributing to job stress. Furthermore, in a study of educator workload in South Africa, teachers reported that attending to learners' social problems significantly crowded out time for teaching (Chisholm et al. 2005).

The role of social workers or support personnel in schools is important. Unless we take the need for these additional personnel in schools with high concentrations of vulnerable children seriously, we risk spending a lot of money, time and effort organising people into new structures and around new roles that they are simply unable to take on. The question also arises as to how we create a climate of care in schools. One way of thinking about this is in terms of the often ignored intrinsic rewards to be gained from teaching – where teachers are confident and effective in what they do, and where they see real changes in students as a result of their efforts. It would seem likely that a culture of care and support would emerge where teachers value the teaching and learning that they do, and students and teachers see the value of their daily work. Research also shows that an ethic of care *is* already widespread in schools and teachers take on a pastoral function (Bhana et al. 2006; Hoadley 2005), but this does not necessarily improve the life chances of children in the long term, and teachers are generally not able to intervene effectively in the lives of children beyond the school where help is needed most. A culture of care and support should be created in relation to the central purpose of schools: teaching and learning.

What is a school?

What is privileged in this paper is the notion that the central function of a school is teaching and learning. In much of the literature and in project documentation around schools as nodes of care and support, is the idea that the boundaries between the school and the community should be blurred. This resonates with postmodern ways of seeing organisation boundaries as permeable and uncertain (Christie 1998). Many of the implementing agents for caring schools base their interventions not on research or on a coherent definition of the school. The interventions are, first and foremost, ideological. The belief is that the school as public institution should be there to provide services to the community, especially children, beyond teaching and learning. But this way of thinking about how to enhance community–school relationships is possibly flawed.

Another way of thinking about the relationship between the school and the community (especially troubled, violent communities) is to strengthen the boundary of the school so that it may create a safe space for children and young people in which they can engage in systematic, formalised learning. These boundaries, it can be argued, are especially critical where children are rendered vulnerable *by* their communities. These boundaries are temporal and spatial and constitute the practices of teaching, learning and the place called school (Fleish 2003). Fleish states:

> Boundaries are critical for fully functioning organisations and the individuals within them. They – the rituals, rules, formal social relations that constitute a system's boundaries – provide a form of containment, a 'mature' social defence for both teachers and learners. Boundaries are physical (e.g. the fences around a school, the walls of a classroom), temporal (e.g. the time school starts and ends, the existence of a timetable), psychological (e.g. giving attention to and engaging with another person), and sociological (e.g. the norms of a social group). Our awareness of the boundaries of a social system and how we respond to what happens at boundaries, are integral to our daily work and lives. (2003: 41).

School boundaries are also epistemological. The purpose of the school is to give 'epistemological access' (Morrow 1995) to students. This is access to school learning and forms of knowledge which can allow students to move from the here and now, the local and particular, to imagine alternate futures

and how they may be attained. This role is especially crucial for a child in a poor community with no access to a secure and predictable livelihood. Here lies the emancipatory potential of the school as conceived by Bernstein (1986). In his enduring concern with social justice and knowledge, Bernstein shows how school knowledge allows for the possibility of imagining other realities and to think things as they aren't. These meanings 'go beyond local space, time, context and embed and relate the latter to a transcendental space, time and context' (1986: 182). The potential of such meanings is to create a new coherence, a vision and understanding beyond the immediate. Here lies the emancipatory potential for vulnerable children in poor communities – not to be confined to the local, but given access to learning that allows for thinking things as they aren't.

Can a child learn if the child is hungry, sick, cold or abused? In all likelihood, no. But the argument being made here is that it is not the job of the school or the teacher to see to these needs. It is crucial that they be met through the appropriate resourcing of schools and communities. It is a difficult balancing act: recognising that schools have a function in the context of the AIDS pandemic, while at the same time protecting their core function which is teaching and learning. It is worth bearing in mind that these debates are not restricted to South Africa. In the USA Milbrey McLaughlin points out:

> Schools have become responsible for many goals that society holds for its young people. And as any harried administrator or teacher will be quick to tell you, schools can't do everything to meet the needs of contemporary youth. Schools are often overloaded and under-funded as they tackle the job of preparing young people for the future. (2003: 18)

Discussion: Whose job is what?

To summarise: teachers are struggling to teach, students are failing to learn and school managers are battling to run efficient and effective organisations. Given these difficulties, it is clear that additional resources need to be allocated to schools if they are going to be able to provide support to vulnerable children. In the context of HIV/AIDS and a largely dysfunctional school system, additional roles, responsibilities and resources cannot be expected of schools. Instead, ways need to be found to *support* schools in becoming supportive of vulnerable children. In other words, we need to think about schools as sites

through which support may be offered, rather than conceiving of support proffered *by* schools themselves. It is the latter conception that predominates in the policy documents described above, as well as many of the projects attempting to implement these policies.

Many of these policies and programmes aim to 'organise the poor' (Richter 2005, personal communication), rather than offer service, support or resources. Rather than facilitate greater functionality of the school in relation to a number of core functions (especially that of teaching and learning), they demand new governance functions, new roles for teachers and an ever-widening ripple of responsibilities for school communities.

Some programmes do approach schools as effective vehicles through which to access children (for example, the Children's Institute Caring School's Project). Given their access to large numbers of children, schools are seen as points for referral to sectors which are positioned to provide resources and other forms of support. For example, Soul City and Absolute Return for Kids address the issue of accessing social grants through schools. In the Soul City project, the purpose is to use the school as a site for referral, and also sites for 'jamborees'. At a pilot for one of these jamborees in the Free State, the Departments of Social Development, Justice and Home Affairs attended an event on a Saturday, and local NGOs, CBOs and radio stations also lent support. About 9 000 people attended the event and 2 500 people were processed for social grants by the DoSD in a single day.

Much more could be done to reach those poor households not yet accessing the Child Support Grant, the Care Dependency Grant or the Foster Care Grant. In addition to these grants, there are various other programmes to provide housing, water, sanitation, electricity and subsidised education to previously disadvantaged communities. However, these programmes are characterised by huge shortfalls and remain inaccessible to many poor children and their families. Some of the most pressing difficulties include transport costs, lack of documentation such as birth certificates and identity documents, administrative corruption and inefficiency, means-test confusion, and lack of knowledge of rights and redress mechanisms.

The argument presented in this chapter is that the needs of vulnerable children cannot entirely be laid at the door of the school. We need to think more carefully about exactly how vulnerability impacts on children and how best

to intervene. For example, it is widely understood that vulnerable children are particularly susceptible to absenteeism and dropout. We need to take seriously the possibility that those most in need of support from the school may often not be at school. We also need to think where the most appropriate intervention may be made to assist these children. Recent research has shown a strong relation between improved school attendance (the primary effect of vulnerability on children's schooling) and income transfers to the home (Samson et al. 2004; Case et al. 2005), even to children in the home who are not direct beneficiaries of the grant (Budlender & Woolard 2006). Policy needs to pay attention to allocating the right functions to the appropriate agencies.

Thinking through the questions of different sectors and their responsibilities might help to clarify where co-operation is most needed, at both local and national levels. The school as a site for *reaching* children in order to facilitate access to other social services is crucial. There is also a need for effective interface between the school and other sectors, as well as between the school and the homes and communities of students. But beyond the school as a site for referral, we need to understand clearly what effect vulnerability has on children's schooling, and the extent to which these effects can be addressed directly by the school. Giving the most vulnerable access to services by those adequately trained to offer them is an urgent priority.

To reiterate, while other agencies can offer children material, psychological and social care and support, no other can provide children with the crucial access to learning that a school offers. This epistemological access remains children's fundamental right, to be pursued *especially* if they are vulnerable. And it can only be pursued if the teaching and learning work of schools and teachers is protected and prioritised.

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