

# THE QUALITY OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

## Background Paper

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### Introduction

Ten years after South Africa's transition to democracy, there are few areas of education that are untouched by the drive since 1994 to overcome the legacy of apartheid. South Africa consists of 43.6m people, of whom more than 350,000 are teachers and almost 12 million are learners in primary, secondary, combined, intermediate and middle schools. The majority is concentrated in provinces that are predominantly rural and now include former homelands. These are the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo provinces.

Province	Primary	Secondary	Combined	Int & Middle	F%	M%	Total
<b>E.Cape</b>	627	397	1002	0	51	49	<b>2027</b>
<b>Free State</b>	344	208	43	107	50	50	<b>703</b>
<b>Gauteng</b>	858	488	98	0	50	50	<b>1444</b>
<b>KwaZulu-Natal</b>	1663	851	146	0	50	50	<b>2661</b>
<b>Limpopo</b>	1136	639	17	0	50	50	<b>1793</b>
<b>Mpumalanga</b>	494	286	112	0	50	50	<b>894</b>
<b>Northern Cape</b>	96	45	22	29	50	50	<b>194</b>
<b>North West</b>	494	235	13	139	50	50	<b>883</b>
<b>Western Cape</b>	504	285	21	77	51	49	<b>888</b>
<b>National</b>	<b>6222</b>	<b>3438</b>	<b>1478</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>11492</b>

Source: SNAP Survey 2001

Between 1994 and 1999, a range of initiatives was introduced to improve access, equity and quality. Spending became oriented to the achievement to equity and ceased to be determined on a racial basis. The South African Schools Act (1996) introduced school governing bodies to democratise control over schools. A teacher redistribution and deployment project in 1996 and the introduction of Curriculum 2005 in 1997 aimed to improve quality.

In 1999, against 'the backdrop of the need to accelerate service delivery and enhance the accountability of the public service', the new Minister of Education, Professor

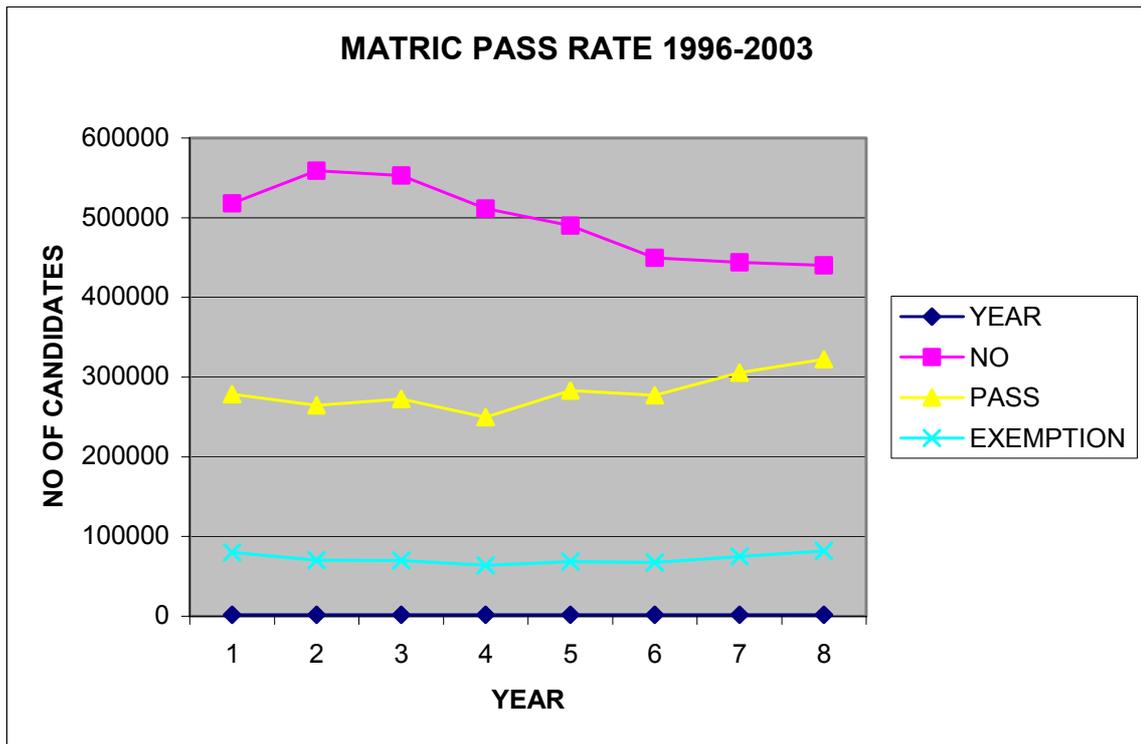
Kader Asmal, made a *Call to Action*. His *Call to Action* identified nine priorities. The priorities concerned with the improvement of quality focused on the developing the professional quality of the teaching force and promoting active learning through outcomes-based education (DoE 2000a). The nine priorities were organised into five core programme areas in the ‘Implementation Plan for Tirisano’ launched in 2000 for the period 2000-2004. ‘Tirisano’ (meaning ‘working together’) identified key objectives, activities and outputs in the areas of HIV/Aids, School Effectiveness and Educator Professionalism, Literacy, Further and Higher Education and the Organisational Effectiveness of the National and Provincial Department. The immediate programme of implementation for 2000-2001 aimed at improving the quality of teaching and the system of education through focusing on the status and quality of teaching and learner achievement. Other changes envisaged within the further and higher education sectors were also intended to impact on the quality of education. These were defined as follows:

<b>Project</b>	<b>Strategic Objectives</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Time-Frames</b>
<b>Status and quality of teaching</b>	To develop a framework for educator development that promotes and enhances the competence and professional skills of all educators	Developing a policy framework for educator development	Norms and standards for educator development	February 2000
		Developing programmes for educator development	White Paper on educator development	April 2000
	To ensure the development of the South African Council of Educators (SACE) as a professional body for educators	Developing a framework on the role of SACE as a professional body for educators	Upgrading of unqualified and underqualified educators	Ongoing, starting March 2000
			Educators trained to implement curriculum 2005	Ongoing
	To implement, in partnership with SACE, the code of conduct that guides the standards of practice and the ethics of educators	Implementing the educator appraisal system for educators	Policy on the role of SACE and the amendment of the appropriate legislation	February 2000
			Ongoing educator appraisal	March 2000
			National teacher awards	November 2000
<b>Learner achievement</b>	To ensure improved	Developing support systems	Regular assessment of	Ongoing, starting April

	learner performance and attainment	to support and ensure the implementation of regular class tests and trial examinations  Developing assessment instruments for measuring national standards at the end of grades 3, 6 and 9  Review of Curriculum 2005 and OBE	learner performance  Reports on learner performance in grades 3, 6 and 9  Report on the implementation of Curriculum 2005 and OBE  Development of plan based on the recommendations of Curriculum 2005/OBE report	2000  December 2000  February 2000  May 2000
<b>Restructuring of the further education and training and the higher education system</b>	..... Provide a framework for the restructuring and rationalisation of the institutional landscape of the FET and HE systems .....	Implement the framework for the incorporation of Colleges of Education into the higher education system		
<b>Quality enhancement</b>	To develop efficient and effective administrative systems for the senior certificate examinations  To develop the curriculum framework and assessment mechanisms for the FET band, ie grades 10-12	Improve the monitoring and reporting mechanisms for the senior certificate examinations  Investigate the feasibility of establishing a national matric examinations  Developing and piloting of curriculum in Grade 10	Reports on conduct of examinations  Reliable matric results  Report on the feasibility of a national matric examination  Educator development programme for curriculum 2005	Annual  Annual  June 2000  Ongoing, starting January 2000

By 2004 all these objectives had been achieved and in some cases even more than had been anticipated, as in the case, for example of curriculum development for schools in

Grades 10-12. Conditions had thus been set in place for major improvement in the quality of education. Matric results in 2003 confirmed the improvements that had been made since 1994, but the validity of the results and standard of the exams were disputed by prominent analysts. Compared with an overall pass rate of 58.1% in 1994, there was an overall pass rate of 73,3%, in 2004. Debate raged in the press for weeks.<sup>1</sup> The graph below shows the number enrolled, passing and given exemption from 1996 to 2003. While there has been a decline in the total number sitting for the exam, the number passing and with exemption have increased.



<sup>1</sup> The debate was sparked by an article by the Dean of Education at the University of Pretoria, Jonathan Jansen, 'Matric quick fixes miss the mark', that appeared immediately after publication of the results in the *Sunday Times*, 4/1/2004; see also Peroshni Govender, 'Top marks for matric fairness', *The Star*, 5/1/2004, Cornia Pretorius, 'Matrics assured marks were not manipulated', *ThisDay*, 7/1/2004, Alet Rademeyer, 'Pasella-matriek' *Beeld*, 8/1/2004, Linda Chisholm, 'Matric Pool Redefined', *Financial Mail*, 9/1/2004, Johan Pampallis, 'Matric successes worth celebrating', *Business Day*, 9/1/2004, Fikile Ntsikelelo Moya, 'A house of bright colours', *Mail&Guardian*, 9-15 January 2004, David McFarlane, 'Classrooms vs Classy Acts', *Mail&Guardian*, 9-15/1/2004, Haroon Mahomed, 'Matrics needed to be better prepared for the challenges of life', *Sunday Independent*, 11/1/2004, Edwin Naidu, 'It's wrong to judge the entire schooling system on matric', *Sunday Times*, 11/1/04, Cornia Pretorius, 'Matric critics bluster about old problems', *ThisDay*, 12/1/2004, Peliwe Lolwana, 'Matric pupils cleared', *Sowetan*, 13/1/2004, Paul Kirk, 'E Cape matric results "slanted"', *Citizen*, 13/1/2004, Victor Mecoamere, 'Quality of education is key', *Sowetan*, 15/1/2004, Claire Bisseker, 'New matric exam spells class war' *Financial mail*, 16/1/2004 'Critics ignore success in education' *Star*, 22/1/2004, Cornia Pretorius, 'Alarming rise in failure rate after problems with curriculum: Schools told to push up marks of grade 10 pupils', *ThisDay*, 29/1/2004, Cliff Malcolm and Linda Chisholm, 'Talking of standards', *ThisDay*, 30/1/2004, William Spady, 'Let's dump the matric ritual', *Mail&Guardian*, 30Jan-5 Feb 2004, Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala, 'Fiddling marks', *Mail&Guardian*, 30Jan-5 Feb 2004.

Despite these improved matric results, there is a body of evidence to show that quality in the majority of primary schools remains poor. The Department of Education itself acknowledges that ‘there is considerable evidence that quality of education in South African schools is worryingly low relative to what South Africa spends on schooling’ (DoE 2003b: 101). Here it is important to distinguish between urban and rural areas and within them, between formal and informal. Schools in informal settlements within urban and rural areas – the former homelands – remain marked by poor quality. Whereas racial differences are no longer as stark as they were ten years ago, and many poor schools are performing better than better-resourced schools, the contours of quality differences by and large continue to reflect historical legacies and differences. This paper will try to examine the dynamics and some of the reasons for this. It will highlight differences between the periods 1994 and 1999, when a new system was essentially being set in place, and 1999-2004 when decisive steps were taken to improve quality, as spelt out above.

Information for this article is drawn from secondary literature and official statistics. The collection of educational statistics has both changed and improved since 1994. But there are gaps because data collection systems are still developing, and because of the dramatic population shifts from rural to small town to urban areas within the last ten years. As government created a new system of education, consisting no longer of 18 racially divided departments, but one national and nine new provincial departments, so too did its data gathering system and categories of data collection change. Whereas statistics were previously gathered by race, and very inadequately in the previous homelands, they are now gathered principally by province and in terms of the new divisions of education: General Education and Training band (GET), Further Education and Training band (FET), Adult Basic Education (ABET), Early Childhood Education (ECD), Education for Learners with Special Needs (ELSEN) and Higher Education (HE). Differences and variations in the questions asked between different provinces means that it takes time for the necessary adjustments to be made for information to be immediately available. The most recent educational statistics made available by the Department of Education’s Education Management Information System (EMIS) thus exists for 2001 (DOE 2003a). The paper and authors cited also use statistics produced in earlier years.

The approach taken in this paper is that the quality of schooling in South Africa’s poorer schools is integrally related to questions of access, equity and democracy.

**What evidence can be cited that there have been improvements in the quality of primary education in SA since 1994? This evidence may cover improvements in the quality of inputs and learning processes as well as learning outcomes.**

It is important to note how public spending on education has changed since 1994. Between 1994 and 1999, the emphasis was on instituting deracialised budgeting processes, reducing the overall budget and cutting costs. As a percentage of GDP, South Africa spent 7.3% on education in 1991/2. Between 2001 and 2004, it spent an average of 5.5%. Despite major wage increases for teachers in 1996, there was a decline in public school budgets between 1997 and 2001 at an annual rate of 1.5%.

The link between improving equity and quality has been central to departmental initiatives since 1994. Immediately after 1994, the strategy was on the one hand to

shift part of the burden for costs onto parents through school fees and on the other to redistribute teachers (the highest cost in the budget) from better-resourced, white and mainly urban schools to poorer-resourced, black and mainly rural schools.<sup>2</sup> In 1996, the Department of Education introduced a policy of rationalisation and redeployment of teachers based on Resolution 3 of the Education Labour Relations Council. It anticipated phasing in a learner: education ratio of 40:1 in all primary schools and 35:1 in all secondary schools (Crouch and Perry 2003: 480). More expensive teachers in the system were offered voluntary severance packages. After 1999, compensatory redress mechanisms were instituted. Since 2000, a pro-poor funding policy has been implemented which allocates funding for learning support materials, maintenance and basic services according to a poverty index based on the poverty of school communities and conditions at schools. This excludes capital expenditure and teacher salaries that are budgeted for separately (Information drawn from Wildeman 2003). Officially the pupil:teacher ratio is 40:1 in primary schools and 35:1 in secondary schools. In practice, there is still overcrowding and a high pupil:teacher ratios particularly in rural schools. Given this, it is likely that unless pro-poor funding inputs also enable the appointment of additional teachers in these schools, they will make much difference.

The racial dynamics of South African society determined the way in which the teacher rationalisation and redeployment policy actually took effect. Teachers in the better-resourced parts of the system did not move to the poorer-resourced parts of the system. Instead, poorer provinces employed new teachers. It appears many of these may have been un- or underqualified as there is evidence that the number of unqualified teachers in the system (less than matric plus a diploma or degree) have risen over time, rather than decreased. In 2000 the percentage of under- or unqualified teachers in the system was higher than in 1975. In 1975, 11 % of educators were unqualified or underqualified. In 1985 it increased to 17%, and in 1994 to 36%. By 2000 it had decreased to 22%, still unacceptably high. (Crouch and Perry 2003: 481). This is significant, as years of teacher qualifications (and textbooks) are strongly correlated with learning outcomes (Crouch and Mabogoane 2001; Vinjevold and Crouch 2001).

The most significant changes since 1994 in terms of the employment and quality of teachers are thus firstly the increase in the number of un- and underqualified teachers and secondly the huge increase in the number of teachers employed by School Governing Bodies (Perry and Arend 2003: 312) In order to retain their previous small pupil:teacher ratios, formerly privileged schools with low pupil: teacher ratios used the powers given to them under the South African Schools Act of 1996 to set fees that would enable the employment of additional teachers. They have become known as ‘governing body teachers’ – teachers, in other words, who are not employed by the provincial departments but by the school. The School Register of Needs for 2000

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<sup>2</sup> Fiske and Ladd (2004) studied the impact of fees on schools and parents in the Western and Eastern Cape and suggest that those schools able to charge high fees have maintained and even improved quality through hiring additional teachers. Those schools in poorer and rural areas that charge much lower fees are often unable to extract these from poor parents who are unable to pay. There is evidence that parents in poor and rural areas do not know about the fee exemption policy that came into effect after 2000. These schools consequently have few resources other than those from the national and provincial departments on which to draw and so are unable to effect quality improvements such as those implemented in schools able to charge high fees. Fiske and Ladd argue that a fees-based policy has not, however, inhibited access.

showed that the proportion of School Governing Body-paid teachers increased from 2.9% in 1996 to 8.2% in 2000. In 2000, the provinces of Gauteng (21.7%) and Western Cape (13.4%) had the highest proportion of SGB-paid teachers, while the Northern Province (2.5%) reported the lowest (DoE 2001: 18).

The institutional base and profile of institutions providing PRESET, INSET and ongoing professional development has undergone significant change in the last ten years. Jairam Reddy describes these as follows:

In 1994, there were 150 public institutions providing teacher education to 200,000 students. At the beginning of 2000, there were 82 public institutions providing education to 100,000 students; of these 50 were colleges of education with 15,000 students. The provinces rationalised these into 25 contact colleges and two distance education colleges: the South African College for teacher Education (SACTE) and the South African College for Open Learning (SACOL)... By 2000, declining enrolments in university faculties of education, rapid decline in college enrolments due to stringent quotas imposed by provinces and the rapid growth of the private sector had changed the teacher education profile significantly.... There were ... serious concerns about the quality and relevance of programmes. Under these circumstances... the(ir) incorporation (of colleges) into universities became inevitable (Reddy 2002: 101).

The incorporation of teacher education colleges into universities has significant implications for improving the quality of teacher education in South Africa. Since many institutions are still grappling with the changes at an institutional level, these implications will probably take some time to become visible.

In the short term, teachers who are upgrading are doing so through distance education. In 2001, of the 107,922 students enrolled at universities, 20,321 were enrolled full-time at contact institutions. The table below shows that the large majority of students enrolled in educator training at universities and technikons in 2000 and 2001 are enrolled in distance education (Crouch and Perry 2003: 482). Distance education programmes for upgrading qualifications are generally public-private partnerships. They generate sizeable subsidies for their respective institutions but, as suggested above, the Department of Education has concerns about the extent to which universities are monitoring the quality of these distance programmes.

Enrolment in Educator Training at Universities and Technikons, 2000 and 2001

Year	Univ Distance at contact institutions	Univ UNISA	Univ Contact only	Total	Techn Distance at contact institutions	Techn TSA	Techn Contact only	Techn Total
2000	60 486	12 241	17 451	90 178	11 280	183	1 819	13 280
2001	63 999	23 602	20 321	107922	8498	253	2 929	1 680

Source: DOE (2000, 2001a) as represented in Crouch and Perry 2003 : 482

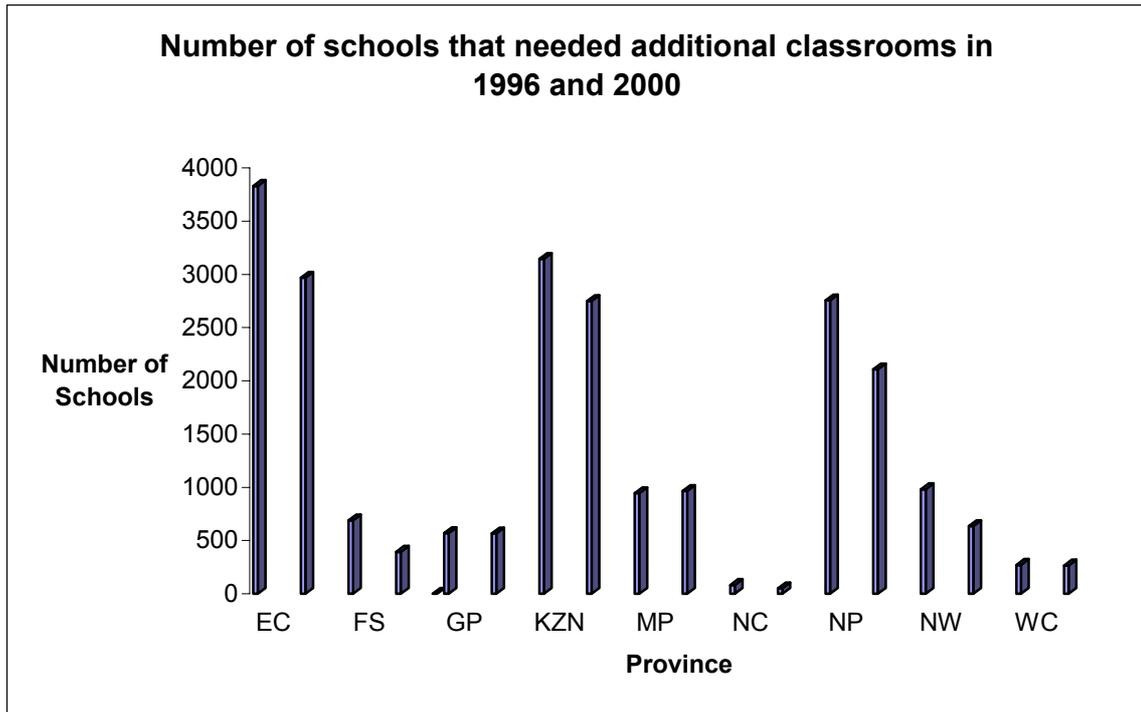
Note:

1. Data for 2001 are missing for the University of NorthWest, Border Technikon and Eastern Cape Technikon
2. Data for 2001 are provisional

Another dimension of the teacher workforce relates to its gender and racial composition. It has 'approximately 20 to 25 percentage points more females than males compared with the rest of the working labour force'. The 'surprising factor' is that 'white participation (has) increased ...' (Crouch and Perry 2003: 483). Crouch and Perry speculate that the reasons for this may be linked on the one hand to the fact that the formal economy is opening up at a faster rate for Africans than are opportunities for teachers, or relative opportunities for whites have waned faster and on the other to the increase in teacher posts created by school governing bodies. Linked to this is a perception that teaching is not an attractive career choice. The Department of Education has consequently embarked on a vigorous campaign to attract teachers to the profession.

Inputs into facilities and resources also have an impact on what is possible in poor and especially rural schools. These are documented most clearly and comprehensively in the School Register of Needs Survey (SRNS), first conducted in 1996 and then again in 2000. It collects information from every school in the country on its exact geographic location, physical facilities, condition of school buildings, services provided, and equipment and resources available. In 1996, Motala pointed out that the SRNS 'provides a frightening picture of neglect and deprivation .... The most striking feature is that of inequality....' (Motala in Chisholm, Motala and Vally 2003: 392). Media collections and resources were rare, as were sports facilities and resources for specialised subjects such as music.

Four years later, the SRNS (DoE 2001) reported some improvements. Unfortunately it did not report on quality-related issues such as learning resources. But it did report that overall, teacher employment policies appeared to have had some effect in these poorest of schools: there was less overcrowding and an improvement in the pupil: teacher ratio. Significant improvements were reported in the provision of basic facilities such as sanitation, telecommunications, water provision, power supply, housing for educators, hostels for learners and access for learners who are physically disabled. For the rest, provincial variations were striking. Backlogs and inequalities are highly unevenly spread across the provinces, as illustrated for example in the number of schools that needed additional classrooms.



Source: Department of Education (2001), *School Register of Needs for 2000*. Pretoria.

There are differences between provinces, between schools in the same locality and even within the same school grounds. Many rural schools might show an improved toilet structure, but they will also evince collapsing ceilings and broken windows. When schools let in the cold and wind, there is little incentive for learners to stay in school. This pattern of uneven infrastructural resources is repeated for quality indicators.

A 2003 Departmental Review of the Financing, Resourcing and Costs of Education in Public Schools (Department of Education 2003b) promised to improve equity and quality through a range of adjustments to the financing and resourcing of poor schools. Its recommendations had implications for quality in primary schools. The Report revealed that despite budget reforms to ensure equality in per-learner expenditure, poorer schools need assistance in procurement of goods and services and asset management and also continue to suffer from expensive textbooks and an inefficiently managed ordering process, high school uniform and transport costs as well as poor management of school nutrition programmes. Its recommendations include bringing down these costs significantly as well as improving systems for the management of resources, thus echoing those studies that have argued that resource inputs have improved – the main challenges lie in the management of resources (van der Berg 2001; van der Berg, Roux and Wood 2002).

In addition, it made recommendations on the costs of schooling. The Report to the Minister on the Review of the Financing, Resourcing and Costs of Education in Public Schools (DoE, 2003: 80) argued that ‘although the poorest fifth of all households pay low fees in absolute terms, of around R50 per year, this constitutes a high proportion of household income. The very poorest spend on average 2% of income on school fees, whilst the figure for middle income and high-income groups is around 1%’. It went on to note that 85% of parents find school fees reasonable,

although only 58% pay their school fees, but that ‘the statistics are not inconsistent with a situation... where there is widespread dissatisfaction with the system of school fees. Even if “only” 15% of parents find the system of school fees unreasonable, this is a high enough figure to cause much tension in the schooling system, especially if one considers the strain that school fees places on households, and the risk that children of non-paying parents will be marginalised.’ (Ibid.: 83). It does not see the fee-setting process as the central problem – parents seem to find these reasonable – but it does see the exemption process as critical. The problem here is the ‘lack of parent empowerment through information’ (Department of Education 2003: 91). The Report questions the legality of ‘hidden fees’ that schools charge – including the cost of food, transport and uniforms. It proposed capping school fees and introducing more stringently monitored and better informed fee-setting processes, fairer and more effective exemptions processes fully integrated into Government’s poverty alleviation programmes and transport assistance to poor learners.

The quality of the inputs thus seems to be uneven. To what extent have curricular and pedagogical inputs made an impact on the quality and outcomes of primary education?

The main initiative since 1994 has been the introduction of outcomes-based education and Curriculum 2005. At the heart of Curriculum 2005 is a set of values linked to social justice, human rights, equity and development as well as a learner-centred approach to learning. The intention of outcomes-based education is to improve the quality of the learning experience through methods that emphasise activity-based rather than rote learning. Critical and developmental outcomes were derived from the Constitution in 1995 and provide the basis of the learning outcomes contained in the curriculum. The critical and developmental outcomes describe the kind of citizen the education and training system should aim to create. The critical outcomes envisage learners who will be able to:

- Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking.
- Work effectively with others as members of a team, group, organisation and community.
- Organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively.
- Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information.
- Communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes.
- Use science and technology effectively and critically showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

The developmental outcomes envisage learners who are also able to:

- Reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively.
- Participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national, and global communities.
- Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts.

- Explore education and career opportunities.
- Develop entrepreneurial opportunities

Curriculum 2005 was introduced in 1997, but it had barely been introduced when criticisms began surfacing that the curriculum was excessively complex and that outcomes-based education could only work in well-resourced schools with highly qualified teachers and that poorly-qualified teachers in rural schools would be at sea when faced with the demands to create their own curricula and resources. Curriculum 2005 was accordingly reviewed and revised to address these criticisms. (DOE 2000; DOE 2002; Chisholm 2003). The Revised National Curriculum Statement for schools from Grades R – 9 (DoE 2002) builds on Curriculum 2005. But it only began to be implemented in 2004.

In the meantime, researchers and analysts have argued that the quality of schooling in South Africa leaves much to be desired when assessed against outcomes. In a recent book titled, *Getting Schools Working*, Taylor, Muller and Vinjevold (2003: 41) argue that ‘studies conducted in South Africa from 1998 to 2002 suggest that learners’ scores are far below what is expected at all levels of the schooling system, both in relation to other countries (including other developing countries) and in relation to the expectations of the South African curriculum’. Their research has revealed that at the end of the first three years of schooling, learners have only a rudimentary grasp of the principles of reading and writing. When they are assessed, it is clear that they are unable to perform satisfactorily at either national or internationally accepted levels. When considered at the level expected by the Revised National Curriculum Statement, they are performing 1 to 2 years below Grade 3 level and 3 years below Grade 6 (Ibid.: 129).

This confirms an established trend in the literature. The Third International Mathematics and Science Repeat Study, for example, which was conducted in 1998 in countries which included Australia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Indonesia, Thailand, Jordan, Lithuania, Tunisia, England, Hungary, Singapore and Turkey, placed South Africa well below the international and continental mean for mathematics and science. The study was based on 225 schools selected from all 9 provinces. South Africa achieved an 85% response rate and the national sample was considered representative for the country as a whole. Only the most proficient mathematics learners in South Africa attained the level of the average learners from Singapore. Science results were not significantly better. The TIMSS-R Report noted a number of contributing factors. As far as curriculum was concerned, it drew attention to the fact that while the interim C2005 curricula for maths and science in South Africa ‘revealed several similarities with curricula internationally ... one of the exceptions was the lack of major emphasis in science on knowing basic science facts and understanding science concepts. While most countries placed a major emphasis on this in curriculum documents, South Africa did not.’ (Howie 2001: 39). This criticism has been addressed in the Revised National Curriculum Statement.

The Department of Education’s *Education for All Assessment* (2000b) came to similar conclusions. It was based on data from the 1999 South Africa Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) Survey, the 1997 Education Management Information System (EMIS) dataset, the 1996 South African Population Census and the 1996 Schools Register of Needs dataset. It found that the average score of Grade 4 learners was

below 50% in the literacy, numeracy and lifeskills tasks for which they were tested. The Department's 2003 Financing Review cited results of the 2000 Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) sample survey of Grade 6 learners which showed that South African learners in Grade 6 achieve a level of reading mathematics proficiency 'that is better than that of our neighbours Lesotho and Namibia, but lower than that for almost all other countries in the region.' This is despite South Africa's much higher expenditure per learner than in any other country in the region, with the exception of Botswana. Thus although Tanzania spends about half as much as South Africa in terms of expenditure over GNP, scores measuring reading skills amongst Tanzanian learners are about 50% higher than South Africa's scores (DoE 2003b: 101).

The relationship between learning outcomes and the provision and use of learning resources is well-documented. Scholars in schools where there have been interventions such those by READ - which introduces books into schools - show a distinct advantage (Schollar 2001). There has been a gradual gradual improvement mixed with continuing challenges in the provision, procurement, use and quality of texts. In the first few years after 1994, in keeping with efforts to keep educational costs down, spending on books and stationery dropped from around R900m in 1995/6 to a low of about R80m in 1997/8 (Taylor and Vinjevold 1999). Since then, allocations have improved. But budgetary allocations are only a part of the story. Success in delivery of textbooks and stationery to schools is mixed across provinces. Studies on procurement, management, dissemination and recovery systems have found that most schools have some system for recording delivery of books, but they are not efficient or systematic. Procurement systems are haphazard, teachers make selections without having reviewed books and often on the basis that they are 'OBE-compliant'. Many schools lack basic storage facilities, with the result that the distribution of books to learners is poorly managed. Retrieval systems are also virtually non-existent, despite the Ministry of Education having made this a priority (Taylor, Muller and Vinjevold,2003: 112-113).

There have been few analyses of the quality of new texts and learning support materials. In the first few years of implementation of Curriculum 2005, teachers were encouraged to produce their own learning support materials. The Ministerial Review Committee on Curriculum 2005 found the quality, availability and use of texts and learning resources uneven. It argued that:

Budget allocation and the provisioning, evaluation and selection processes impact on the availability of appropriate textbooks. Currently the quality of textbooks being used in schools is variable as a result of design flaws in C2005 and the unreliability of the evaluation process. Poor planning and uneven levels of skill on the part of the developers undermine the quality of curriculum support materials produced by the DOE. Teachers need textbooks along with other learning support materials and they need to be trained to use them effectively. Teachers generally do not have the time, the resources and the skill to develop their own materials, although this should also be encouraged (DoE 2000: 76).

Since this Report, the Department has revised the curriculum, expanded allocations and initiated processes for improved procurement and selection processes.

The Department of Education has placed a high priority on translating school resources into learner performance. It recommends that constructive community pressure be placed on schools: ‘a public empowered with more comprehensive information about the schooling system would almost certainly exert positive pressure on institutions and leaders to account for educational performance’ (DoE 2003b: 103). For this reason, it proposes that the DoE should invest in integrating existing performance data, conduct research on input-output trends in order to understand the relationship between resourcing and performance and ‘produce comprehensive and user-friendly statistics for public consumption that will allow comparisons between provinces and districts/circuits in terms of learner performance’ (Ibid.: 104).

Curriculum review and revision is a vital element in the improvement of educational quality. As from 2004, the Revised National Curriculum Statement will be implemented in schools on a staggered basis, starting in the Foundation Phase. Although still outcomes-based, its design principles are less complex than those of the first version of Curriculum 2005 implemented between 1997 and 2003.

The Revised National Curriculum Statement includes amongst its principles:

- ❑ Social Justice, A Healthy Environment, Human Rights and Inclusivity
- ❑ Outcomes-based Education
- ❑ A High Level of Skills and Knowledge for All
- ❑ Clarity and Accessibility
- ❑ Progression and Integration

There are eight Learning Areas in the National Curriculum Statement. A Learning Area is a field of knowledge, skills and values, which has unique features as well as connections with other fields of knowledge and Learning Areas. The Learning Areas are:

- Languages
- Mathematics
- Natural Sciences
- Technology
- Social Sciences
- Arts and Culture
- Life Orientation
- Economic and Management Sciences

The relationship between human rights, a healthy environment and social justice is addressed in each Learning Area Statement. The Learning Area Statements provide a guideline of requirements and expectations from Grade R to 9 for schools in the General Education and Training band. They identify the goals, expectations and outcomes to be achieved through learning outcomes and assessment standards. The outcomes and assessment standards emphasise participatory, learner-centred and activity-based education. They ‘leave considerable room for creativity and innovation on the part of teachers in interpreting what and how to teach.’ (DOE 2002: Overview). Thus the learning outcomes for languages, for example, are intended to ensure that learners are able to listen, speak, read and view, write, think and reason, understand

and use language structure to interpret texts. Mathematics outcomes are focused on developing knowledge, understanding and skill in numbers, operations and relationships; patterns, functions and algebra; space and shape; measurement and data handling.

The Revised National Curriculum Statement defines assessment standards as describing the level at which learners should demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcome(s). Assessment standards describe the minimum level, depth and breadth of what is to be learnt. They are grade specific and show how conceptual progression will occur in a Learning Area. They embody the knowledge, skills and values required to achieve learning outcomes. They do not prescribe method. Learning support materials and teacher development programmes will play an important role in interpreting and giving expression to the learning outcomes and assessment standards.

The quality of education is linked to teachers, texts and the values promoted in schools through the official and hidden curriculum. Violence in schools remains a major issue, as does racism and sexism. Rape of schoolgirls, sexual violence and abuse, often by teachers, have been a marked feature of the schooling experience of many girls as well as boys. The extent to which sexual abuse and female pregnancy is a component of the drop-out rate in secondary schools is unclear. The connections between rape and sexual abuse of girls at school and deaths due to HIV/Aids are also unexplored. HIV prevalence amongst children aged 2 to 18 years is in the region of 5.6%, according to a Nelson Mandela Foundation funded HSRC study (2003). The prevalence is highest in the 2 to 9 year old group of children. School-age children form a relatively small proportion of the population infected with HIV. It nonetheless has a number of direct effects. One of these is to increase nutritional needs. Due to a weakened immune system, other infections start to occur which raise the need for nutrients.

The impact on school attendance of HIV/Aids in the family is well-documented. It is felt in:

- ❑ A decrease in learner enrolments
- ❑ Absenteeism
- ❑ Diversion of family income from education to support sick family members

All of these issues impact on the quality of the learning experience for learners. Both the national and provincial departments of education, sometimes in cross-sectoral teams, have undertaken programmes to address these. Curriculum 2005 and the Revised National Curriculum Statement have made learning, understanding and being able to act on issues of sexuality and health, including HIV/AIDS, central to the curriculum. Teacher unions have taken up gender and HIV/AIDS issues. Under the auspices of the Education Labour Relations Council, all teacher unions and departments of education have put their weight behind a major research project to measure the prevalence of HIV amongst teachers, determine the driving factors of the epidemic and review current initiatives at school and community level.

In tackling these issues at school level, teachers' understanding is critical. If teachers are to address issues of human rights, then teacher education is a most important place

to start. The recent past has given the priority to incorporation of colleges into higher education. The implications for teacher education are enormous. Although newly-integrating institutions are still struggling with the administrative and logistical challenges of integration, many have begun to take up the challenges of orienting teachers in a new way. Here the way has been prepared by new constitutional imperatives, the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) that define a new role for teachers and Curriculum 2005 and the Revised National Curriculum Statement which establish new expectations of teachers (Parker 2002; Sayed 2004). There are both possibilities and challenges in taking up social justice issues in teacher education. Some teacher educators consciously place teacher education within a human rights framework in order to prepare teachers to address a broad range of diversity factors including race, social class, gender, sexuality, religion, language, HIV status and disability (Moletsane, Hemson and Muthukrishna, 2004). Supporting teachers are national initiatives aimed at the wider public and including teachers and learners. The South African Human Rights Commission has convened two national forums – a Discussion/Consultative Forum on Anti-racism in the Education and Training Sector (CFRE) and the National Forum on Democracy and Human Rights (NFDHRE) – as well as strategies and initiatives to combat racism (Manjoo 2004).

**What have been the policies, innovations and programmes which have been instrumental in improving the quality of primary education?**

The initiatives undertaken by government, NGOs and donors, often in partnership, to improve and monitor the quality of primary education have been legion. On the part of government, initiatives have been systemic and aimed at reform of the entire system. In a parliamentary briefing in February 2004, Minister Kader Asmal (2004b) pointed to:

- ❑ Focused attention to district development as a means for supporting school-based innovations.
- ❑ Introduction of school meals: in poor schools these improve the experience of learning has been school meals.
- ❑ The implementation of an Integrated Quality Management System, including Whole School Evaluation
- ❑ National Teaching Awards: these were introduced to instil pride and a sense of vocation in teachers
- ❑ Road shows to recruit students to becoming prospective teachers
- ❑ Establishment of partnership projects across a range of areas, but focusing especially on, for example, maths and science
- ❑ Improvements in textbook procurement and delivery processes

**What are the key lessons which have been learnt regarding how to sustain improvement in the quality of primary education? And what is presently being done to secure the quality of education for the future?**

Interventions and their outcomes are also highly specific to local contexts and particularities. Here three key lessons will be highlighted: (i) the need for attention to the relationship between the language of learning and teaching and the home language of teachers and learners in improving learning outcomes (ii) the need for strengthening districts in their professional support functions to schools (iii) the need

for multi-faceted interventions to support the introduction of outcomes-based education, literacy and numeracy.

Analysing and summarising the results of 16 school-based intervention and assessment studies conducted in South Africa, Taylor, Muller and Vinjevold draw the conclusion that a critical issue for quality is:

... The all-pervasive and extremely powerful influence of language, which stands out as the one factor which is not only unambiguously implicated in learning, but which also offers relatively clear policy lessons. They revolve around the need for pupils to have as good a grasp of the language of teaching and learning as possible. Pupils who attend classes conducted in a language, which is not their first language, are at a significant disadvantage. This disadvantage is accentuated when the language of teaching and learning is not the first language of the teacher. (65)

They argue for intensive instruction in the language of teaching and learning in teacher education, home practice in the official language of the school and a conscious focus on the importance of language at the school level, as well as explicit policies and programmes to develop proficiency amongst staff, pupils and parents in the official language of the school.

The attempt by Taylor, Muller and Vinjevold to analyse the results of 16 very different intervention studies focuses its lessons learnt on the role of districts. The authors conclude that districts are intended to provide schools with a range of professional and maintenance services but in fact 'lack focus, capacity, resources and the political climate necessary to act with authority in providing for the routine maintenance needs of schools, let alone undertaking the very demanding work necessary for improving the performance of the many poorly-functioning schools under their jurisdiction'. (127) They show how districts are bypassed by different initiatives as well as by national government and how their functions are thereby increasingly vitiated.

The Kgatelopele District Improvement Project in Limpopo province is a particular example of a multi-faceted intervention that included support to primary schools in 2001 in the form of support for the introduction of outcomes-based education, literacy and numeracy (Perold, 2002). Amongst the lessons learnt were:

- The need for integration with district-level professional and curriculum support
- Enabling teachers to spend more time in teacher training
- Consolidating progress in pilot schools before moving on
- Making better use of principals to sustain change in schools
- Providing more learner and teacher support materials than has been the case
- Ensuring participative management
- Integrating districts more directly into project work
- Involving the broader community
- Partnering with many partners

## Improvements in ECCE and literacy programmes<sup>3</sup>

### *Early Childhood Education*

It is difficult to assess improvements in the sphere of ECCE and literacy because of the nature and quality of information available. The information has improved, but it does not focus on quality. Instead it focuses on access and spending. There is extremely limited access to and spending on ECCE and literacy. Quality must as a consequence also suffer. The practitioner profiles in both ECCE and adult literacy classes are important indicators of quality. But there is a debate currently raging in ECCE circles about whether the removal of children from community and home-based sites to school-based sites, and the corresponding professionalisation of ECD, is justifiable or not (see Porteus, 2004). For the Department of Education, the introduction of a reception year, or Grade R, is intended to improve the school-readiness of children.

In 1994, registration of ECD centres was fragmented: public pre-primary schools were registered under education, and 'educare centres' and 'creches' were registered under welfare – according to different statutes. A large number of ECD centres such as in informal settlements and rural areas were not registered because they were marginalised from the formal bureaucracy, or they could not meet the apartheid statutes largely suitable to serviced urban sites.

A 1992 study conducted by the World Bank and the Centre for Education Policy Development (Padayachee et al 1994) provided an initial estimate of coverage (see below). It estimated that almost 10% of South African children between 0 and 6 had access to some form of ECD site, and 3% had access to a subsidised service. While over one third of white children attended early childhood facilities, only 6% of African children had such access. The differential between expenditure per capita on white children and African children exceeded 40. A 1996 nation-wide audit (DOE 2001) provided data on 23,482 sites and 1,030,500 learners between the ages of 0 and 7 across the nation. It revealed that:

- *Access:* One out of 6 children between the ages of 0 and 7 have access to some sort of site-based ECD services. The majority of children are 5 to 6 years old; coverage is much more limited for children under 4 years old. Children in rural areas have the least access to services. African children have access to services with lower indices for infrastructure and practitioner quality. Too few children have access to services, which cater to their home languages.
- *ECD Sites:* There are three types of ECD sites nationally – school based sites (17%), community based sites (49%) and home based sites (34%). 72% of sites are located within one kilometre of a primary school. Over 80% of the sites are multi-age sites providing services to children between the ages of three and five years old. Home-based sites are smaller, have more practitioners per learner, and tend to be the site of the youngest children. Community and home based sites are more likely to be open for a greater number of hours per day, have more practitioners per learner, and have greater access to electricity, water, and sewerage than school based sites.

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<sup>3</sup> Information for this section is drawn from Porteus (2004) and Baatjes and Mathe (2004).

- *Financial Basis:* Learner fees are by far the most important financial input into the ECD sector. 28% of the sites had no income other than school fees. The user fees were less than R25 per month at one third of the sites, between R25 and R75 at another third, and are over R75 in the final third. Fee payment rates are poor across the three site typologies. Some sites depend upon limited subsidisation from the governmental departments of welfare (20%), education (10%) and health (7%). The current financial basis of most sites is tenuous.
- *Practitioner Profile:* The field of ECD is highly feminised with 99% of practitioners being women. A large number of practitioners either have no training (23%) and/or do not have qualifications recognised by the government (88%). Sixty percent of the practitioners without any training are African; 61% of practitioners with recognised qualifications are white. Low qualifications are associated with low pay. Forty four percent of practitioners earn less than R500 per month. The qualification and salary profile demonstrate a deep discrimination against African practitioners.

Given the curriculum and teacher education priorities of the last few years in the pursuit of improving quality, ECD has to some extent been given less attention than it deserves. There is every likelihood that, like adult education, it will be given greater priority in the next five years.

### ***Literacy***

In 1999, ABE received a boost with the appointment of Kader Asmal as Minister of Education. Beginning in 2000, Asmal instituted various planning processes, including the establishment of the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) and a Board of Advisors to assist with his national literacy campaign. The South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) targeted 500,000 learners (out of 3 million) in the first year of its implementation. In 2004, Asmal reported that the Department had established 2 371 adult basic education centres, involving 210 569 adult learners in a variety of programmes in business management, agriculture or applied technology. As a result of these efforts, he said that departmental literacy projects had reached nearly 2 million learners. (Asmal, 2004)

Researchers are less positive about the achievements. Baatjes and Mathe (2003) argue that the number of Public Community Learning Centres declined from 1 440 to 998 during the period 1995 to 2002, and that enrolments were low partly as a result of the decline in NGOs offering ABET. In 2000 only 38 of 150 ABET NGOs surveyed in 1997 were still in operation (Aitchison *et al* 2000). By contrast, commercial providers of ABET that provide programmes to business and industry in line with the NSDS have flourished.

Poor quality is reflected in the examination results and participation rates of the ABET Level 4 learners in Public Community Learning Centres in 2002. (Aitchison 2003). Aitchison shows that of the 40,974 learners enrolled, half (21,148) wrote the exams and less than half (17,926) passed between 1 and 8 learning areas. This suggests a serious problem with learner retention in the state-driven ABET system. There is also often a positive correlation between high drop out rate and poor quality of instruction. More than 50% of adult learners drop out of ABET programmes run by the state. Poor quality of instruction can also be related to the employment of un-

or under-qualified educators and lack of learning material. Many Public Community Learning Centres are simply dysfunctional. The situation is even worse when analysing the numbers of entries for learning areas and the number who actually wrote. The higher the number of learning areas, the lower the number of people who actually wrote all the learning areas for which they entered.

## **Conclusion**

The first ten years of South Africa's democracy have seen dramatic new policies being implemented across the board to improve access, equity, quality and democracy in education. Quality improvements have been linked to efforts to achieve equity and greater access to schooling. In the first few years after 1994, policies were implemented that were intended to improve quality in the fields of teacher redistribution, teacher education and curriculum. The results of the teacher redeployment policy interacted with other policies to produce the unintended result of increasing the number of unqualified teachers in the system while at the same time enabling privileged schools to maintain quality through the employment of extra teachers.

The continuing impact of poverty on all aspects of quality and learner performance at the turn of the millenium led to government review and revision of a number of policies introduced in the immediate post-1994 period, including its school financing and curriculum policies. In the meantime, a range of social actors implemented a variety of projects intended to improve quality in schools. Some started to analyse the results and impact. They have found little impact in the last ten years on learner performance, which remains alarming. They point to the need on the one hand for systemic improvements focused on district capacity development and on the other for attention to the language of learning and teaching in use in schools. There is also evidence of the need for attention to teacher quality, including available teacher education. Smaller scale projects invariably draw attention to the critical need for professional development of teachers and district personnel as well as the critical role of the presence of learning resources as well as their control and use. These issues are underlined when we turn to early childhood education and literacy. These two areas have not been a high priority over the last ten years. However, from the point of view of improving the quality of primary education, the integration of colleges of education into higher education and the introduction of the Revised National Curriculum Statement in 2004 hold great promise for the future.

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