CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the concepts *hidden curriculum* and *the school leaving examination* as they are viewed worldwide, including in South Africa and in the Northern Province in particular. The concept *hidden curriculum* will be discussed against the background of and in contrast to the formal curriculum. While acknowledging the inter-relatedness of these two concepts, for the purpose of this study they will be discussed separately.

While acknowledging various contributions from several educationists, the concept *hidden curriculum* will be explained mainly from two broad theoretical approaches, viz., the functionalist and the neo-Marxist. The neo-Marxist perspective of the notion *hidden curriculum* will include both the reproductive theory and the reproduction resistance theory.

As the concept *school leaving examination* is one of the important aspects of the formal curriculum, it will be discussed on the basis of its common intended and unintended functions and effects and its practical importance as viewed nationally and internationally.

2.2 EXPLORING THE CONCEPT *FORMAL CURRICULUM*

An analysis of the concept *curriculum* reveals some profound changes which the concept has undergone throughout the ages, particularly during the twentieth century. It further indicates changes in the role of the school and the nature of knowledge among the communities. Originating from a Latin root *currere* (Brubaker 1982), meaning a race course of subject matters to be mastered, the concept *curriculum*, as interpreted by various curricularists, reveals many and diverse definitions.

Brubaker (1982:2) explains curriculum as that which persons experience in a setting. His

explanation includes the interactions among persons as well as the interactions between persons and their physical environment. Brubaker's explanation of *curriculum* is not only confined to a school as he explains a setting as any instance where two or more people come together in new and sustained relationships to achieve certain goals.

In an attempt to explain *curriculum*, Zais (1976:7-10) uses the notion to include curriculum as the programme of studies, course content, planned learning experiences, experiences under the auspices of the school, a structured series of intended learning outcomes and curriculum as a written plan for action.

The diverse definitions of the concept *curriculum* have been asserted by Hass and Parkay (1993:2) who used the notion to include a school's written courses of study and other curriculum materials; the subject matter taught to students, the courses offered in a school, and the planned experiences of learners under the guidance of the school. Hass and Parkay (1993:3) argue that:

> "The curriculum is all of the experiences that individual learners have in a program of education whose purpose is to achieve broad goals and related specific objectives, which is planned in terms of a framework of theory and research or past and present professional practice."

In an attempt to explain and interpret the concept *formal curriculum,* several expressions are used by various educationists depending on their different points of departure, which include the manifest curriculum (Bloom 1972), official curriculum (Sambell & McDowell 1998), curriculum proper (Martin 1976), didactic curriculum (Wren 1999), explicit curriculum (Bigelow 1990) and the mandated curriculum (Portelli 1993).

While acknowledging the diverse expressions of the concept *formal curriculum*, this concept can be better understood and interpreted if it is contrasted with the *hidden curriculum* as they both form the school curriculum. In an attempt to explain the formal curriculum, Portelli (1993:343) argues that:

> "The formal curriculum is that curriculum which is officially recognized. It is public, available to all who ask for it and it is meant to be explicit."

Wren (1999:594) explains the formal curriculum by contrasting it with the hidden curriculum as he argues:

> "Usually, when educators refer to school curriculum, they have explicit, consciously planned course objectives in mind."

Lynch (1989) explains the formal curriculum in terms of the universalistic and particularistic functions of the school. Lynch (1989:29) argues that knowledge systems in all schools are compartmentalized, taught by subject specialists and distributed to pupils in batches. According to her, the universalistic nature of the formal curriculum is based on the manner in which knowledge is selected, organized and evaluated while the particularistic practices are based on the manner in which knowledge is distributed or transmitted, i.e. its mediation.

Kelly (1989:12) explains the formal curriculum in terms of the formal activities for which the timetable of the school allocates specific periods of teaching time:

> ".... those activities that are planned or are the results of some intentionality on the part of teachers and planners..."

While acknowledging some definitional shifts and the absence of the universally agreed-upon definition of the concept *formal curriculum*, this study regards the above-mentioned definitions sufficient for being a basis of analysing the concept *hidden curriculum*.

2.3 EXPLORING THE CONCEPT *HIDDEN CURRICULUM*

While the concept *hidden curriculum* is widely-known and commonly used by various educationists throughout the ages, it has never been used to refer to exactly the same thing. Being a multidimensional concept which encompasses a broad range of definitions, several expressions were used by various educationists throughout different years to denote it, which include, *inter alia*, the unnoticed curriculum (Portelli 1993), the unwritten curriculum (Dreeben 1976), the unintended curriculum (Martin 1976), the implicit curriculum (Wren 1999), the unstudied curriculum (Cornbleth 1984), the latent curriculum (Bloom 1972), the invisible curriculum (Zais 1976), and the informal curriculum (Kelly 1989).

Most of the expressions which are used to refer to the hidden curriculum reflect the different points of departure of various educationists which result in different interpretations and meanings. Notwithstanding the diverse interpretations and meanings, the concept *hidden curriculum* can be analysed from the two broad theoretical approaches, viz., the functionalist and the neo-Marxist.

2.3.1 The functionalist theories

The functionalist theories are based on the consensualist school of thought which focuses on the consensual understanding of both society and the school's role in relation to it. Lynch (1989:2) asserts that the functionalist theories focus on the structural relationship between the school and the institutions of public life. While acknowledging the valuable contributions of various functionalists as they explain the hidden curriculum in terms of the social complexity of the classroom (Jackson 1990), structural relationships between the school and other public institutions (Dreeben 1968) and the school as maintenance subsystem of society (Cusick 1973), etc., I intend to focus mainly on the contributions of the above three functionalists, viz. Jackson, Dreeben and Cusick towards the understanding of the concept *hidden curriculum.*

It is generally acknowledged that the educational psychologist Phillip W . Jackson is the one who originally coined the concept *hidden curriculum* in the 1960s. As a pioneer, he defined the hidden curriculum in terms of what he termed the three facts of life. Jackson (1990:22-34) argues:

> ".... the crowds, the praise, and the power that combine to give a distinctive flavour to classroom life collectively form a hidden curriculum which each student (and teacher) must master if he is to make his way satisfactorily through the school."

Jackson viewed classroom life in terms of crowds, praise and power. He argued that the crowded nature of classrooms expects learners to learn to live in crowds which involve unavoidable delays, denial of their desires, social distractions and interruptions. Praise involves the evaluative character of the school which might result in contradictory judgements from educators and peers while the unequal power relation allows the educators to command the learners' attention.

Although Jackson acknowledged the existence of a close relationship between the formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum, he attributed most of the failure of learners at school to failure to comply with the institutional expectations, i.e. failure of mastering the hidden

curriculum. Jackson (1990:35) asserts:

> "Even when we consider the more serious difficulties that clearly entail academic failure, the demand of the hidden curriculum lurks in the background."

While he defined the curriculum of the school in terms of the social requirements of the learning situation, he attributed the learning of the hidden curriculum to the redundancy principle, i.e. the frequency of occurrences. Jackson (1990:6) argues:

> "The fact of prolonged exposure in either setting increases in its meaning as we begin to consider the elements of repetition, redundancy, and ritualistic action that are experienced there."

Dreeben (1976:12) highlighted the definitional problems and the vagueness of the concept and defined the hidden curriculum in terms of the school's social structure:

> "... the prevailing social arrangements in which schooling takes place and the implication that children infer modes of thinking, social norms, and principles of conduct from their prolonged involvement in these arrangements."

Dreeben argued further that schools are traditionally viewed in terms of intended learning outcomes which are acquired by pupils through instruction and through their engagement in various activities. Apart from intended learning outcomes, school programmes produce other relevant outcomes which were never anticipated and for which no curricular provision was made. While acknowledging the existence of both curricula in schools, he asserts that children learn from their daily experiences and also from school instruction. Dreeben (1976:122) argues:

> "In all likelihood, any set of social arrangements and any instructional programme will have unanticipated consequences, observed and unobserved by those who work in schools."

In his description of the hidden curriculum, Dreeben focussed on the existence of the structural relationship between the school and the society *per se*. He compared schools with factories and concluded that both were capable of producing changes in people that they were not designed to

produce. While he accepted that the social arrangements or environments of the school could be deliberately designed to produce some desired effects by changing methods and materials of instruction, there could be no prior guarantee that such a particular set of social arrangements or methods and materials of instruction would produce the intended effects.

In his participant observation study of an American senior class of Horatio Gates high school, Cusick (1973) attempts to explain the relationship between society and the school environment. Although he does not use the concept *hidden curriculum*, his work explains the hidden curriculum from the learners' perspective while acknowledging the existence of other perspectives which include educators' perspectives and administrators' perspectives (Cusick 1973:211-214). He explains the hidden curriculum in terms of the unintended effects of the socio-cultural characteristics of the school, viz. poor learner involvement in formal activities, poor learner-educator interaction, fragmentation of educational experience, minimal compliance on the part of the learner, and learner concern for the maintenance subsystem.

2.3.2 The Neo-Marxist perspective

The neo-Marxist perspective is based on the reproduction theories which are premised on the correspondence principle which states that structural correspondence exists between the social relations of school life and the social relations of production, i.e. schools as being socially reproductive. While acknowledging the valuable contributions of various reproduction theorists as they explain the hidden curriculum in terms of the structural correspondence between the social relations of the labour process and those of the school (Bowles & Gintis 1976; Apple 1979, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1995; Anyon 1979, 1981; McLaren 1993, 1986; Gatto 1992; Gordon 1980, 1982, 1983; Willis 1977; Giroux 1983, 1988; Bowles 1977, etc.), I intend to focus mainly on the contributions of Bowles and Gintis (1976), Apple (1979, 1995) and reproduction resistance theories, viz. Willis (1977), Giroux (1983, 1988), Gatto (1992) and McLaren (1986, 1997) towards the understanding of the concept *hidden curriculum.*

Without any mention of the concept *hidden curriculum* Bowles and Gintis contributed to the development of a theory of the hidden curriculum. They implicitly ascribed the hidden curriculum

to the existence of the structural correspondence between the social relations of school life and that of production. Bowles and Gintis (1976:131) argue:

> "The structure of social relations in education not only inures the student to the discipline of the workplace, but develops the type of personal demeanor, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social class identifications which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy."

Bowles and Gintis view schools as functional for the maintenance of the capitalist economy. The hierarchical division of labour between educators and learners, constant fragmentation and evaluation of learners through streaming and testing were deemed important in fostering docility, compliance, status divisions and institutionalised competition which are all essential for the capitalist. Bowles and Gintis (1976:131) assert that:

> "Hierarchical relations are reflected in the vertical authority lines from administrators to teachers to students. Alienated labor is reflected in ... the alienation of the student from the curriculum content, and the motivation of school work through a system of grades and other external rewards..."

The structural correspondence between the social relations of the labour process and those of the school has further been argued by Bowles (1977:137):

> "An ideal preparation for factory work was found in the social relations of the school: specifically, in its emphasis on discipline, punctuality, acceptance of authority outside the family, and individual accountability for one's work."

Bowles argues that the social relations of the school replicate the social relations of the workplace by helping learners to adapt to the social division of labour. Since learners are not exposed to a similar normative climate in schools, Bowles and Gintis stress the importance of the socially differentiated character of the learners' hidden curricular experience which may be ascribed to social class, race or gender. They view schools as the integral part of the larger social systems and argue that the hidden curriculum could be understood by taking cognizance of the structural forces outside of schools.

Apple (1995:41) supports the reproduction theory as he claims that schools are socially reproductive as they are distributors and producers of culture:

> "... any position that wants to understand fully the school's place in the reproduction of inequality, must be complemented by a concomitant focus on the school as a productive, not only distributive, institution."

Apple views the role of the school as producing agents for positions in the economic sectors and producing the cultural forms which are directly or indirectly required by the economic sector (1995:41). He further regards the school's role as producing the ideological needs of capital (1982:23). Apple (1995:39) further argues:

> "Schools are not there to stimulate widespread class mobility. Rather they basically act as sorting devices. They allocate individuals to their proper places within the hierarchical division of labor..."

He regards the manner in which schools distribute knowledge to the learners as being class-biased since certain groups, particularly the poor and the minorities, are excluded. Apple (1990:33) argues:

> "... schools therefore, processes both knowledge and people ... the formal and informal knowledge is used as complex filter to process people, often by class..."

Apple (1990:38) explains the reproduction function of the school in terms of the legitimation role of the state in education. He argues:

> "... since schools are state apparatuses, we should expect them to be under intense pressure to act in certain ways, especially in times of both fiscal and ideological crises."

While espousing the reproduction theory in interpreting the hidden curriculum, Giroux (1983) focuses on problems in resistance theory by analysing the historically and culturally mediated factors that produce a range of oppositional behaviour. Giroux (1983:285) stresses that resistance behaviour in schools may not be behaviour which is trying to challenge the dominant school ideology as it may be fuelled by ideological imperatives that signify issues and concerns that have

very little to do with the school directly. He further points out that while some learners may seem to challenge the dominant school ideology, some may accommodate it by deciding to remain silent in order to succeed within the system (Giroux 1983:285).

In an attempt to explain the hidden curriculum, Willis (1977) argues in terms of learners' oppositional behaviour at school which results in the working class learners preparing themselves for the working class jobs while the middle class learners prepare themselves for the middle class jobs. Willis (1977:1) argues that:

> "The difficult thing to explain about how middle class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves."

Willis explains the class reproduction in terms of job reproduction, i.e. middle class jobs belong to middle class learners while working class jobs belong to working class learners.

McLaren (1986, 1993) explains the hidden curriculum from a resistance theory perspective. Although he does not use the concept *hidden curriculum*, his work explains the hidden curriculum in terms of the reproduction and resistance theories. His ethnographic study is rooted in the notion that schools perform the reproductive functions of preparing the working-class learners for the lower rungs of the occupational ladder. His work sheds some light in the way ideologies which are embedded in various rituals inform most aspects of school life and how power works through the use of performative and regulatory rituals.

Gatto (1992) attempts to explain the notion *hidden curriculum* in terms of the seven lessons he teaches and which he regards to be universally taught and for which educators are paid, viz. confusion, class position indifference, emotional dependancy, intellectual dependancy, provisional self-esteem and surveillance.

2.3.3 Other approaches to the concept *hidden curriculum*

Although it is generally accepted that functionalist theories and reproduction theories serve as the basis for explaining and interpreting the concept *hidden curriculum*, there are other approaches

which have extended the above-mentioned theories either through criticism or affirmation and which provide a better understanding of the concept. While acknowledging the valuable contributions made by many other educationists in explaining and interpreting the concept *hidden curriculum*, I intend to focus on a selected few which include, Snyder (1971), Lynch (1989), Assor and Gordon (1987), Bloom (1972), Martin (1976), Berkhout and Berg (1994), Portelli (1993), Christie (1991), Cornbleth (1984) and Gordon (1982).

After experiencing rapid and unpredictable changes in higher education which were characterised by increasing upheaval, disruptions and conflicts, the psychologist Snyder (1971) defended the notion of the hidden curriculum. In an attempt to define the hidden curriculum, he contrasted the expectations of students with the expectations stated by teachers. Snyder (1971:6) argues that three-hour exams, a ten-page paper, a reading list of four books, etc., become the task to be mastered for the professor's approval. Such tasks then lead students to a set of tactics or manoeuvres.

According to Snyder, students view the expectations of teachers in terms of courses which are regarded as mere hurdles placed by teachers and which demand the students to learn the style, form and tactics of jumping in order to earn the approval of teachers.

Snyder attributes the hidden curriculum to poor communication between teachers and students which makes the students unwilling to discuss their problems with the teacher. Due to the mistrust between teachers and students, most of the problems are often shared with roommates rather than with teachers. He accused the school of playing a duplicitous game because often it tends to work against what it claims to be its ideal goals and objectives. Snyder (1971:18) asserts that:

> "Professors and students, presumably, are interested in learning, growth and certain intellectual excitement. But instead they find themselves unexpectedly trapped by grades, competition for success and rewards..."

Snyder further explains the hidden curriculum in terms of a network of school rules and regulations which govern the students' social conduct and which make institutions to function in a parental role. He stresses the inter-relatedness of the formal curriculum and the hidden

curriculum. Snyder (1971:6) argues:

> "If one treats the two curricula as separate, with little or no influence on each other, ... a very simple, trivial model of education may emerge."

In an attempt to develop the concept *hidden curriculum*, Lynch (1989) focussed on the reproduction theories of the functionalists and the Neo-Marxists who interpreted the hidden curriculum in terms of the social complexity of classroom activities, structural relationships between school and other institutions, the school as maintenance subsystem of society and the structural correspondence between the social relations of school life and that of production. She interprets the concept *hidden curriculum* in terms of the mediation of the universalistic and particularistic dimensions of schools. Lynch (1989:30) argues:

> "Certain aspects of school organisation and practice are primarily universalistic while others take particularistic forms. The mediators of educational services ... play a key role in determining the particularistic universalistic balance in a given area."

Christie (1991:138) defines the hidden curriculum in terms of authority, rules, discipline, friendship, individual working habits, etc. as she argues:

> "These other things which aren't written down in any syllabus document are called the hidden curriculum. These are the less obvious aspects of what we learn at school."

The above-mentioned definition of the hidden curriculum links up with Berkhout and Bergh's (1997:50) definition:

> "... the socialisation effects that do not necessarily form part of the explicit or planned purpose of the school or of teaching."

While acknowledging the various expressions used by different educationists in defining the hidden curriculum, Berkhout and Bergh attribute that to the different points of departure which result in various interpretations and descriptions. They discuss the hidden curriculum by focussing on the school timetable and public discourse. Berkhout and Bergh (1994:49) assert that:

> "... without a critical interpretation of the hidden curriculum, policy proposals and changes which are currently under discussion cannot contribute to the optimalisation of human potential and national development."

In an attempt to define the hidden curriculum, Gordon (1982) identified three common ways of explaining and characterising it. He called the first approach the outcomes definition as it defines the hidden curriculum in terms of non-academic learning, viz. attitudes, values, dispositions and social skills. As the second definition focuses on the physical and social environment of the school, he named it the environmental definition. The third approach focuses on the unconscious, unplanned influence of the school on the learners, giving rise to the term *latent influence*. In contrasting the three definitions, he proposed a criterion which he called the pervasiveness test. Gordon (1982:190) maintains:

> "Any definition of the hidden curriculum ... should in fact differentiate between the two curricula on the basis of consistency and pervasiveness."

According to the pervasiveness test, the hidden curriculum is likely to be more effective than the formal curriculum because it is more pervasive and consistent. According to Gordon (1982:190) the main weakness of the outcomes definition is that it gives no good reason for supposing that the teaching of skills, norms, values and attitudes is more consistent than the teaching of academic matters. Although the environmental definition tries to give reasons for supposing that the content of the hidden curriculum is more consistent and more pervasive than that of the formal curriculum, it does not effectively separate the pervasive and consistent influences from the limited and fleeting ones. Gordon argues that the latent influence definition clearly differentiates between the two curricula on the basis of consistency and pervasiveness and further suggests that as the hidden curriculum is transmitted unconsciously, its decoding is likely to be resisted. Gordon (1982:192) argues:

> "... the school's hidden curriculum is made up of the potential learning outcomes that derive from two different sources: (1) the secondary consequences of the school staff's action; (2) the school's physical environment."

He asserts that during actual teaching the teacher is aware of the primary consequences of his teaching, hence schools and their personnel can be held responsible for only some of the consequences.

In contrasting the hidden curriculum with the formal curriculum, Bloom (1972:343) defined the hidden curriculum in terms of the redundancy principle. Without any claim that the redundancy principle alone provides an adequate explanation of the learning of the hidden curriculum, Bloom attributed the easy learning of the hidden curricula to the high frequency and redundancy of the material learnt. Bloom (1972:343) argues:

> "The latent curriculum is in many respects likely to be more effective than the manifest curriculum. The lessons it teaches are long remembered because it is so pervasive and consistent over the many years in which our students attend school. Its lessons are experienced daily and learned firmly."

As learners experience the daily lessons of the hidden curriculum, they are unaware of having been taught or having learnt. Bloom argues that there is a very high possibility of the hidden curriculum thriving better than the formal curriculum.

Commenting on the redundancy principle, Assor and Gordon (1987:331) argue that it is inadequate to explain the learning of the hidden curriculum because it ignores two factors which often modify or even cancel the effects of redundancy on learning, viz. the internal cognitive structures and the organizational capacities of the learner and the reward value of the material learnt. They call for a revision of a one-factor theory, viz. the redundancy principle so that it could include the above-mentioned two additional factors. According to them, an exclusive emphasis on the redundancy theory leads to an overestimation of the massive impact of the hidden curriculum and an undifferentiated view of its contents. In what they regarded to be a more cautious view of the impact of the hidden curriculum they suggest a distinction between two types of hidden curriculum, viz. a hot curriculum which includes items with high hedonic relevance and a cold curriculum which includes items with low hedonic relevance. Assor and Gordon (1987:337) argue that:

> "The learning of the hot curriculum is largely based on the reward principle, whereas the learning of the cold curriculum is based mainly on the redundancy principle."

While acknowledging the broad range of definitions of the concept *hidden curriculum*, Sambell and McDowell define it in terms of the macro-level and the micro-level. Sambell and McDowell (1998:392) argue:

> "At the macro-level, social theorists describe a hidden curriculum largely in terms of its detrimental effects on the ideals of liberal educational philosophy and the process of schooling as a coercive societal mechanism. At a micro-level ... [it] is expressed in terms of the distinction between what is meant to happen ... and what teachers and learners actually do and experience..."

At micro-level, Sambell and McDowell define the hidden curriculum through contrasting the officially stated curriculum and the *de facto* curriculum.

In contrasting the hidden curriculum and what she termed the "curriculum proper" Martin (1976:137) argues:

> "A hidden curriculum consists of some of the outcomes or by-products of schools or of no-school settings, particularly those states which are learned yet are not openly intended."

Martin contrasts the hidden curriculum with the formal curriculum in terms of what is openly intended for learners and what learners learn, although not openly intended. She argues that the hidden curriculum is always and everywhere tied to learning and that there is no special subject matter which always and everywhere characterizes it as not limited to either one sort of object or one sort of state.

In her amended definition of the hidden curriculum, Martin (1976:144) argues:

> "A hidden curriculum consists of those learning states of a setting which are either unintended or intended but not openly acknowledged to the learners in the setting unless the learners are aware of them."

While her first definition characterizes the hidden curriculum in terms of unintended learning states, her amended definition refers to either unintended or intended learning states that are not openly acknowledged. She distinguishes between unconscious influences from the student's viewpoint and from the teacher's viewpoint and further suggests that the hidden curriculum can only occur provided the students are unaware of the influence. Until learning states are acknowledged or the learners are aware of them, they remain hidden and are regarded as a hidden curriculum, though the teachers may be aware of them.

In contrasting the hidden curriculum and the formal curriculum, Casey and Tucker define the hidden curriculum in terms of the ability to acquire problem-solving skills. Casey and Tucker (1994:4) assert that:

> "It consists of the knowledge and skills that students acquire, in subtle and indirect ways, from sources other than the actual lessons prepared by the teacher. It has a major impact on the formation of a student's role as a learner."

In order to create lifelong learners, Casey and Tucker argue that learners should be made aware that they have to handle their own problems by becoming effective, creative problem-solvers.

Portelli (1993:344) identifies four major meanings of the hidden curriculum in the curriculum discourse, viz. the hidden curriculum as the unofficial expectations, or implicit but expected messages; the hidden curriculum as unintended learning outcomes or messages, the hidden curriculum as implicit messages arising from the structure of schooling; and the hidden curriculum as created by the students. He argues that most of the definitions of the hidden curriculum link up with one of the above-mentioned four meanings as they tend to overemphasise certain aspects and give interpretations thereof.

While it is generally acknowledged that functionalist theories and reproduction theories serve as the foundation for analysing and interpreting the concept *hidden curriculum* in this study, an analysis of this concept has revealed some diverse definitions. This diversity is due to some profound changes in the role of the school in various societies throughout the centuries and the various points of departure of educationists.

2.4 THE SCHOOL LEAVING EXAMINATION

In this dissertation the school leaving examination refers to the external end of secondary school examination or the secondary school completion examination. Being one of the public examinations, it is related to the concepts *evaluation, testing* or *assessment*. While the primary purposes of most classroom-level assessments, tests or evaluations are diagnostic and formative, the school leaving examination is summative in its intent. Taylor (1999:186) asserts that:

> "The primary function ... is to assess the capabilities of individual students for the purposes of certification and selection into the job market or more advanced educational programmes."

The school leaving examination, being a public examination, is written by learners at the end of the senior secondary phase. Although countries differ on how important the school leaving examination results are for a candidate, the community or the country itself, most of the countries rely on the school leaving examination results for multi-purpose functions.

The school leaving examination in South Africa is commonly known as the matriculation examination. It is similar to the Japan school leaving examination, viz. the Joint First Stage Achievement Test (JFSAT), the French Baccalaureat examination, the Abitur examination of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Attestat Zrelosti of Russia, etc. (Republic of South Africa 1994). The school leaving examination results of various countries have different implications for each country and their effect on the students, school and the nation differ markedly. Eckstein and Noah (1993:75) assert that:

> "Nations may thus be arranged on a scale ranging from those where the external examination systems are highly determining to those that are much more open ... They may also be arranged according to those where the impending examinations dominate secondary school practices and the lives of students, and those where they are less central."

In some countries the school leaving examinations exert relatively little control over the lives of students, the school activities and the entire country while in other countries they influence and direct almost all the school activities and the country at large. In the following paragraphs various functions of the school leaving examination, intended and unintended, shall be discussed against the background of the selected countries.

2.4.1 Functions of the school leaving examination

The school leaving examination can be better explained and understood if it is viewed against the background of its functions in the education system. The following selected functions will assist

to give a clear and comprehensive view of the school leaving examination.

2.4.1.1 Allocating scarce places in post-secondary education

In most countries, the results of the school leaving examination are used to allocate scarce places in post-secondary institutions. The results are therefore used to control access to institutions of higher learning and as a result the examinations tend to be very competitive.

In most countries, including South Africa, the demand for places in post-secondary education far exceeds the supply. The results of the school leaving examinations are generally accepted as a device of allocating scarce places. The Northern Province Education, Arts, Culture and Sport (2000:2) asserts:

> "... the grade 12 examination results have become a yardstick for measuring the credibility of our education system ... are also used as a yardstick to gauge the quality of our learners and the capability to further their studies at tertiary institutions."

The opportunities for higher education expanded very slowly while the number of secondary school graduates increased rapidly. Therefore, the school leaving examination could no longer be the only device of allocating scarce places in higher education. In addition to the school leaving examination, most institutions of higher education introduced other forms of tests as admission selection devices. This resulted in the school leaving examination being a necessity but not a condition for admission. Japan is one of the countries which places extraordinary emphasis on the school leaving examination as a device of regulating admission to post-secondary education. Commenting on the admission policy in Japan's post-secondary education, Noah and Eckstein (1992:6-7) argue:

> "In 12th grade, at the end of upper secondary school, comes the second stage of the selection process, the university entrance examination. Performance in the examination is once again absolutely critical to a young person's subsequent chances for education..."

In preparing pupils for the fiercely competitive set of school leaving examinations at the end of lower secondary school, examinations are taken in order to regulate admission to upper secondary

schools of high prestige. In Japan examinations dominate and control the lives and school activities of pupils. As universities and other institutions of higher education are classified by society according to their prestige and reputation, pupils compete for admission to highly prestigious national public institutions like universities. Eckstein and Noah (1993:73) argue:

> "Good results mean entry to a top national university, where fees are low, quality of staff, facilities and education are superior, prestige is high, and career opportunities are outstanding."

In order to be admitted to the national public university in Japan, pupils are expected to write two examinations, viz. the Joint First Stage Achievement Test (JFSAT) and the common test. The JFSAT is a nationwide, centrally administered examination and the common test was initially introduced and set by public universities and it was later adopted by the Ministry of Education who instituted a new Common Test in 1990. The school leaving examination, viz. the JFSAT, is a necessity but not sufficient condition for university admission. Noah and Eckstein (1992:7) remark that these examinations are very highly competitive. In a typical year there are four candidates for each public university place.

The high competitiveness of examinations is promoted by the Japanese culture which is characterized by status and hierarchical consciousness and academic politics. Pupils who fail to get admission to national public universities, local public universities or private universities as well as pupils who would like to improve the quality of the school leaving examination results, often repeat the school leaving examination in the private cram schools.

2.4.1.2 Measuring and improving the effectiveness of teachers and the school

The school leaving examination results are usually accepted by parents, the government, pupils and other stake-holders as the less complicated and clear indicators of school quality and the effectiveness of teachers. Although the examination is written by pupils, it is usually used by the public to evaluate the school and the quality of the teachers. This is clearly indicated by Noah and Eckstein (1992:6):

> "Examination results can be used to evaluate (with greater or lesser validity) the quality of a teacher or a school."

The success or failure of pupils in the school leaving examination is usually associated with the success or failure of the teachers and the school as a whole. Lynch (1989:32) asserts that:

> "Teachers (especially in second level) must be seen to get results if they are to have professional credibility - the most visible results are the grade levels attained in public examinations."

The school leaving examination results are used in most countries by parents and the government to establish a preferential scale. In almost all countries, e.g. Japan, parents want their children to be admitted to the right school or school of high prestige. Parents usually view the right school or the prestigious school in terms of the school leaving examination results. The school leaving examination serves as a guide to the allocation of public funds among schools and for promotion of and increments for the teacher depending on the need to do so.

Commenting on the value of the South African school leaving examination results, the Northern Province Education, Arts, Culture and Sport (2000:2) argues:

> "Grade 12 examination results ... enable the public to assess the impact of government initiatives and the investment made in education. They also alert the government in general and the Department in particular to those areas that need improvement. And above all, grade 12 examination results determine the ratio of input and throughputs."

While the results of the school leaving examination measure the quality of the school and teachers, they also help to improve the quality of the school and teachers if used correctly. The results of the school leaving examination can be a good source of motivation for teachers and pupils. Schools, pupils and teachers can compare their achievement with the achievement of other schools.

Tamir (1988:43) argues on the following functions of the school leaving examination with regard to the improvement of the effectiveness of the teachers:

> "[to] motivate teachers in in-service education activities; providing essential feedback; provide a potential framework for rewards for teaching efforts."

The quality of the school, which includes the availability of resources, influences the achievement of pupils which influences the quality of the school.

2.4.1.3 Checking patronage and corruption

The school leaving examination is accepted in most countries as a politically and ethically defensible way of deciding on who should get the job and who should be denied. The examination is usually used by most countries as a device of checking nepotism and open corruption in government service. It is also used as a device to assist employers in the non-governmental sector in hiring potential employees.

During the nineteenth century, examinations were used by the British government to eliminate the pervasive practices of jobbery and patronage which were rife in the government service. In the United States examinations were used to place a check on politicians who favoured their supporters with government jobs. In the People's Republic of China the school leaving examination was used to select and appoint people in high public office. The political correctness and political activism certificates which were later used to replace the school leaving examination as a device of checking patronage and corruption failed to yield the expected results and the Chinese government was forced to backtrack by re-introducing the school leaving examination (Noah & Eckstein 1992:15).

2.4.1.4 Raising educational standards, levels of knowledge and skills

The school leaving examination helps in raising educational standards, levels of knowledge and skills. It helps to raise the level of school achievement. The school leaving examination, being a criterion of curriculum, reflects the strong points and the weak points of the curriculum and provides specific guidelines for teaching. It ascertains the coverage of the intended curriculum by both pupils and teachers.

Tamir (1988:43) stresses the following functions of the school leaving examination:

> "Communicating desired emphasis of different education aims. Defining the knowledge and skills which may be expected from matriculants ... ascertaining that

certain instructional standards are maintained ... Providing a means for control and accountability regarding instruction and the achievement of educational aims .... :Providing essential feedback."

The school leaving certificate serves as a secondary school completion credential or completion of a course of study, viz. the upper secondary level of schooling and it ensures that its bearer possesses certain knowledge and skills.

2.4.1.5 Limiting curricular differentiation

The school leaving examination serves as a major device for limiting curricular diversity in various countries, particularly in highly decentralised school systems in order to control the curriculum. Countries which have instituted the decentralised school system usually face the problem of having very little control over the school curriculum and school activities. Such countries usually use the school leaving examination to control the school and the curriculum.

Since the school leaving examination demands clear-set objectives in the form of subject syllabi in both centralized and decentralized school systems, both teachers and pupils are compelled to work towards the examination, albeit directly or indirectly.

2.4.2 The unintended effects of the school leaving examination

The importance of the school leaving examination in various countries cannot be refuted nor doubted. The school leaving examinations are used in various countries as the levers of change, improvement and the development of the education system and the country at large. While acknowledging the intended effects of the school leaving examination, it is equally important to acknowledge its unintended effects.

Since the school leaving examinations exert a powerful influence on school activities, including the curriculum, the extent of such influence differs from one country to another as examination systems fulfil their functions differently. The school leaving examinations need to be controlled lest they destroy their good motives. Noah and Eckstein (1992:6) comment:

> "In consequence, examination requirements can lead to undue concentration on the material to be examined, to the exclusion of other elements in the school curriculum."

This is usually found in countries where the pressure exerted by the school leaving examination is extraordinarily high. In such countries examinations dominate and control pupils' lives, teachers' lives, and all the school activities to the extent that anything which is not examined is less valued and less important. Eckstein and Noah (1993:23) further argue:

> "Indeed, examined subjects can drive unexamined subjects out of the school timetable entirely. Above all, examinations can serve as a way of legitimizing knowledge, signalling the acceptance of a new school subject."

In his paper, *Making the best use of matriculation examination*, Tamir (1988:44) mentions the following unintended effects of the school leaving examination:

> "Discouraging school-based curriculum development, forcing specific and rigid subject matter content, decreasing in-depth learning in favour of superficial covering of material."

Although the school leaving examination aims at being the fairest device of rewarding the hardworking pupils, it can easily be manipulated by those families that can afford the best schools, the best tutors and the best examination aids. This ultimately results in high quality institutions being attended mainly by pupils from wealthier families while pupils from the poor families mainly attend institutions of poor quality.

The school leaving examination, if not well controlled, can hamper authentic teaching and learning. The creativity of pupils and teachers may be discouraged in favour of the memorization of facts and events. Teachers may be tempted to teach the examination rather than the syllabi. Both teachers and pupils may collaborate to cheat in order to achieve good examination results.

2.4.3 The practical importance of the school leaving examination

Despite severe criticism levelled against the school leaving examinations, their primary functions

or motives have proved their worth over time to the extent that even today most countries find no substitute for them. The importance of school leaving examinations has been clearly demonstrated by the People's Republic of China. During the cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976), China abandoned its tradition of relying on the school leaving examinations for appointing people to high office and the allocation of scarce places in higher education. Certificates of political activism and political correctness replaced the school leaving examination. Noah and Eckstein (1992:15) assert that:

> "... acceptance into higher education was determined largely by class background, work experience, [and] recommendations concerning political reliability. Academic examinations were rejected both as symbol of traditional oppression and a powerful means of maintaining social differentiation."

Due to problems in the labour market, educational deficiencies, the poor standard quality of teachers and poor standards of personnel in all sectors, ideological consideration as a device for selection and replacement was abandoned and replaced by the reintroduction of the school leaving examinations.

The People's Republic of China is not the only country which abandoned the school leaving examination, although it serves as a good example. Noah and Eckstein (1992:5,6) argue:

> "From time to time, nations have tried to abandon examinations at the end of secondary school, but have then been forced to backtrack."

The Soviet Union also abandoned the school leaving examination in 1918. Just like in China, admission to higher education and the appointment of people in government service were determined on the basis of social class origin and political activism. Noah and Eckstein (1992:164) assert that:

> "Soon after the Bolshevik revolution, examinations, school tests, and marks (including examination for university entrance) were all abolished as symbols of Czarist elitism and discrimination."

By the end of the 1920s the government was already under severe attack for having abandoned

examinations. The school leaving examinations were reintroduced by the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1932. Since then the school leaving examination is a well-entrenched feature of the Soviet Union education system.

2.4.4 The relationship between the formal curriculum, the hidden curriculum and the school leaving examination

Though the concepts *formal curriculum, hidden curriculum* and the *school leaving examination* are separately defined and interpreted by the researcher, their practical inter-relatedness cannot be ignored. The inter-relatedness of the hidden curriculum and the formal curriculum is clearly argued by Wren (1999:594):

> "... usually, when educators refer to school curriculum, they have explicit, consciously planned course objectives in mind. In contrast to this didactic curriculum, students experience an unwritten curriculum characterized by informality and lack of conscious planning."

Though schools are structured and organised to cater for the formal curriculum, they end up catering for many other things which cannot be accounted for in terms of the formal curriculum alone. Learners go to school to learn various subjects but end up learning many other things which cannot be explained in terms of subjects alone. Though the school leaving examination intends to evaluate the mastery of the formal curriculum, it ends up evaluating the mastery of both the formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum. This indicates that the mastery of both curricula is needed for learner improvement performance. Bloom (1972:344) asserts that:

> "Our innocence has been in giving our attention solely to the manifest curriculum while we overlooked the latent one."

2.5 CONCLUSION

The South African school leaving examination affirms the functionalist theories and the reproductive theories with regard to its functions. As the school leaving examination allocates scarce places in post-secondary education, it basically acts as a sifting device for post-secondary educational institutions, social classes and economic institutions like factories. While the school

leaving examination "processes" knowledge, it also "processes" people according to societal classes.

The school leaving examination does not only require learners to reproduce knowledge but also to produce knowledge. Through its meritocratic ranking and evaluation, the school leaving examination not only allocates places but also denies others some opportunities. As the school leaving examination measures the effectiveness of teachers, learners and the school as a whole, it can result in the persual of grades, ranks, selection and certification rather than learning.

While acknowledging the diverse criticisms and the ongoing debate based on the value of the school leaving examinations in South Africa and many other countries, it provides an important national criterion against which the performance of the education system as a whole can be measured.