



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF MULTI- GRADE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

MASEGANKANE HILDA SHAYI



**EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF MULTI-GRADE
PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

by

Masegankane Hilda Shayi

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree in

Magister Educationis

(Educational Psychology)

Faculty of Education

University of Pretoria

South Africa

Supervisor: Professor Carien Lubbe-De Beer

21 SEPTEMBER 2015



DECLARATION

I, MASEGANKANE HILDA SHAYI (Student Number 04370023) declare that “Educators' perceptions and experiences of multi-grade primary schools” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....

SIGNATURE (M. H. Shayi)

.....

DATE



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Almighty God, for the breathe He give me every day of my life, for having created and designed the uniqueness in me. Thank You God for planting the idea of this study in my mind, making me develop an interest in this topic, giving me the energy, courage, and determination to make this study a success against all odds.

To my supervisor, Professor Carien Lubbe-De Beer I will always appreciate your unwavering support, guidance, feedback and your wonderful supervision. Your knowledge, experience, expertise, and insightful comments made this study a success. May God keep on empowering you to guide and supervise new students under your supervision.

To my family, my husband Mmapsa and my two children Ditiro and Dipono, thank you for being the source of strength in my life. I will always appreciate the ideas, support, challenges, and experiences we share together. I know I can always count on you. Thank you for allowing me to take the time to share with you to devote it to my studies.

To the rest of my family, my brothers, sisters, cousins and in-laws thank you for being there for me at the time when I needed you most. I could not have done this without you. Boreadi, Kamogelo, Thato, Humphrey, Matron, Jerry, Vusi, Kagiso, Mpho and Ngwato I am grateful for all the technical and technological assistance you gave me.

Special thanks to the teachers and learners who took part in my research. I could not have done this without your willing participation in my study. You spared your time, shared your experiences, your fears and thoughts with me. Through your efforts, I was able to understand and emotionally feel what is experienced in multi-grade primary schools.

I cannot forget to thank all the UP staff, the librarians the IT technicians and support staff for their assistance, support, and words of motivation during my frustrations with different things. To my co-researchers, Eddy Baloyi, Nhlanhla Mpofu, Sophy Kodisang, Jeaneth Ramollo and Mr Maluleka you gave me advice, comfort and words of encouragement. We also shared our fears and challenges together.



To my colleagues at all the schools I worked with, thank you for sharing social and current issues with me. In particular Shirley, Shylet, Nape, Moroane and Matladi you always motivated, supported and encouraged me not to lose hope. Your continuous friendship, openness, and interest in education greatly influenced my studies in many ways. I will always appreciate your ideas and all the good years we shared together.



I dedicate this study to: My two lovely children my son Mapiti Ditiro and my daughter Magari Dipono, my husband Leshoene Joseph. I will forever cherish the love, support, assistance, and encouragement you provided me. You were always there when I needed you most. You gave me the time and space to focus on my studies.

It is also dedicated to my parents, my mother Hunadi, my brothers and sisters, my late father Phogole and my late mother-in-law Hlapogadi. You have always been the source of strength in my life and throughout my studies. I would not have been where I am without your inspiring words. “Ke nnete ge bare mmala wa kgomo o taga namaneng.”



DECLARATION: LANGUAGE EDITOR



www.inteligi.co.za
info@inteligi.co.za
084 495 8984
Pretoria East

2015/08/31

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EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

This letters serves to confirm that Ms Shayi's mini dissertation, which was written in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Educational Psychology, had been proofread and edited by myself.

This was done as part of the process of finalisation for purposes of final submission to the University of Pretoria.

Yours Sincerely

Ms C.E. van Zyl

Freelance Language Practitioner and Research Assistant

www.inteligi.co.za



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Educators' perceptions and experiences of multi-grade primary schools
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Educational Psychology
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ABSTRACT

The allocation of human and financial resources to various schools in South Africa depends on the number of learners enrolled in a particular year. Schools with less learner enrolment are more likely allocated few educators. The grades in such schools are often combined and the schools become multi-graded. Research reveals that multi-grade schools commonly occur in remote, rural areas. The research study is aimed at exploring the experiences of educators working in primary multi-grade schools.

Both local and global literature indicates that educators working in multi-grade schools are with a lot of different challenges. For this study, a qualitative methodology and case study research design were used. Two primary schools were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Five educators participated in the research. The data was collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data was analysed inductively using *in vivo* coding.

The study revealed that educators in primary multi-grade schools encountered challenges with regard to managing the curriculum, managing the time, administration of their work, attending to the needs of the learners and shortage of resources. In addition, the study showed that the educators and the communities where the schools are situated lack support from the government and the surrounding businesses.

In order for multi-grade primary schools to be effective and productive there must be more support provided to them so that the neighbouring secondary schools may have lower levels of dropouts and good matric results. Lack of support for multi-grade primary schools has a negative impact on matric results because learners miss a lot of work that form the basis of matric curriculum. The ignoring of issues such as development of the communities and service delivery also affect the schools negatively.

KEY WORDS: Multi-grade classes; multi-grade teaching; multi-grade schools; teacher-learner ratio; learner-teacher support material



GLOSSARY

AIDSESEP/ISPL	Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest/ Instituto Superior Pedagogico de Loreto
ANA	Annual National Assessment
CA's	Curriculum Advisors
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
CASS	Continuous Assessment
CSI	Community Service Investment
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EEA	Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998
EFA	Education for All
EMS	Economic and Management Sciences
FAL	First Additional Language
HRE	Human Rights Education
Inter-Sen	Intermediate and Senior Phase
IMPACT	Instructional Management by Parents, Community, and Teachers
JPTD	Junior Primary Teachers Diploma
LTSM	Learners and Teacher Support Materials
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MGS	Multi-grade Schools
MGC's	Multi-grade Classes
MMTTC	Malcolm Moffat Teacher Training College
NCERT	National Council of Research and training
NEPA	National Education Policy Act
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NS	Natural Sciences
NSNP	National Schools Nutrition Programme
PTC	Primary Teachers Certificate
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio



P1 School	School with learner enrolment above the required minimum but less than 80
P2 School	School with learner enrolment of 80-159 (including schools with less than 80 learners but with more than one teacher)
P3 School	School with learner enrolment of 160-719
PSEDP	Plantation Sector Education Development Programme
RDP	Plantation Sector Education Development Programme
R&R	Redeployment and Rationalisation
SASA	South African Schools Act
SA-SAMS	South African School Administration Management System
SGB	School Governing Body



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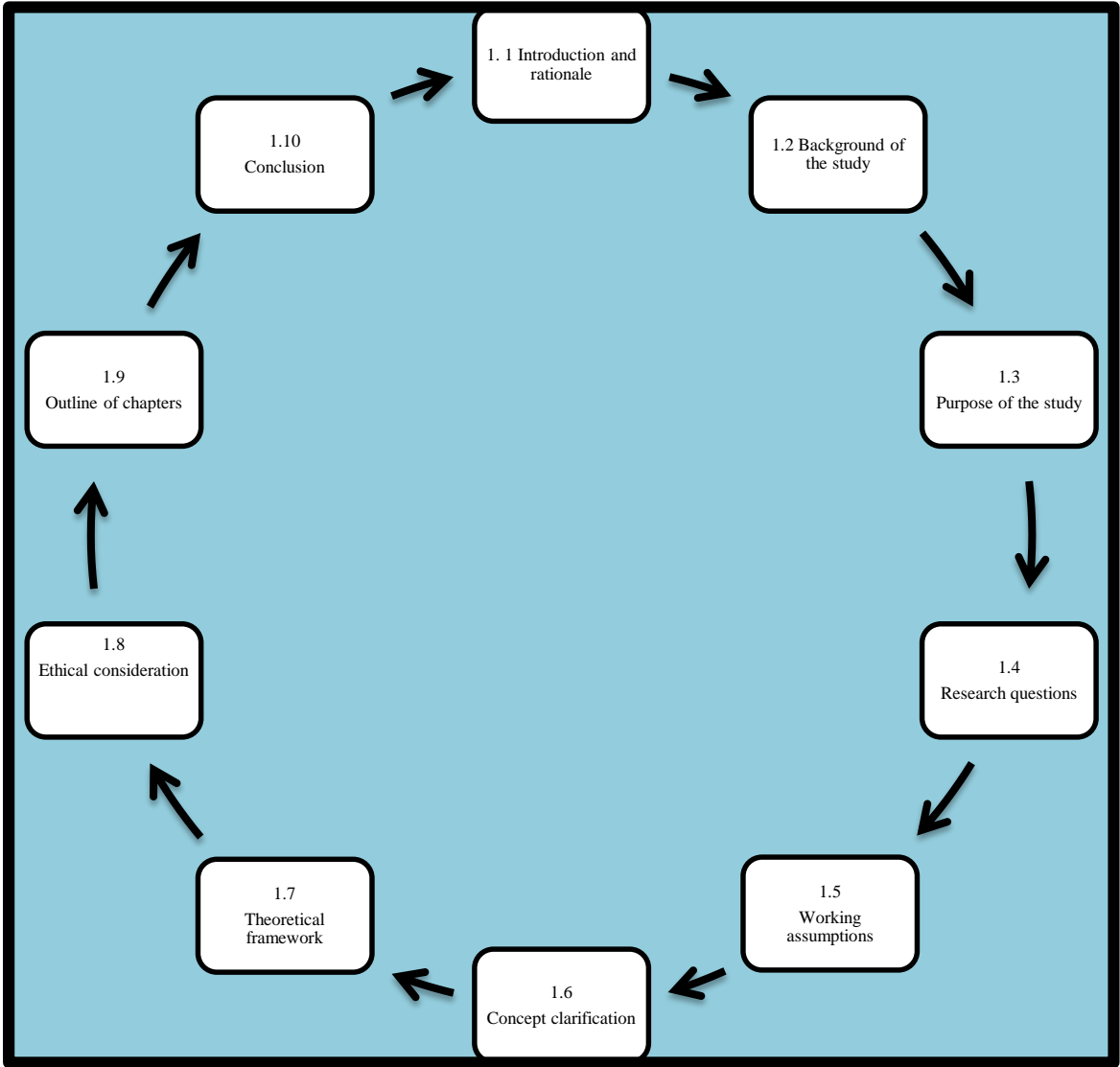
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION





CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

In the new South Africa, since 1994, the allocation of human and financial resources to different schools has been determined by considering the number of learners enrolled in a particular year. Schools with low learner enrolment are generally allocated fewer educators. In these cases, the grades are often combined, and the schools often become multi-graded. Subsequently, educators who work in such schools are often faced with various challenges. The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of educators working in primary multi-grade schools.

In this study, a qualitative approach embedded in a case study design was used to gather information from two selected primary multi-grade schools. The participants consisted of five educators who were selected through purposeful and snowball sampling, since in one of the participating schools there was a vacancy for an ad hoc post. Data was collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis. In this chapter, the background to the study, the purpose of the study, the research questions, working assumptions, concept clarification, theoretical framework, as well as ethical considerations will be presented.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The introduction of democracy in South Africa has brought about many changes. These changes included, amongst others, the restructuring, and reform of education that gave rise to a new education system (Lubisi and Murphy, 2010). Of vital importance is the changing role and responsibilities of provinces and educators in the new democratic system as prescribed by the Constitution, the South African Schools Act (SASA), and the National Education Policy Act (NEPA).

In support of the above, Lemon (1999, p. 96) mentioned that “[p]rovincial governments bear primary responsibility for school education, and have a crucial role in shaping the new system”. In addition to the number and extent of changes in the education system



of South Africa, particularly with regard to curriculum change, there is mounting pressure on educators as practitioners of education to implement these changes.

Other changes include the creation of a new curriculum and decentralisation of duties and responsibilities among the national, provincial and local government (Sayed, 1999; Starr & White, 2008) as well as new legislation and policies (Zimmerman, 2006). Lemon (1999, p.98) highlights that “Decentralisation is reflected in two key aspects of education policy since 1994, the devolution of power from the centre to the nine provinces in terms of the new constitution and the devolution of powers to individual schools”. Decentralisation of duties and responsibilities, which is the devolution of power in a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down approach was introduced by the government with the aim of empowering people at regional and local levels for proper service delivery, stability and efficiency (Christie, 2006; Starr & White, 2008; Sayed, 1999).

However, this aim did not transpire, since some studies indicate that rural communities are highly disadvantaged (Jordaan & Joubert, 2008) and imbalances between rural and urban communities continue to exist (Lemon, 1999). Typically, the schools in urban areas tend to become densely populated and are characterised by a higher enrolment of learners compared to the schools found in smaller, rural communities (Zimmerman, 2006). Schools in remote rural areas are marginalised, under-resourced and often become multi-grade schools (Muthayan, 1999; Lubisi & Murphy, 2002).

The existence of multi-grade schools in developed and developing countries respectively varies. In developed countries, multi-grade schools occur as a pedagogical choice and not as a necessity (Aksoy, 2008, p. 218) whereas in developing countries multi-grade schools occur because of circumstances and not because of choice (Blum and Diwan, 2007, p. 2). These circumstances may include having to deal with issues of educator absenteeism and budget constraints (Joubert, 2006), low population density areas in which schools are scattered and inaccessible (Beukes, 2006) and schools of low enrolment and shortage of educators (Blum & Diwan, 2007).

Research indicates that governments have a tendency to direct their focus on “improving conventional schools” (Joubert, 2007, p. 1). However, governments that



tend to allocate the responsibility to local communities usually ignore the development of multi-grade schools. In support of this, Birch and Lally (1995, p.11) both state that “One positive future direction has been the attempt in several countries to engage the local community such that it provides the facilities while the centre provides the other infrastructure of multi-grade teaching. As important as it is to involve the local community in this way, the outcome will always be one in which the facilities can reflect the wealth of such communities.”

The researcher is of the view that, for multi-grade schools to succeed and be effective, more support from all stakeholders is essential. According to Juvane (2007), low literacy levels have a negative impact on development in rural areas. Consequently, learner enrolment in schools of communities with poor or no services is always lower, and multi-grade teaching prevails frequently (Starr & White, 2008).

The focus of this study is therefore on multi-grade schools (MGS), as there appears to be an existence of limited research regarding this phenomenon – especially in connection with the provision of support to improve the quality of teaching. The researcher’s interest in this topic started when she was transferred to a primary multi-grade school. Upon arrival at the school, it was realized that some of the grades were combined. Colleagues at the school were asked how they manage to teach the contents of different subjects to different grades of learners with different developmental levels, to which they offered different answers. During educator workshops and meetings, it was soon noted that in that particular geographical area, there were many multi-grade schools. Subsequently, the researcher decided to embark on this study.

According to Juvane (2007), teaching in multi-grade classrooms can be difficult and often result in poor performance of the learners. Studies indicate that educators in multi-grade schools deal with challenges of planning, organising, and managing the curriculum (Beneviste & McEwan, 2000; Taole & Mncube, 2012). One can argue that, if educators in multi-grade schools receive no formal training, they would likely also not be able to provide effective, high quality teaching. Proper training is vital to enable educators to adapt their skills and competencies in teaching multi-grade classes.



1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was therefore to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of educators in their school situations in order to understand how they dealt with the various aspects underlying multi-grade schools. In this research study the experiences and perceptions of educators in multi-grade schools were explored and described. The study gave insight into the challenges brought about by multi-grade teaching.

Through this study, educators and principals shared their perceptions and experiences from managerial and administrative perspectives, both inside and outside the classroom situation. The study enabled educators to give their own opinions and suggestions regarding intervention strategies in order to improve the quality of teaching in multi-grade schools.

The study might assist the government to support educators teaching in multi-grade schools and to provide relevant educational programmes directed towards multi-grade educators. It may also raise awareness amongst government officials such as policy makers, planners, and government support staff on the nature and extent of needs required by educators in multi-grading schools.

This research study might contribute towards the development of theory or policy change. In addition, this study has the potential of adding to the current scope of knowledge and can be used as a source of reference in future studies. It is hoped that at a micro-level (school), the educators of the schools would be able to share their experiences, which will benefit them and the community. On macro-level, the study might create an awareness of the importance of an educational programme for the training of multi-grade educators.



1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research study was based on one primary research question and five secondary research questions.

1.4.1 Primary research question

What are the perceptions and experiences of educators teaching in multi-grade schools?

1.4.2 Secondary research questions

- i. What are the roles and responsibilities of educators teaching in multi-grade schools?
- ii. How do educators in multi-grade schools perceive their duties as facilitators?
- iii. What form of strategies do educators use and implement during multi-grade teaching in the classroom situation?
- iv. What form of challenges do educators experience, with regard to managerial and administrative work in multi-grade schools?
- v. What are the opinions and suggestions of educators in connection with intervention strategies needed or required by educators and learners in multi-grade schools?

1.5 WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

The research was guided by the following working assumptions:

- ❖ Educators in multi-grade schools have different experiences both negative and positive.
- ❖ Educators in multi-grade schools perceive multi-grade teaching differently.
- ❖ Educators in multi-grade schools have more managerial and administrative work or duties than those in larger schools.
- ❖ Educators in multi-grade schools use and implement different strategies when they facilitate in multi-grade classrooms.
- ❖ Educators in multi-grade schools were pedagogically trained to teach in mono-grade classrooms but not multi-grade classrooms.
- ❖ Multi-grade schools are not getting enough support from the government.



1.6 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

1.6.1 Multi-grade schools

Multi-grade schools are schools in which there is more than one grade taught in one class. In these schools, the grades are combined in one classroom in order to deal with the problem of educator shortage. The combination of grades in multi-grade schools depends on the number of educators available. In a school where there are two or three educators, three to four grades may be combined in one classroom.

1.6.2 Multi-grade teaching (MGT) and Multi-grade classrooms (MGC's)

According to the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), document (Department of Basic Education, 2012) multi-grade teaching refers to the teaching of learners of different grades in the same classroom setting. In such situations, educators teach children of different ages with ability levels of two or more phases, depending on the number of educators available. For instance, in a primary school, if there are two educators available, one will be responsible for teaching the Foundation Phase, while the other will be responsible for teaching the Intermediate and Senior Phase combined.

In a situation where there are three educators in the school, one educator will teach Foundation Phase, while the other will teach Intermediate Phase and the third one will teach the Senior Phase. In addition to these pedagogical tasks, the teachers have to perform their extra-curricular organisational and managerial duties. This usually occurs in small schools in rural areas, or even in farm schools in semi-urban areas.

Multi-grade classrooms are classrooms in which learners of two or more grades or phases are combined and taught together either simultaneously or consecutively, depending on the strategies employed by the educator in that particular class. Multi-grade classrooms are sometimes referred to as co-taught classrooms or combined classrooms. These types of classrooms may be structured temporarily to alleviate the problem of educator absenteeism or permanently due to learner enrolment and educator shortage in the school.



1.6.3 Experiences

An experience is defined as “a conscious event that is lived through or undergone, as opposed to one that is imagined or thought about” (Vandenbos, 2006, p.354). Creswell (2008, p. 639) states that experiences are a person’s subjective encounters as an individual and his/her social interaction with significant others. For the purpose of this study, experiences refer to the different personal experiences of educators in multi-grade schools as individuals and members of a group.

1.6.4 Perceptions

Collins and O'Brien (2011) define perception is explained as when an individual becomes aware of what is in the environment around him or her in relation to himself or herself. Perception refers to how individuals view things on a cognitive level. It is a person’s idea or thought about something. Within the context of this study, perception refers to different ways in which educators in multi-grade schools perceive the situation in which they work.

1.6.5 Educator/Teacher

Hawes and Hawes (1982, p.45) define an educator as a “professional practitioner in the field of education, usually engaged in either teaching or administration.” It is an individual whose job entails the instruction and commanding of subject matter to learners. Someone who can plan, manage and monitor student learning by assisting learners to acquire and master the subject matter in a teaching-learning situation. In the context of this study, a teacher is someone who has been professionally trained to teach, guide, and assist learners to develop holistically on their way towards responsible adulthood.



1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In Creswell (2008, p. 515) a theoretical framework is referred to as a theoretical lens which pertains to “a guiding perspective or ideology that provides a structure for advocating groups or individuals and writing the report”. The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of educators in their school situations by understanding how they dealt with different aspects underlying multi-grade schools.

1.7.1 Systems Theory

The study’s theoretical framework is based on Bronfenbrenner’s Ecosystemic Model of Child Development (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2006) which is an integration of Ecological Theory and Systems Theory. According to the Systems Theory, various levels and groups of people are viewed as interactive systems wherein the functioning of the whole depends on the interaction of all the parts. In the context of this study, multi-grade schools are sub-systems of the Department of Basic Education where different parts interact together. Other parts include the curriculum, educators, learners, parents, managers and administrators as well as policies and legislations. Systems Theory is comprised of eight basic elements (Donald *et al.*, 2006), namely:

- ❖ **Systems and sub-systems interaction:** This occurs when whole systems interact with other systems around them, e.g. the National Department of Basic Education may interact with Provincial Departments of Education through policies, the curriculum and resource allocation.
- ❖ **Patterns of functioning:** In this case, all parts of a system influence the whole system in such a way that when something occurs to one part, it affects all the other parts. The way these parts react form a pattern, e.g. if multi-grade teaching is poorly introduced to educators, it will be poorly implemented, and learner achievement will be poor.
- ❖ **Cycles of cause and effect:** An action in one part of a system causes an effect on another part of a system in a cyclical way, e.g. lack of training for multi-grade educators will affect the way they organise, plan and manage their teaching and learning process.



- ❖ **Goals and values:** Stated and underlying goals and values affect the system and are affected by the whole system and interaction with other systems, e.g. if multi-grade schools have been introduced to achieve the goal of providing quality education for all, lack of support and insufficient resources in these schools will increase negative attitude towards these schools.
- ❖ **Communication patterns:** Communication patterns occur between the system as a whole and outside systems, e.g. educators in multi-grade schools communicate with the learners, parents, educators of other schools and curriculum advisors as well as educational managers at all levels.
- ❖ **Roles within the system:** The way people's roles are defined in a system is vital for the functioning of the whole system, e.g. if government does not provide training to multi-grade educators and government officials fail to visit multi-grade schools for quality assurance, then the challenges encountered by educators will never be known.
- ❖ **Boundaries:** There are clearly defined boundaries between the sub-systems and the whole system. The rigidity and flexibility of the boundaries affect the functioning of the whole system, e.g. each multi-grade school belongs in a particular community, circuit, district, and province. The increase or decrease in learner enrolment in each multi-grade school determines allocation of resources by government; therefore, this will differ from school to school.
- ❖ **Time and development:** Human systems change over time and the occurrence of developmental changes influence the system as a whole, e.g. the changes in the education system brought about changes in policies, the curriculum, and allocation of resources to different schools in various communities.

1.7.2 Bronfenbrenner's model of child development (ecosystemic perspective)

According to Donald *et al.*, (2006), Bronfenbrenner's theory indicates that different social contexts in the system interact in shaping the child's development. According to this theory, the developmental process is made up of four core dimensions, namely: person factors, process factors, contexts, and time. The theory states that "proximal



interactions are interactions that occur in close face-to-face long-term relationships that are vital in shaping a child's development" (Donald *et al.*, 2006).

These sustained social interactions are affected by person factors and social contexts within which they occur. Therefore, person-, process-, and context factors change as time proceeds due to maturation and changes in social contexts (Donald *et al.*, 2006). This theory further states that the process of child development occurs inside five nested systems (Donald *et al.*, 2006, p. 41–42), namely:

- ❖ **Microsystems** - Involved with proximal interactions with other familiar people, e.g. roles, relationships, and patterns of daily activities that shape the holistic development of the child.
- ❖ **Mesosystems** - Made up of microsystems that continuously interact with one another, e.g. a child who lacks support from family may get it from friends, neighbours, and educators.
- ❖ **Exosystems** -These are the systems in which a child has no influence, but which can influence his or her proximal interaction, e.g. the challenges faced by educators in implementing the curriculum influence quality learning for the child.
- ❖ **Macrosystems** -These refer to powerful social and economic structures, e.g. the allocation of human-, physical-, and financial resources to schools by the Department of Basic Education.
- ❖ **Chronosystems** -The influence of developmental time on the interactions between the systems and individual development, e.g. as time changes, relationships, processes, contexts and educator demand and supply also change. The link between the macrosystems, mesosystems and chronosystem is shown in the figure below:

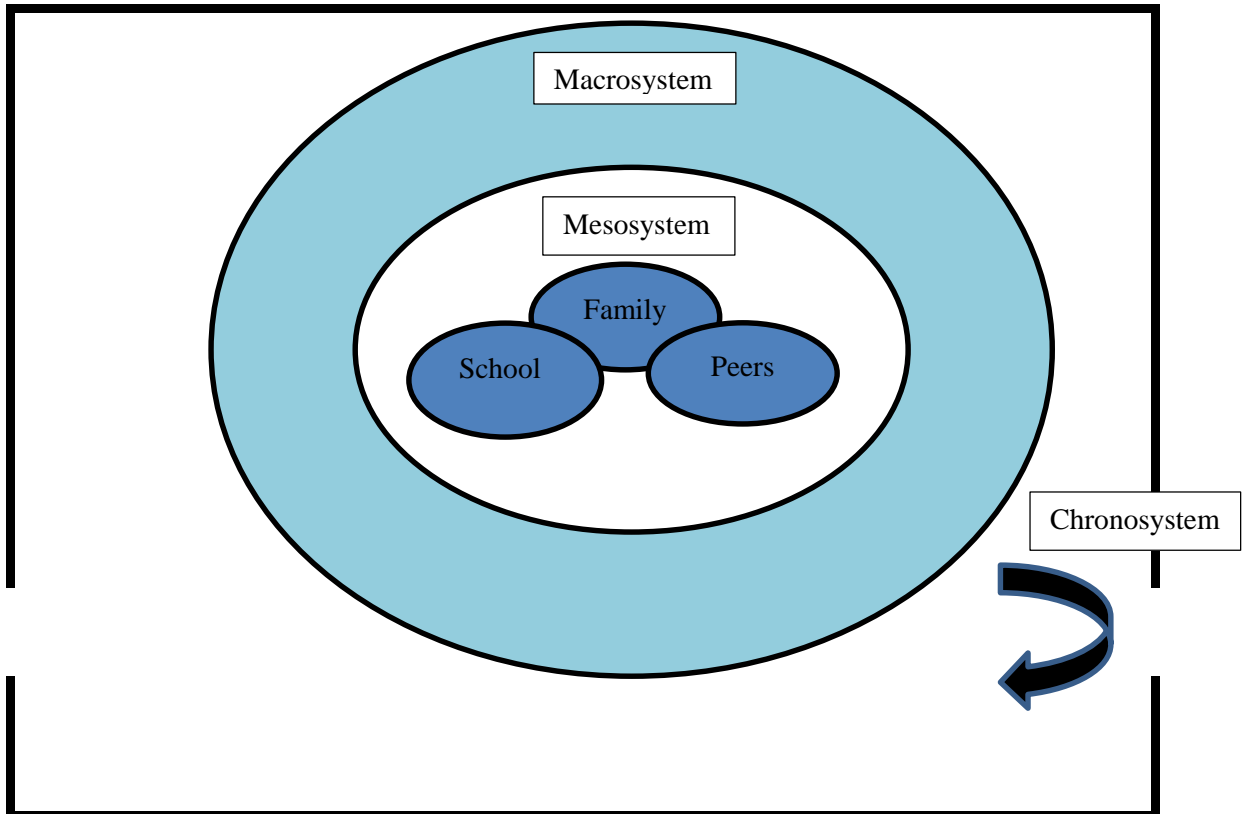


Diagram 1: Relationship between systems of child development

In the above diagram, the mesosystem refers to microsystems that can act together in the holistic development of a child. Within the community, the learner, having limited family support, may get assistance from friends, relatives, neighbours, and educators at school. In addition, the child is also affected by powerful social and economic structures such as service delivery by local municipalities, and policies used by the government to allocate human- and financial resources to schools. The chronosystems pertain to the manner in which changes over time, such as family and community relationships, affect the development of a child negatively or positively.

This theory may be useful in enabling individuals to understand how things might change, develop and be modified; and therefore it can be particularly useful in this study to explore the experiences of educators and how they understand and partake in the phenomenon of multi-grade schools. In the context of this study, the teaching and learning situation is influenced by, for example, the family situation, available resources at home and at school, values regarding achievement and the level of support from the government. This theory can be illustrated by the following figure:

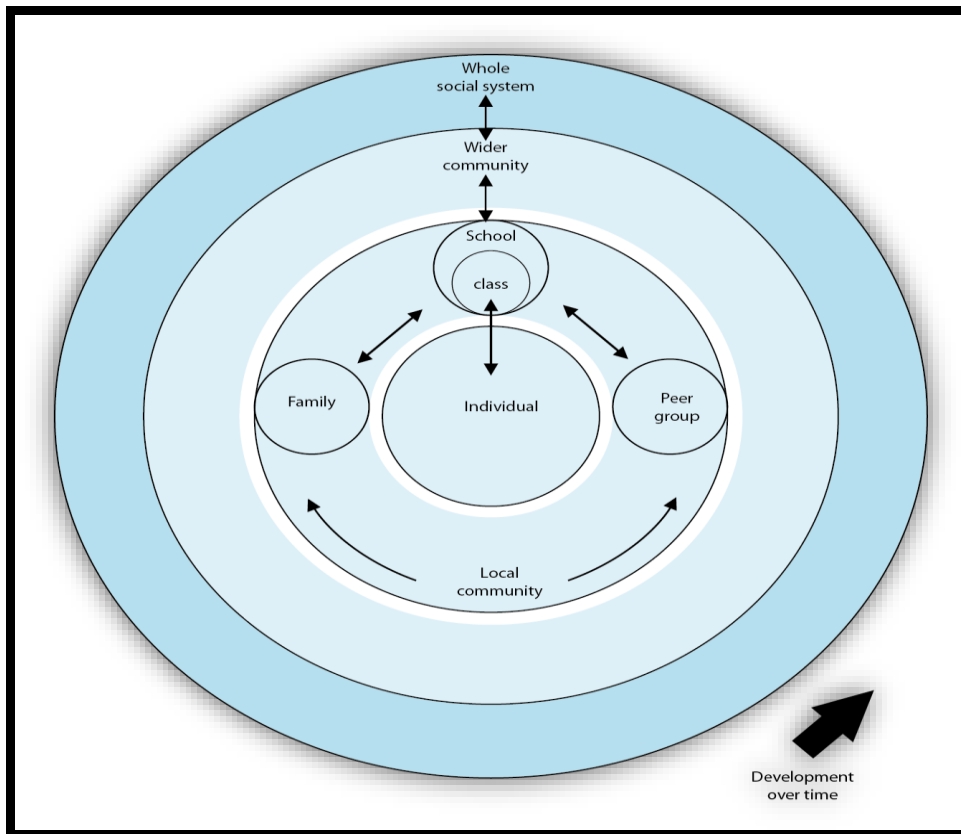


Diagram 2: An outline of Bronfenbrenner’s ecosystemic perspective of child development (Donald *et al.*, 2006, p. 44)

1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

One of the cornerstones of research is the consideration of ethics on the research site and in the academic community. Throughout the research process, ethics was considered as a priority (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2004; Creswell, 2008). Collins and O'Brien (2011, p. 128) ethical principles are defined as “an organized body of guidelines and rules that govern the practice of a professional discipline or activity.”

According to Mouton (2011, p. 239) “the epistemic imperative is not merely a nice idea or convenient rhetoric, but acts as a regulative principle that guides the conduct of scientists.” From the stage of the literature review cited words were indicated by acknowledging their sources. The following research ethics were considered as critical pillars of this study: negotiation of access and approval, informed consent, confidentiality, privacy and anonymity as well as professional integrity.



1.8.1 Approval and negotiation of access

Ethical approval was gained at the University of Pretoria. Before commencement of the actual research, a research proposal was written, presented, and defended in the presence of a proposal defence committee. The proposal, together with other documents, was submitted to the university's ethical committee for further approval. After approval was granted, permission to conduct the research was gained from the following institutions: the province (See Addendum A), district (Addendum B), circuit (Addendum C), and the schools (Addendum D & E) where the research took place.

This approach, according to (Creswell, 2008, p.12), indicates respect of research sites in two manners: a) Respect is shown by gaining permission before entering a site, by disturbing the site as little as possible during a study and by viewing oneself as a “guest” at the place of study; and b) Researchers may need to consult with different gatekeepers at multiple levels in an organization.

1.8.2 Informed consent

When approval and access were obtained, the educators were requested to take part in the study. Once they agreed, they were given consent forms (Addendum F) which explained and clarified to them in detail how data was going to be collected. The participants were informed that face-to-face interviews were to be conducted with them and that the interviews would be tape-recorded for data analysis. The date, time and venue of the interviews were clearly communicated to them together with the estimated duration of the interviews and observation.

According to Mouton (2011, p. 244) it is important for the researcher to “explain to the subjects what the research is about, the benefit of the research and who will benefit”. In this case, the researcher explained and clarified any aspects of the study that might have a direct or indirect effect on the well-being of the participants. Lastly, participants were informed that they were free to discontinue their participation at any time during the research process. In the two selected schools, however, no objections were encountered from the participants.



1.8.3 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

After getting permission at the research sites and from the research participants, their privacy was respected at all times. In (Mouton, 2011, p.243) it is highlighted that “the right to privacy includes the right of participants to refuse to be interviewed, the right to refuse to answer any questions and the right to refuse to be interviewed at certain times”. During the data collection process, these rights of participants were respected – particularly the right to privacy and the right to human dignity.

This was ensured by “protecting their anonymity” with pseudonyms or fictitious names and by “keeping their identity confidential” with numbers or letters e.g. Respondent no 1 or 2 at School A or B. In Mouton (2011, p. 244) anonymity is defined as the “principle that the identity of an individual is kept secret” and confidentiality is defined as the “principle of treating the information gathered from subjects confidential.”

The matter of keeping the identity and collected information of participants confidential, were clearly communicated to them. According to Cohen *et al.* (2000, p. 292), the non-identifiability and non-traceability of participants must be guaranteed. Only the researcher will know the identity of the participants. Regarding confidentiality, the researcher ascertained that the information given by the participants could not be traced or connected to them in any way.

1.8.4 Professional integrity

Throughout the research process, technical standards were adhered to and respected. Plagiarism was avoided and all sources were acknowledged. Reference was made to all sources that were consulted either directly or indirectly. The data and the findings were presented in a way that avoided falsification, fabrication, and misrepresentation. According to Foster (1996, p. 101) “professional integrity is the responsibility of researchers to report their findings accurately and truthfully.”

It is also understood that the researcher is required to respect the research sites and the participants, and to respect and follow all the protocols and societal dynamics within the communities where research is conducted. In order for the participants to feel less



stressed or threatened, the main purpose of the research was explained to them, as well as the role of the researcher and how they could possibly benefit from the study.

During data collection, sensitive information that could have been personally harmful and potentially threatening was avoided. This approach is emphasised in Cohen *et al.*, (2000, p.58) who states that “the welfare of subjects should be kept in mind, even if it involves compromising the impact of research”. As a form of reciprocity, participants were given gift vouchers as a token of appreciation of their willingness to participate in the research (Creswell, 2008, p.239) and they were informed that they would receive copies of the manuscript on their request once the study had been finalised. Finally, the personal-, emotional-, academic-, professional-, and financial assistance obtained from individuals who positively contributed towards the research process have been acknowledged.

The researcher maintained her role as researcher towards one participant who was known by her by “guarding against my own bias, emotions, attitudes, beliefs, values and characteristics” (Cohen *et al.*, 2004, p. 140). In this manner, it was easy for the researcher to talk to the participant, as she was comfortable to share more information compared to other participants.

1.9 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

This study consists of the following chapters:

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 gave an overview of the study and dealt with the introduction, reasons and background to the study and the purpose of the study. It also covered research questions, working assumptions, concept clarification, a theoretical framework, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 2

This chapter is about the literature study and concentrates on books, chapters, reports, policies and legislations. In addition, both local and international articles form part of the literature review. It covers the historical background of the South African education



system from which multi-grade primary schools originated and the conditions of such schools and how those schools are generally experienced.

Chapter 3

The chapter provides information on research methodology for the study. It is also comprised of all the processes and procedures followed by the researcher in collecting data. The chapter covers the research paradigm, research design, data collection methods, selection, and description of research sites and participants. Lastly, the chapter addresses the strategies the researcher used in data analysis and data transcription and how quality criteria were ensured.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, the researcher gives a detailed report on the findings of the study. It deals with the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of research results obtained from the two data collection strategies, namely observation and document analysis.

Chapter 5

This chapter provides findings from the third data collection strategy, namely interviews. The themes and sub-themes, which emerged from the interviews, are discussed and linked with the observations and document analysis. Literature from chapter two was also integrated into the themes to determine conflict or agreement.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 gives the research overview, summary, conclusion and recommendations for relevant stakeholders and future studies. Finally, the researcher gives a reflection of the study.

1.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter was focused on the introduction of the study by presenting relevant background information as well as details on the focus of the study. In the chapter, the researcher provided the background of the study, research purpose, research questions,



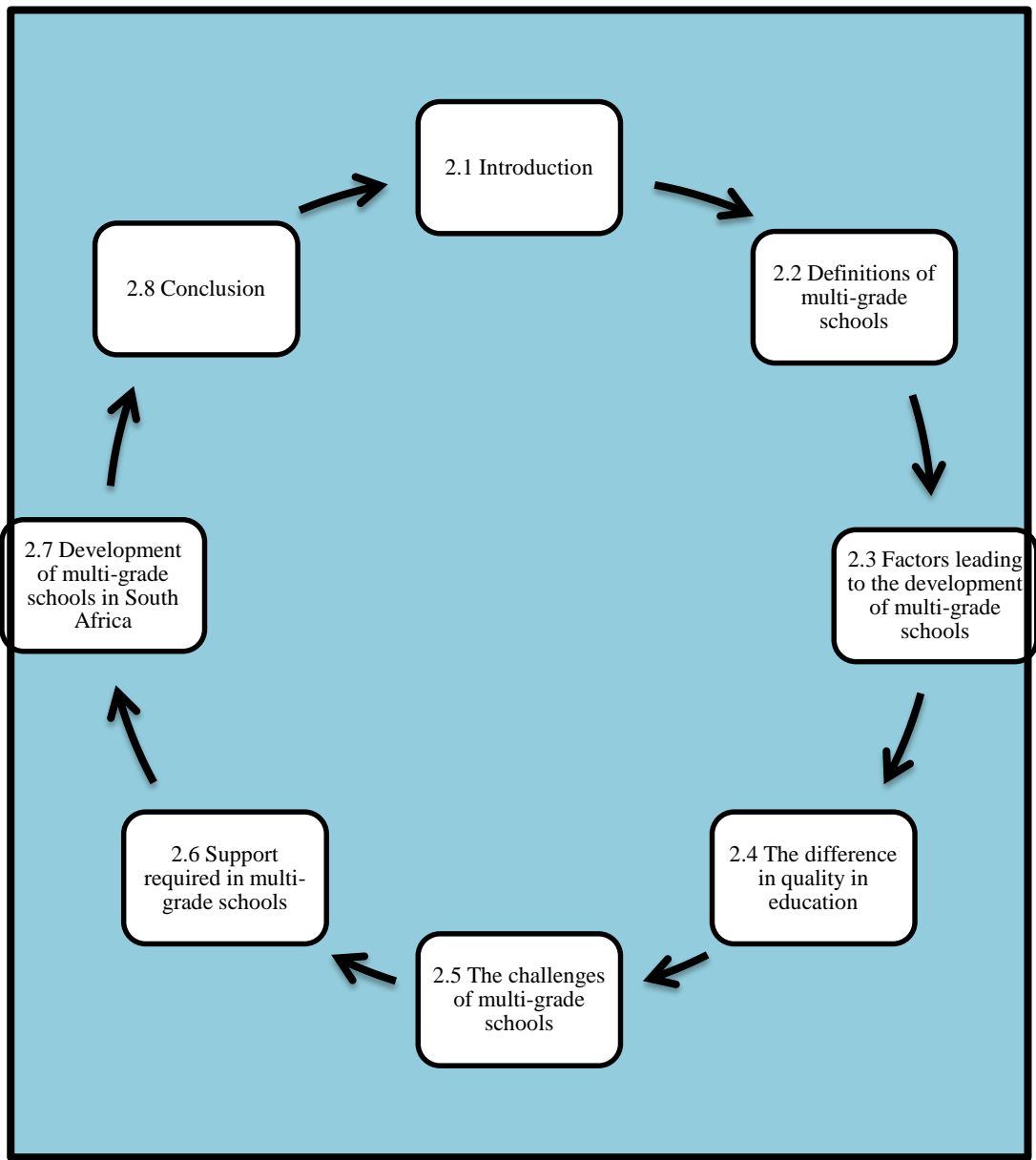
and working assumptions. In addition, key concepts were clarified and the theoretical framework was presented.

In the next chapter, the researcher identified and made a critical analysis of various bodies of literature relevant to the study. The literature was comprised of theoretical literature, empirical studies and methodological literature based on experiences of educators working in multi-grade primary schools.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW





CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section will contain a short synopsis of current literature, according to the knowledge and readings of the researcher, in relation to this study – the literature will be both nationally and internationally based. The discussion will commence with the definition of multi-grade schools and will further extend to factors that lead to the development of multi-grade schools. The discussion also proceeds with factors commonly leading to the development of multi-grade schools in other countries and in South Africa.

The working conditions of multi-grade schools in poor rural communities are discussed in relation to multi-grade schools in rich urban communities. Additionally, the problems encountered by educators in multi-grade primary schools are highlighted about policy and the deployment of educators to multi-grade schools, training, resource provision, assessment, and curriculum management. The type and extent of support provided by the government and other stakeholders to educators and learners in multi-grade schools are also discussed. In conclusion, the effectiveness of multi-grade schools with regard to the quality of education will be elaborated on.

Literature studies reveal that related research had been conducted on a national level. Research conducted by Brown (2009) focused on challenges of using multi-grade teaching in order to achieve Education for All (EFA) and Sustainable Development (SD) goals whereas Msila (2010), Segale (2005), Titus (2004), and Maponya (2010) focused on principals' challenges in multi-grade schools. In another study of Brown (2009), Jordaan and Joubert (2008) dealt with the preparation of educators for multi-grade teaching in South Africa. Brown (2010) also focused on the views of educators on the benefits of multi-grade teaching while Mncube and Harber (2010) and Taole and Mncube (2012) concentrated on educator experiences and quality in education. Further research was conducted locally on aspects such as assessment in multigrade schools (Lubisi & Murphy, 2010; Chrisholm & Wildeman, 2013). In contrast, Lemon (1999) and Tickly (2011) focused on social justice regarding small schools. Internationally,



Aksoy (2008) dealt with the prevalence and status of multi-grade schooling in Turkey. In addition, Beneviste and McEwan (2000) focused on challenges or constraints in the implementation of educational innovation. Birch and Lally (1995), Blum and Diwan (2007) and Plantilla (2006) focused their studies on multi-grade teaching in primary schools in Asia. While Little (1995; 2001) concentrated on the role of research and practice on multi-grade teaching whereas Gibson (1994) focused on policy, practice and the need in teacher professional preparation for multi-grade teaching. Hargreaves (2001), Lubisi and Murphy (2010), and Mulkeen (2006) dealt with the challenges faced by different countries in deploying educators to rural schools while a study by Mulkeen and Higgins (2009) focused on the practice of multi-grade teaching in three Sub-Saharan countries. Additional research was conducted by Miller (1991) in the United States of America, by Mulryan-Kyne (2007) in Vietnam, by Lingam (2007) in Fiji, by Starr and White (2008) in Australia, and by Thomas and Shaw (1992) in Veenman (1997) on multi-grade schools. Although few studies indicate the occurrence of multi-grade schools in developed countries (Miller, 1991) most research show a high prevalence of such schools in developing countries (Aikman & Pridmore, 2001; Aksoy, 2008; Brown, 2010; Little, 1995; 2001). According to Blum and Diwan (2007), there is a vacuum of research on the quality of education from the perspective and experiences of learners, educators, and policy makers.

2.2 DEFINITIONS OF MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLS

Research indicates that there is no universal definition for multi-grade schools. As a result, such schools are generally defined in terms of occurrence (Aksoy, 2008) and conditions that mostly prevail in such schools (Thomas & Shaw, 1992; Little, 1995; Lingam, 2007). However, some authors define multi-grade schools in terms of teaching. For example Joubert (2007, p. 5) regards multi-grade teaching as settings where the teacher is responsible for teaching learners of various grade levels simultaneously. While Kamel (2010) indicates that multi-grade teaching is a situation where students belonging to two or more grades, or levels of ability, are educated together in one class, but not at the same time.



However, other studies define such schools in terms of classes (Miller, 1991; Pridmore, 2007) where multi-grade schools are considered schools in which there are two or more grades taught in one classroom. According to Mulryan-Kyne (2007, p. 554) a multi-grade is a class “[which] comprised of two or more grade levels for which one teacher is given responsibility”. A similar definition is given by Hargreaves (2001, p.554) stating that a multi-grade is class “... where one teacher has responsibility for two or more grade groupings of children at the same time”. The responsibility of the educator is a common factor in the two definitions. In contrast Beukes (2006, p.18) indicates that multi-grade classes are “organizational institutions” whereby learners belonging to two or more grades are taught for most or all of the school day.” However, Little (2001, p. 483) defines multi-grade teaching on the basis of “necessity and choice”. Consequently, in instances where multi-grade teaching occurs based on necessity the classes are also called combination classes–forced mixed-age classes or forced mixed grades.

In cases where choice applies, the concepts of “vertical grouping, ungraded, non-graded and family grouping” are used. Beneviste and McEwan (2000, p. 33) define multi-grade schools as “typical schools” which “have one or two teachers” whereby the “classes are heterogeneous in both age and ability.” The two authors mention that such schools are suitable “for poor counties with low primary school coverage and quality in rural areas”. Educators in multi-grade classes are not only faced with two or more grades in one classroom but also have to teach four or more subjects depending on the curriculum needs of the particular education department. Aikman and Pridmore (2001, p.522) state that “[m]ulti-grade teaching is a form of teaching with one teacher in the same classroom giving lessons at the same time to many groups of pupils at different levels”. In the context of this study, multi-grade schools is defined as schools that have multi-grade classes and where multi-grade teaching occurs.

2.3 FACTORS LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLS

According to Pridmore (2007, p. 559) even if “multi-grade schools gained popularity when most countries were attempting to meet the Education for All (EFA) goals”. However, Miller (1991) points out that such schools have been in existence since the



1800s. The factors that contribute to the development of multi-grade schools differ greatly. Some studies focus more on the factors contributing to the development of multi-grade schools (Botha, 2010; Lubisi & Murphy, 2010), while others concentrate on the conditions which prevail in multi-grade schools (Berry, 2000). In this regard, Taole and Mncube (2012) and Aksoy (2008) appeal to authors to be cautious when comparing the status between multi-grade schools in different countries with different contexts.

Studies indicate that reasons behind the existence of multi-grade schools vary between choice and necessity (Little, 1995; Miller, 1991). The creation of multi-grade schools is viewed as a necessity in rural remote areas that are inaccessible and have limited resources (Juvane, 2007; Joubert, 2010) to raise access and retention. Other studies indicate that multi-grade schools are a pedagogical choice (Aksoy, 2008). Multi-grade teaching enables governments to deal with teacher absenteeism, budget constraints (Joubert, 2007; Beukes, 2007) as well as low enrolment and educator shortages (Blum & Diwan, 2007). According to Mulryan-Kyne (2007, p.501) “[t]he occurrence of multi-grade schools is common in remote, rural areas where enrolment justifies the appointment of a specific number of teachers.” In support of this statement, Pridmore (2007) associates the existence of multi-grade schools to poverty of marginalized populations who live nomadically in remote, mountainous regions.

Migration of people from rural communities to towns and cities is believed to be among the factors that contribute to multi-grade schools (Aksoy, 2008; Starr & White, 2008). According to Starr and White (2008, p. 3) “[r]ural schools located closer to larger regional centres are noticing a shift in enrolment trends as welfare dependent families relocate to acquire affordable accommodation”. Smit and Humpert (2002) highlight that demographic decline or dwindling population is a big problem for most countries and has the possibility to lead to multi grade teaching. On the other hand, Veenman (1997, p.269) indicates that multi-grade schools in developed countries is associated with a “decline in child birth while in developing countries limited educational budget and inadequate infrastructure are contributing factors’. This may be attributed to poor infrastructure in rural communities when people resettle or relocate to other areas where enrolment in the local schools becomes negatively affected.



A study conducted by Mulkeen (2006) indicates that factors such as educator deployment policies and educator utilization also contribute to the development of multi-grade schools. Further, Mulkeen (2006, 5) “[u]neven deployment patterns” create surpluses in certain schools and areas resulting in shortages in others”. This imbalance, results in teachers preferring to work in urban than in rural areas. Educators are unwilling to work in rural areas because of the low quality of life associated with poor accommodation, infrastructure, entertainment facilities, health concerns and low professional development opportunities as some of the contributory factors. Furthermore Mulkeen (2006, p. 6) highlights that gender equity as well as the language factor impact on rural-urban educator imbalances. On the gender issue, the author indicates that female educators generally dislike working in rural areas for fear of their own safety as well as separation from their families. Mulkeen (2006) also states that language creates deployment problems in instances where multiple linguistic or ethnic groups exist in the community, and where the educators are not conversant with the dominant language group.

Some studies reveal that the formulation of new policies contributes to the development of multi-grade schools (Starr & White, 2008; Lemon, 1999). The authors associate the existence of multi-grade schools to educational reform and restructuring, although Starr and White (2008) also add the aspect of globalization. In support of this, Plantilla (2006, p.20) states that “[t]he government must take the initiative of establishing education policies and programs aimed at recognizing and supporting rural areas which are disadvantaged”.

Even though multi-grade schools have been in existence in South Africa before the development of the Constitution, the South African Schools Act (SASA) together with the Constitution partially contributes to the increase in the number of such schools. Section 29 (1-2) of the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution states that “every child has the right to basic education and to receive education in the official language of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable”. On the other hand, one of the preambles in the South African Schools Act (SASA) notes the provision of “education of progressively high quality for all learners”.



To support this, Daniel (2004, p.7) also states that “multi-grade schools were developed to address the children’s right to free basic education”.

In Brown (2008, p.75) the list of conditions mentioned as contributory factors to multi-grade teaching are: unpredictable numbers in annual enrolment among new learners in some schools; teacher shortage owing to out-migration and to lower entrants to teacher education programmes; antipathy among teachers to work in remote rural and sparsely populated villages; and a post-apartheid surge in demand for education. Although Brown (2008) cites educator shortage as the most probably contributing factor towards the development of multi-grade schools, Mulkeen (2008, p. 5) also associate the problem with the educators’ “preference to work in urban areas.” According to Brown (2008, p.71) educator shortage in multi-grade schools results from “the reluctance of teachers to work in remote rural areas.” However, some studies indicate that factors such as the infrastructure and social contexts within communities have a role to play. In support of this Little (2001) states that communities wherein the schools practice multi-grade teaching are characterized by poor social, economic and educational conditions.

Little (2001, p. 482) further summarizes that multi-grade schools occur as a necessity under the following conditions:

- ❖ Schools in areas of low population density, scattered schools, inaccessibility and low enrolments;
- ❖ Schools that comprise a cluster of classrooms in different locations, in which some classes are multi-grade for the same reasons as mentioned above and some are mono-grade;
- ❖ Schools in areas of population decline, where previously there was mono-grade teaching and where, now, only a small number of teachers are employed in the schools, necessitating multi-grade teaching;
- ❖ Schools in areas of population growth and school expansion where enrolments in the expanding upper grades remain small;
- ❖ Schools where parents send their children to more popular schools within reasonable travel distance, leading to a decline in the number of students and teachers in the less popular schools;



- ❖ Schools in which the official number of teachers deployed justify mono-grade teaching but where the actual number deployed is less. The inadequate deployment arises for a number of reasons including low teacher supply, teachers who are posted to a school but who do not report for duty, or teachers on casual medical leave;
- ❖ Schools in which the number of students admitted to a class comprise more than one ‘class group’, necessitating a combination of some of them with students in a class group of a different grade and
- ❖ Schools in which teacher absenteeism is high and ‘supplementary teacher’ arrangements are non-effectual or non-existent.

2.4 THE DIFFERENCE IN QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The challenge for developing countries according to O’Sullivan (2006, p. 246) lies in the “provision of a good quality education.” The quality of education in multi-grade schools will be discussed based on working conditions that prevail in small schools in urban areas as well as rural areas. Various authors describe quality in different manners which, according to O’Sullivan (2006, p. 248), are “confusing and conflicting.” According to the author quality is defined in terms of six conceptualisations namely; i) the deficit notion; ii) the competency approach; iii) the value-added and fitness for purpose view; iv) Bergman’s (1996) four types of quality – value, input, process and output; v) quality as teaching and learning processes; and vi) the contextual understanding of quality. In this study, quality will be described according to Mncube and Harper (2010, p. 615). Schools which are generally rated as able to provide quality education have the following core values:

- The schools are capable, democratic and just, affording learners the opportunity to acquire, apply and practice the different kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will prepare them for life;
- The schools actively demonstrate concern for, and promote high standards of excellence in, all aspects of school life, both at an individual and institutional level;



- The schools expose learners to a humane outlook on life and instil crucial values as an integral part of each individual's personal and social development;
- The schools develop in learners a sense of independence and self-worth as human beings, giving them confidence in their ability to contribute to society in different ways; and
- The schools inculcate in the learners a concern for the cultural and economic enrichment of the surrounding community.

Some of the above-mentioned core values are challenging to achieve in multi-grade schools. Consequently, most studies highlight that education in multi-grade schools is of low quality. For example, Blum and Diwan (2007, p.3) mention that “the quality of education” provided by multi-grade schools creates a “serious concern”. In support of this, Taole (2014, p. 531) highlights that “there is a gap between compulsory schooling and quality of education” and that more still needs to be done in South Africa “in terms of ensuring that learners in the classroom get the quality of education that they deserve”. This is because multi-grade schools were developed to increase free access especially in South African rural schools.

2.4.1 Multi-grade schools in rural areas

Aksoy (2008, p. 218) highlights that many developing countries are faced with the challenge of providing equal education for all through “compulsory basic education”. According to Aksoy (2008, p. 219) there are “...significant disparities in educational access” which are still visible in the Turkish educational system “between genders, social and economic” as well as “geographic location.” However, due to negative working conditions in multi-grade schools, teachers are reluctant to work there. According to Starr and White (2008, p. 3) the community contexts of small multi-grade schools are characterized by “large-scale unemployment and population migration to cities and mining regions for work,” followed by “deterioration of local rural businesses and public services, including schools”. Educators’ negative attitudes depend on the contexts in which the schools are situated. Some of these contexts are listed in Gibson (1994, p.68) as “unsuitable physical accommodation, drinking water and lavatories, together with low



salaries, poor teaching materials, heavy workloads, frequently inept leadership and want of supportive and specialized personnel”. In support of this, Blum and Diwan (2007, p.3) mention that “the quality of education provided by multi-grade schools creates serious concern”. According to (Lemon, 1999) educational restructuring in South Africa shifted the responsibility to provincial governments.

2.4.2 Multi-grade teaching in urban areas

Research indicates that multi-grade teaching in developed countries occur as a result of choice (Little, 2001; Miller, 1991). School choice is determined by factors such as religion, ethnicity, human rights and efficiency as well as sustainable development. Some examples of such schools include Garden schools, Montessori schools, Charter schools and Gandhian schools. For example, Blair (2009, p.16) indicates that in the United States school gardens are “academic, behavioral, recreational, social, political and environmental remediation”. According to Blair (2010, p. 17) garden schools are introduced “for aesthetic purpose” to allow enough experiential learning. In developed countries, charter schools also practice multi-age/grade schooling. It is indicated in Bierlein and Mulholland (1995, p. 6) that “Numerous charter schools” are “utilizing multi-age/multi-grade.” Charter schools are defined as schools “created and operated under a charter or contract” (Bierlein and Mulholland 1995, p.2). These schools are chosen to deal with “lower class size” and “a district-wide teacher pay cut.” Some of the charter schools use Montessori-type programs that the authors regard as back-to-basics programs. According to Bajaj (2012, p.6) in India there is an increasing number of “small, independently run schools” operating apart from “government structures”. Bajaj (2012, p. 11) indicates that such schools are either run privately or by NGOs to promote Human Rights Education (HRE).

Some of these schools, like charter and farm also schools, use the “Montessori pedagogy and multi-grade instruction.” The schools, according to Bajaj (2012, p. 11), use “human-rights friendly educational practices” that support the “framework” of “Amnesty International (curriculum, governance, community relations and school environment/extra-curricular activities)”. According to Kamel (2010, p.7) multi-grade teaching is often chosen in developed countries as it is regarded “as a powerful



pedagogical means for developing learning skills.” In Kamel (2010, 4) it is further indicated that the child-centered mode of instruction applicable in multi-grade teaching is “similar to the Montessori system” because they both “promote individuality and creativity.” In South Africa, the Lynedoch Primary School caters for the needs of children “from the families who live on the surrounding farms” (Swilling and Annecke 2006, p. 315). The authors indicate that the school provides “a working example of integrated sustainable development” by considering the safety of the learners as priority. This school, as well as the pre-primary school, uses a Montessori approach.

2.5 THE CHALLENGES OF MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLS

There exists contrasting arguments about the advantages and disadvantages of multi-grade schools. Some studies indicate that multi-grade schools can be valuable and beneficial (Brown, 2009; Jordaan & Joubert, 2006; Mulryan-Kyne, 2007). In support of this, Pridmore (2007, p. 559) highlights that “multi-grade schools can be attractive to policy makers because they can be located close to where children live to help increase enrolment, especially of young children and girls.” Considering this benefit, it is worthy to say multi-grade schools offer a double function, namely provision of equal education to all, as well as protection of children’s rights – particularly the safety of young children and girls. In support of this, Kamel (2010, p. 7) mentions one of the benefits of multi-grade teaching as the increase of “access to schooling” by reaching learners living in “remote areas” whereby their “social obligations might prevent them from continuing their education, especially in the case of girls”.

Despite the general translucent view of the benefits of adopting a multi-grade approach, research indicates that teachers in multi-grade schools are faced with numerous challenges (Berry, 2000; Hargreaves, 2001; Starr & White, 2008).

2.5.1 Policy and Teacher deployment to multi-grade schools

Policy plays a role in the development of multi-grade schools, as well as the conditions of these schools and the deployment of educators. Multi-grade schools were developed through what Starr and White (2008) regard as one-size fits all education policy and



practices. According to Starr and White (2008, p.2) globalization leads to “processes which affect nation states and produce policy mediation”. In light of the above contexts, countries worldwide are pressured to restructure their education systems to meet international quality standards. Therefore, provision of equal education for all is an educational policy in both developed and developing countries irrespective of budget constraints.

Secondly, policy has an impact on the deployment of educators to multi-grade schools. In the South African context policies such as pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) and redeployment and rationalization (R&R), as mentioned in (Lemon, 1999), contribute to the placement of educators in multi-grade schools. According to Brown (2008, p. 79), educators in multi-grade schools “do not participate in the decision that leads to their classes becoming multi-grade.” Moreover, other studies indicate that educators have no control over their deployment to multi-grade schools, and as such “feel themselves to be at a disadvantage that if they were given a choice... they will often opt for single-grade classes” (Veenman, 1997, p.265). The same opinion is cited in Research conducted by Blum and Diwan (2007) indicated that educators and policy makers perceived multi-grade as a means by which the state has attempted to avoid its responsibility to hire sufficient number of teachers. However, a contrasting view by Veenman (1997) indicates that the educators’ general negative attitude towards multi-grade classes is mainly due to larger workloads as well as the complex structural organization of these classes. In Veenman’s (1997, p. 265) view, multi-grade classrooms put more pressure on the educator to have “better classroom management skills.” Consequently, educators are reluctant to work in multi-grade schools, due to the difficulty of the situation. Concerning policy, Jordaan and Joubert (2006, p. 9) indicate that there is “a massive gap between international policies and the implementation of these policies on local governmental level.” The authors further indicate that in most cases “Policies are planned and implemented on a national level” in order to be in line “with international arrangements” without taking their impact on classroom level into account.



2.5.2 Training provided to educators in multi-grade schools.

The training that is received by multi-grade educators is similar to that obtained by mono-grade educators (Brown, 2009; Hargreaves, 2001). Educators in multi-grade schools usually have no pedagogical training to teach multi-grade classrooms and have to adapt their skills to manage different content for different levels or phases Mulryan-Kyne (2007, p. 501). In support of this Taole and Mncube (2012, p. 152) argue that educators in “multi-grade schools are unable to cope perfectly due to lack of specialised skills and competencies” needed for such schools. The same view is shared by Brown (2008, 81) who indicates that “South Africa’s higher education institutions” have no training for multi-grade teaching “but for single grade classes.” In addition, Jordaan and Joubert (2008, p. 3) indicate that “multi-grade education training does not exist in South Africa.” The writers attribute this to the challenge faced by researchers and policy makers “to identify the relevant and common policies out of relatively small-scale interventions.” For example, a study conducted by Blum and Diwan (2007) revealed that limited efforts to improve in-service training occurred on only two levels in India. The first one involved “self-training module on multi-grade management whereby books and booklets had been produced to practical local relevant advice for teacher trainers.” The second level involved “a theory based module on multi-grade strategies included in the educator training curriculum recommended by National Council of Research and Training (NCERT).” The two writers discovered that “there are multiple dimensions to the issue of multi-grade teaching and learning within the national context of policy and practice” (Blum and Diwan, 2007, p. 20). For example, educators are expected to teach the different grades with the same content, while common assessments from district-, provincial-, or national levels are designed for each grade separately.

Teaching in multi-grade schools is very difficult (Juvane, 2007). This may be attributed to training received by educators teaching in multi-grade schools. Specific skills and competencies are essential for multi-grade teaching (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007, p.503). However, research also indicates that multi-grade educators are not adequately trained to teach in multi-grade classroom situations (Jordaan and Joubert, 2006; Berry, 2006; Aikman and Pridmore, 2001). This is because training received by multi-grade



educators is similar to that obtained by mono-grade teachers (Brown, 2009; Hargreaves, 2001; Mulryan-Kyne, 2007).

If educators are not properly trained to teach in multi-grade schools then they will not be effective. Educators in multi-grade schools should receive specialized training for education in order to be effective in such schools (Jordaan and Joubert, 2006, p. 8). Little (1995, p. 30) highlights that in order for teaching in multi-grade schools to be effective, “teacher training must be accompanied by self-study support materials for teachers and learners, guidance on lesson planning and assessment as well as classroom organization and management”. Proper training will ensure that educators become what Juvane (2007) regards as facilitators rather than keepers of knowledge.

The quality of education in multi-grade schools could be enhanced by improving the education programmes for these educators. According to Mulryan-Kyne (2007, p. 504) this is essential because “teachers interpret policies differently, consequently teachers implement the curriculum differently, the way the learners are taught depends on how the teacher interprets policies and the skills and abilities of the teacher.”

There is also an indication of inadequate educational programmes in most countries to help educators adapt their skills to suit multi-grade teaching (Aksoy, 2008; Beukes, 2000; Plantilla, 2006). In order to provide educators in multi-grade schools with appropriate training, some countries have designed educational programmes for pre-service and in-service training (Little, 1995). These programmes constitute i) MMTTC in Zambia, ii) Escuela Nueva in Colombia, iii) AIDSESEP/ISPI in Peru, iv) PSEDP in Sri Lanka and v) IMPACT in the Philippines. Although the programmes have been adopted on a small- scale, they have proven to be effective (Little, 1995). According to Little (1995, p. 30) the programmes have been used in “developing countries” to deal with “educational problems in disadvantaged rural” communities having “low populations”. In addition, Little (1995, p. 30) also indicates that all the programmes were successful because they “involved teacher training in the techniques of multi-grade teaching” locally. The programmes also include “the design, reproduction and distribution of” a considerable amount of self-instructional guides that “support individual, peer and small group learning” as well as assessment strategies and “forms



of internal school and classroom organization”. In support of this, Kamel (2010, p. 5) associate the success of the Escuela Nueva to “mechanisms which give” prior attention “to the process of training the” educators, curriculum development, “improving community participation and promoting local accountability and management.” Little (2001, p. 487) also adds that the success of the Escuela Nueva depends on its key features, namely: (i) its flexible, rather than automatic, promotion system, (ii) its rural-orientated curriculum, and (iii) its instructional materials designed for self-study and individualised learning. Beneviste and McEwan (2006, p. 44) summarise that “local will is important” for the “successful implementation of multi-grade schooling programs including “education programs in general”.

According to Smit and Humpert (2012), one of the practices that can be beneficial in training educators to deal with heterogeneous classrooms is Differentiated Instruction (DI). This practice is aimed at “enabling teachers to plan strategically to meet the needs of every student” (Smit & Humpert, 2012, p. 1153). In addition, the writers highlight that educators need to view learner differences as an opportunity for them (educators) to expand their teaching competencies. Furthermore they indicate that instead of judging these “differences to be problematic” and integrating them “into lesson plans as a time-consuming task”. The two authors argue that “the critical variable that affects student learning is the teacher and not the classroom structure”.

In contrast, Pridmore (2007, p. 561) indicates that curriculum in multi-grade schools can be adapted by using four models, namely “quasi-monograde, differentiated curricula, multi-year curriculum cycles and learner and material centered.” In the quasi-monograde model each grade is given direct teaching like in the case of monograde. The advantage of this model in Pridmore’s view is that it enables the teacher “to spend more time with each grade group” or “to deliberately give more time to groups” which are busy with tasks or subjects of a higher difficulty level. With regards to a differentiated curricular “the same general topic or theme of the same subject” is taught to all learners” of the different grades at the same time “to facilitate learning across age and grade boundaries”. According to Pridmore (2007, p. 562) the model is beneficial in enabling the educator to use questions of different difficulty levels for all grades to “support and extend learning.” Unlike Smit and Humpert’s differentiated instruction



that focuses on formative assessment, differentiated curricular supports the teaching learning process of a lesson. In the multiple-year curriculum cycles, learners “of two or more consecutive grades” are taught “common topics and activities together” but the time of commencing and completion of the curriculum cycle differs (Pridmore 2007, p. 563). The value of using this model is that it permits the “integration of content, objectives and process” with a focus on “process” and encouragement of “project work to integrate” various “themes and subjects”. According to Pridmore (2007, p. 564) in the learner and materials centered model, learners “work through interactive, self-study learning materials” while the educator “stimulate and check on learning”. The first benefit of this model is that it “enables teachers to deliver the curriculum” flexibly for learners to “work at different levels in different subjects at the same time.” Secondly, the model “provides for integration of content, process and objectives” depending on the availability of “high-quality learner guides” and the willingness of the “teachers to facilitate collaborative learning.”

2.5.3 Curriculum management

Educators in multi-grade schools deal with challenges of planning, organizing, and managing the curriculum (Beneviste & McEwan, 2000; Taole & Mncube, 2012). The educators in multi-grade schools are expected to cover all the material for every year, for all learners enrolled for each specific year (Miller, 1991, p. 12). Curriculum in multi-grade schools is designed in a way that often makes it dysfunctional and irrelevant (Juvane, 2006). The complexity of the curriculum in multi-grade schools is intensified with curriculum related tasks that educators have to perform.

According to Pridmore (2007, p. 560) the main challenge of multi-grade schools is that “curriculum materials” are “developed with the needs of mono-grade teaching in mind”. The main challenge about these materials is that pressure is exerted on multi-grade educators as they “are expected to adapt these materials on their own.” Berry (2006, p. 9) highlights that educators in multi-grade schools “struggle to plan the curriculum,” not because they are under-qualified, but because of the way the curriculum is structured. The difficulty of curriculum management is associated to what Joubert (2008, p. 8) regards as the inflexibility of the grade based curricula. Even if the grades



in each phase are combined, each grade has its own subjects, content coverage guided by subject policies, assessment frameworks, and pacesetters different from each other.

For a multi-grade educator the complexity of teaching in a multi-grade classroom is not necessarily related to the difficulty of content, but the volume of work and the time available to do it. In support of this, Mulryan-Kyne (2007, p.501) states that the multi-grade educator is expected to “teach a number of programmes in a number of subjects to a number of grades in the same time required for a single grade teacher.”

According to Berry (2006, p. 9) “classroom management is more complicated because of the necessity of having more than one group on task at the same time, educators may be required to write multiple lesson plans and end of term test have to be set for each grade level group”. The same view is also shared by Hargreaves (2001,) who states that “traditional models of teaching forces the teacher to search for alternative models suitable for different achievement levels.” Multiple lessons would be required because the level of difficulty of content varies between grades.

2.5.4 Resources provision in multi-grade schools

According to Berry (2006, p. 8) teachers in multi-grade schools are faced with “lack of resources, infrequent supervision and poor living conditions”. This is also confirmed by Brown (2009, p. 64) who states that that “contextual arrangements and resources suitable for multi-grade classes differ from those of mono-grade classes”. Therefore, schools with more learner enrolment are always provided more resources such as human resources, Learner-Teacher Support Materials (LTSM), as well as food supply in the case of the National Schools Nutrition Programme (NSNP). Even the financing of public schools is allocated according to the Norms and Standards Policy, meaning that a school with more learners will be given more funds than a school with fewer learners. There is a need for policy makers to design and develop resource materials suitable for planning and management of curriculum by teachers in multi-grade schools (Beukes, 2006).



2.5.5 Assessment in multi-grade schools

Educators in multi-grade schools are also faced with challenges when it comes to conducting assessments (Hargreaves, 2001; Chisholm and Wildeman, 2013). This difficulty emanates from the fact that educators in multi-grade schools are expected to teach content of one subject to different grades and assess the grades differently. Consequently, the teachers are pressured to cover content related to each grade and in that way, “mono-gradedness persists in multi-grade schools even though they are not monograde” (Little 2001, p. 482). Furthermore, educators experience a lack of time in order to do assessments “to devote to any one grade.” Hargreaves (2001) believes assessment should enable educators to recognize individual differences between learners whereby learners are assessed based on certain skills, knowledge, or attitudes.

According to Hargreaves (2001, p. 555) “a system of grade promotion examinations and repetition had to be accommodated within the multi-grade setting regardless of its appropriateness to the learning needs of pupils in multi-grade schools”. An appeal is made by the writer for policy makers to cater for the needs of both multi-grade and mono-grade classrooms. In support of this, Chisholm and Wildeman (2013) feel that the current form of testing favours big, well-resourced schools while small schools in rural communities are disadvantaged. According to Chisholm and Wildeman (2013, p. 93) the “politics of performance undermines education quality by privileging the measurable” while poor learners are left “unprepared to engage meaningfully in learning”. This is because the current testing system in South Africa is focused on performance and “judges the overall effectiveness of a school.” Consequently, schools adopt certain measures of selecting only the best learners so that they can achieve excellent results. The social contexts of the communities where multi-grade school occur are marked by unemployment and poverty. According to Chisholm and Wildeman (2013, p.97) the parents in such communities have limited resources “to transport their children away from the local” multi-graded schools.



2.6 SUPPORT REQUIRED IN MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLS

In the following section, the forms of support provided by different stakeholders will be discussed. This discussion will include support needed by educators as well as support required by learners in multi-grade schools.

2.6.1 Support needed by educators

Several studies indicate a tendency to ignore the needs of multi-grade schools by government administrators at both provincial and national education levels (Beukes, 2006; Joubert, 2006; Little, 1995, 2001). Inadequate provision of support to multi-grade schools is caused by what Aksoy (2008) calls ‘lack of political will from the government’. To emphasize this, Joubert (2006, 10) states that “multi-grade schools are not reported in statistics and educational research”. In support of this, a study conducted in India by Blum and Diwan (2007) revealed that there was “no national government policy on small schools or multi-grade teaching”. Consequently educators had to find their own solutions to meet the particular management, administration and curriculum provision needs of small multi-grade schools.” In an article by Mulryan-Kyne (2007, 504) it is stated that “education support to multi-grade teachers is a necessity in multi-grade schools, for effective quality education”. Support needed in multi-grade schools vary. In support of this, Aikman and Pridmore (2001) maintain that support for multi-grade educators must involve an initial educator training programme, in-service training as well as continuous professional support.

Aksoy (2008, p. 226) states that “one of the biggest problems experienced by teachers in multi-grade schools is lack of administrative and financial support”. However Aikman and Pridmore (2001, p. 534) also add that “teachers need to be given support to deal with everyday problems” in their teaching process, but also need support in communication network and transport. In this regard, it is understandable because some of the communities where multi-grade schools are found have poor infrastructure, remoteness, and inaccessibility.

According to Brown (2010, p. 197) “multi-grade teaching process could be utilized to support sustainable human development.” The success of multi-grade teaching does not



depend on educators only, but also on the support of other role-players such as curriculum advisors, circuit managers, and district administrators. This can be achieved by paying regular visits to multi-grade schools for quality assurance. Taole and Mncube (2012) suggest that it is vital for the government to provide support for multi-grade teaching in order for educators to offer quality education in such schools. This is also indicated in Tickly (2011, p. 92) who states that civil society have a tendency to expect that "...schools and teachers have to account for poor examination grades" instead of also expecting politicians and "elites to account for the system failures of the system as a whole."

2.6.2 Support needed by learners

There is a silence of research on the support that could be provided to learners in multi-grade schools. The learners in multi-grade schools also need to be provided with various forms of support. Firstly, learners could be provided with suitable workbooks and textbooks to suit the needs of multi-graded classes. Secondly, learners could be provided with self-help kits. Learners in multi-grade schools also need to be provided with libraries, laboratories, as well as well-functioning equipment. Additionally, learners in multi-grade schools can be supplied with sporting equipment of various sporting codes.

2.7 DEVELOPMENT OF MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Research indicates that multi-grade schools give developing countries opportunities to be successful in providing education for all, in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Education for All (EFA) goals (Alexander, 2008; Higgins, 2007; Little, 1995). In addition, Brown (2010) states that multi-grade schools enable developing countries to promote sustainable development. In South Africa, similar to other developing countries, the phenomenon of multi-grade teaching prevails particularly in remote rural areas and farm schools (Maponya, 2010; Segale, 2005; Titus, 2004).

Post-apartheid policies also contributed to the development of rural-urban inequalities in South African schools. According to Lemon (1999) restructuring policies in the



education system impacted more on individual schools. For example, policies such as pupil teacher ratio (PTR), redeployment, and rationalization (R&R) also had a role to play in this context. Lemon (1999) argues that parents' decision of where their children are enrolled led to a high density of state and private schools and as a result, more than half the pupils are not attending their nearest schools. According to the National Educators Policy Act (NEPA) the formula used for the allocation of educators to schools is 40:1 (primary) and 35:1 (secondary). The creation of multi-grade schools in South Africa was to ensure the right of access to education by way of combating discrimination (Plantilla, 2006). Multi-grade schools were developed to address the children's right to free basic education, including children living in remote rural areas (Lemon, 1999). The same view is held by Joubert (2007, p. 3) who states that "education is a basic right" as well as "an essential prerequisite" in poverty reduction and improvement of "the living conditions of rural people".

Therefore, multi-grade schools play an important role in developing countries in the attempt to provide education to remote rural communities (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007). Multi-grade schools also offer the Education System an opportunity to compete in an increasingly global economy and to prepare educators and learners to adapt with the new changing environments. In addition, Mulkeen and Higgins (2009, p.2) indicate that "multi-grade teaching provides a viable mechanism" in providing education "for schools" in or closer to "small communities." Multi-grade schools serve as "a way to address uneven grade distribution" commonly prevailing in "primary schools in low-income countries" (Mulkeen & Higgins, 2009, p. 2). To support this, Kamel (2010, p.6) mentions some of the benefits of multi-grade schools as (i) peer collaboration; (ii) respect of children's diversity as individuals or in groups; and (iii) increase of access to schooling.

2.7.1 The status of multi-grade schools in South Africa

In order to understand the status of multi-grade schools in South Africa the manner in which institutions are graded will be discussed. According to the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 the grading of primary schools is depending on the number



of learners enrolled in that particular school. Consequently, this determines the number and type of post allocated to the school. For example, a school with a learner enrolment of fewer than 80 is graded as P1 and is likely to qualify to have one or two educators appointed. Furthermore, a school with a learner enrolment of between 80 and 159 is graded as P2, and may likely qualify to have three to five educators. Finally, a school with a learner enrolment ranging from 160 to 719 is graded as P3 and usually qualifies to have five to ten educators. The teaching time of the principal also indicates whether a school is multi-graded or not. In Segale (2005, p. 9) it is indicated that “the curriculum needs of the school and the staff establishment will inform the actual teaching hours”. The author provides the following as guidelines in determining the teaching time:

- ❖ Primary School : Post level 1 - Between 85% and 92%
- : Post level 2 - Between 85% and 90%
- : Deputy Principal – 60%
- : Principal - Between 10% and 20%
- (depending on which post level appointed to)

From the discussion above it is evident that the size of the school depends on the number of learners enrolled. Therefore, the information justifies the argument by (Lemon, 1999) that Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) plays a role in rural-urban inequalities in schools. Resultantly P1 and P2 are usually multi-graded, depending on the number of classes which are combined. Schools with a learner enrolment of less than 280 are more likely to have one or more multi-graded classroom.

According to the CAPS (Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement) document (Department of Basic Education, 2012), the number of multi-grade schools in South Africa is 6 665 which is equivalent to 26% of the schools in South Africa. The information in the graph below illustrates the number of multi-grade schools in each of the nine provinces of South Africa as arranged in alphabetical order.



Table 1: Alphabetical list of provinces in South Africa and the total number of multi-grade schools in each province (Department of Basic Education, 2012)

PROVINCE	NO. OF SCHOOLS
Eastern Cape	2333
Free State	722
Gauteng	185
Kwazulu-Natal	1131
Limpopo	631
Mpumalanga	688
Northern Cape	155
North West	441
Western Cape	379

Whether the number of multi-grade schools in South Africa as indicated in Table 1 will decrease or increase, depends on the factors which contributed to the development of those schools into multi-grade schools. Apparently some schools become multi-graded because of migration of people from the local communities to other neighbouring communities due to poor or lack of services. In other areas the schools become multi-graded because of geographical conditions.

2.7.2 The workload of educators as prescribed by policy requirements of the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998

In order to understand the situation faced by educators in multi-grade schools, the workload of educators in schools, irrespective of whether they are mono-graded or multi-graded, will now briefly be elaborated on. According to the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998, the workload of educators (school based) is classified as follows:



The work done by educators embraces the following core duties covered by an educator during a formal school day (with or without contact with the learners) and outside the formal school day.

a. DURING THE FORMAL SCHOOL DAY

- Scheduled teaching time
- Relief teaching
- Extra and co-curricular duties
- Pastoral duties (ground, detention, scholar patrol etc.)
- Administration
- Supervisory and management functions
- Professional duties (meetings, workshops, seminars, conferences etc.)
- Planning, preparation and evaluation.

b. OUTSIDE THE FORMAL SCHOOL DAY

- Planning, preparation and evaluation
- Extra and co-curricular duties
- Professional duties (meetings, workshops, seminars, conferences etc.)
- Professional development

In support of this (Blum and Diwani, 2007, p. 3) found that additional responsibilities of educators besides teaching include “school administrative tasks, arranging for the provision of mid-day meals (a nationally- mandated government policy), maintaining records for attendance and periodic medical check-ups, conducting household surveys for the national census and administering preventive polio medication to each student.”



2.8 CONCLUSION

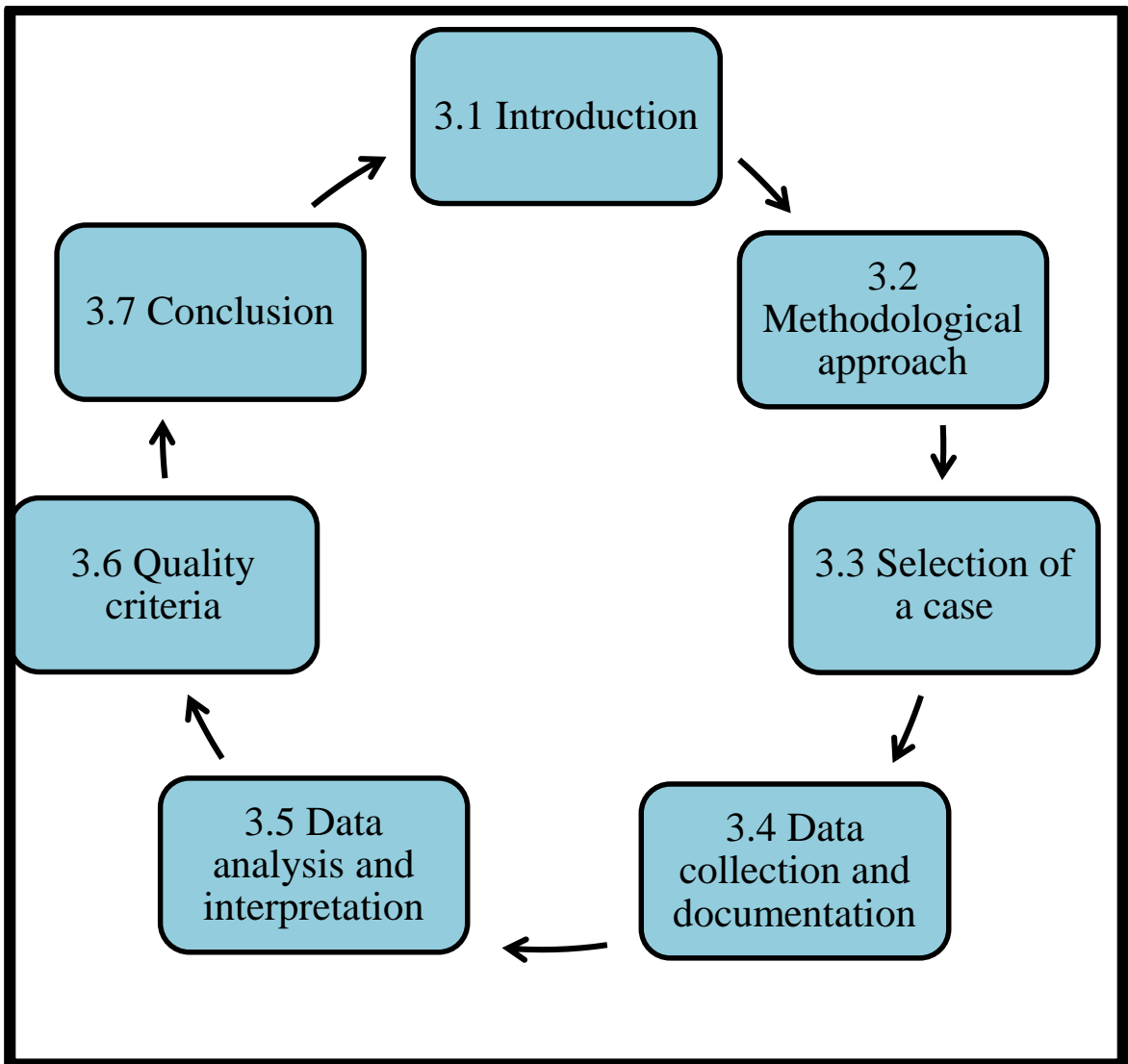
In this chapter, the various definitions of multi-grade schools were provided. Furthermore, the different factors that lead to the existence of multi-grade schools were discussed. A brief discussion on how the quality of education is defined followed, together with an elaboration on the occurrence of multi-grade schools in rural and urban areas. In addition, the various challenges encountered in multi-grade schools were discussed, including the form of support required by educators and learners in such schools. Finally, a discussion of the occurrence and status of multi-grade schools in South Africa was presented.

In the following chapter, the methodological approach and research design will be discussed. It will include the selection of a case and participants. Additionally, the data generation methods as well as data analysis and interpretation will be presented, followed by a brief discussion on the quality criteria used in this particular study.



CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY





CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, relevant bodies of literature and empirical studies related to the focus of the study were identified, which was to explore and describe the experiences and perceptions of educators in multi-grade primary schools. In this chapter, a detailed discussion of the research process will follow.

In this section an overview of the research methodology used in the study is given, namely research design, selection of participants, data generation, and documentation followed by quality criteria. Furthermore, the methodological approach, research paradigm and research design will be elaborated on.

The discussion will be extended by means of a description of the data generation methods, data analysis procedures and for each aspect, the rationale behind the choice made will be justified. In addition, an indication of how quality criteria issues such as confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability were addressed in this study will be included.

3.2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

It is common practice for researchers to give a distinction between methods and methodology. Although the definitions vary from author to author, there are also some similarities. In Travers (2011, p.vii) “methods are defined as techniques used in collecting data while methodology is defined as the assumptions of the researcher and affect the way a study is done”. Methodology is understood to be a procedure or way of doing something. Methodology is defined in Cohen *et al.*, (2000, p. 77) as “a clear plan of action.”

For the purposes of this study, a qualitative approach was used to make sense of the experiences of educators and to present their subjective interpretations (Mertens, 2005). By further using a qualitative approach, the researcher was able to apply its three critical elements, namely description, understanding, and interpretation. This approach also



enabled an understanding of the situations of the educators that were being studied, from the participants' point of view. The purpose of qualitative research is description and understanding of human phenomena, human interaction, or human discourse.

According to Creswell (2008, p.18) a qualitative approach enables the researcher to “admit the value-laden nature of the study, and to report their values and biases and the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field.” Creswell’s statement applied directly to this particular research because the way in which the educators attached values to their perceptions and experiences differed individually and contextually. In this instance, the information, which was obtained from the educators, differed according to their own personal values and experiences, the values of their schools and the communities where the schools are.

The fundamental assumption of a qualitative approach is that social reality exists differently according to the way different people construct it (Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Babbie, 2005; Creswell, 2008). Therefore, when exploring multi-grade classrooms and the educators’ experiences, qualitative research offered the opportunity to uncover various constructions of this particular social reality. This multiple existence of reality depends on the time and contexts in which the different individuals find themselves (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Using this approach, the following ten elements as stated in Litchman (2006, p. 8), provided guidance:-

- ❖ Existence of multiple realities as constructed by the observer.
- ❖ Researcher role is expected to be subjective.
- ❖ Researcher is not distanced from the study but immersed in it.
- ❖ The findings are not generalizable but situational.
- ❖ It allows multiple ways of knowledge acquisition.
- ❖ It is aimed at understanding and interpreting social interactions.
- ❖ It relies on small sample sizes selected non-randomly.
- ❖ Does not study variables, but the whole entity.



- ❖ Visual data is described in words.
- ❖ Data analysis occurs through transcription, codes, themes, and patterns.
- ❖ Writing style occurs formally and personally.

It can be concluded that, by making use of these cornerstones of the qualitative approach, one would be able to obtain multiple realities as constructed by individual teachers in primary multi-grade schools subjectively in their different situations.

3.2.1 Research paradigm

Epistemologically the study was conducted through an interpretive paradigm. According to Maree (2011, p. 33) a paradigm is a perspective and is defined as a “way of viewing the world.” The interpretive paradigm is based on the principle that knowledge is personal, subjective, and uniquely created by participants in a community by giving their own inside perspective (Cohen, *et al.*, 2004).

This paradigm is aimed at understanding the subjective world of human experience and enables the researcher to share the same frame of reference of participants. Through the paradigm the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings constructed by different educators in their multi-grade classrooms. The interpretive paradigm also emphasizes that multiple realities occur and are subjectively presented as multiple voices of participants. In the context of this study, this was evidenced by what was said by participants during the interviews in the two selected schools.

3.2.2 Research design

In this study, the researcher used a descriptive case study design to describe, analyse, and interpret the experiences of educators in multi-grade schools. A case study is defined as a particular instance or problem that requires investigation (Merriam, 1998). In Yin (2009, p.18) a case study is defined as “an empirical enquiry about a contemporary phenomenon, (e.g. a “case”), set within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident”.



In this study, the context was the experiences of teaching in multi-grade primary schools. According to Cohen *et al.* (2000, p. 181) a case is a systemic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest. Through the research design, the actual situations in multi-grade schools were understood in relation to other schools as perceived by the educators. In this instance, it is believed that the experiences of educators in multi-grade schools might not always be clear to departmental officials, because they hold the same expectations from these educators as they do from those in mono-grade schools. The research design enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of educators in their multi-grade classrooms together with the meanings they attach to their situations.

According to Merriam (1998), a case study as a unit can be a person, classroom, an institution or organisation, a programme, a country, a situation or events. As a research design, a case study is useful in providing rich insights into particular situations, events organisations, or individuals. One of the characteristics of a case study is that it “focuses on individual actors or groups of actors by trying to comprehend their perceptions of events” (Cohen *et al.*, 2004, p. 182). The focal point of this study was to explore and understand the perceptions and experiences of educators in multi-grade schools. Through the design, the educators shared their daily experiences, frustrations, worries, and expectations. The design is represented in the following diagram:

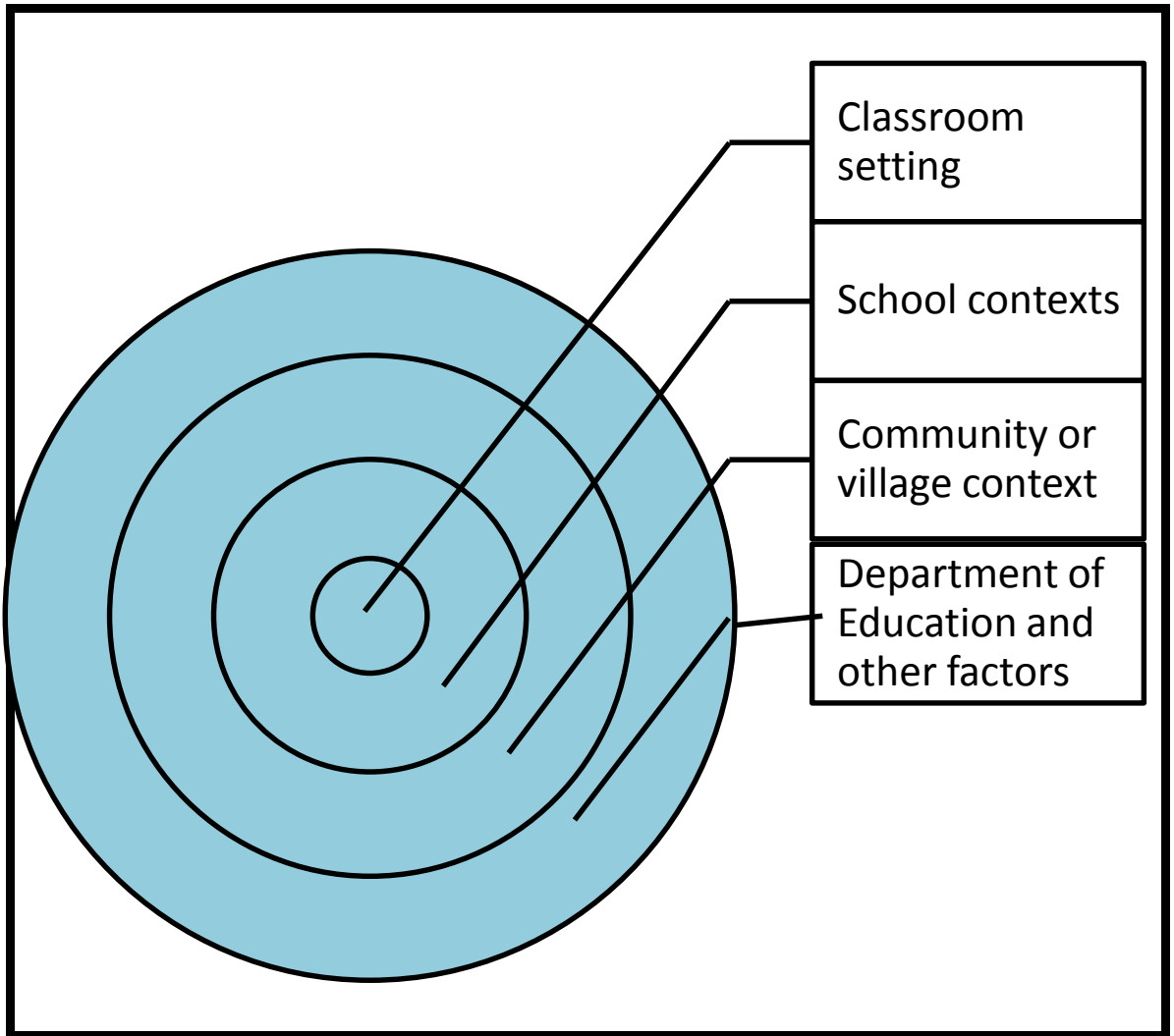


Diagram 3: An illustration of a case study design as micro-cosm, reflects the wider context in which it is located.

In the above diagram, a detailed study of the two schools (see 3.3) gave the researcher an insight into the phenomenon as reflected from the wider context in which they are located. The inner circle represents the two multi-grade primary schools. The middle circle shows the community contexts of the two selected schools while the outer circle represents the context of the Education System. The arrows indicate the various contextual factors and influences that shape multi-grade primary schools such as political change, community needs (such as service delivery), governmental policies and tribal authority and relationships.



The diagram of a case study reflects what is stated in (Chapter 1, section 6.1) about the basic principle of the Systems Theory. This theory states that groups of people at different levels are viewed as interactive systems wherein the functioning of the whole depends on the interaction of all the parts. For example, in this study the socio-economic status of the communities impacts on the contexts of the local schools. Consequently, the contribution made by the Department of Basic Education in the allocation or provisioning of resources to the multi-grade primary schools in these communities may likely affect the quality of education positively or negatively.

By making use of a case study, the following benefits or strengths as mentioned in Rule and John (2011, p. 7) were enjoyed: It allows you to examine a particular instance in a great deal of depth; It focuses on the complex relations within the case and the wider context around a case as it affects the case; and It is very intensive. Through this research design, the perceptions and experiences of educators in multi-grade primary schools within their context as compared to other schools in the surrounding district could be explored.

A case study is very flexible in terms of what it studies and can use a wide variety of methods for data collection and analysis that can be used in combination with other research approaches e.g. the life history of a place of participants can be used to illuminate the particular case of the institution or programme (Rule & John 2011; Merriam, 1998). In this study, the researcher was able to use interviews, observations and document analysis in order to get a clear understanding of the perceptions and experiences of educators in multi-grade schools.

A case study makes it easy to manage a particular unit of study to be delineated and distinguished from other units. The research design assisted with the identification of the relevant research sites from other schools within the area that have a similar characteristic. Additionally, a case study uses multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process. Therefore, it was possible to determine in advance what evidence to gather and what data analysis techniques to use.

Finally, a case study is well known for its ability to catch unique features that may be lost in larger-scale data. In this study, even if two schools were selected, the researcher



was able to obtain interesting and valuable information which would not have been possible if the selected schools were five or more.

The main challenge of using a case study is that its results cannot be generalised. It can also not be used to develop a theory. According to Yin (2009) this limitation applies in an instance where a case is used to test an existing theory or to develop a new theory. In this study, information obtained from multi-grade schools will not be generalised to the broader context of the education system but to the theoretical propositions of previous studies.

Another weakness of case studies is that participants are likely to change their behaviour in the presence of the researcher. In order, avoid this, the researcher spent more time at the research sites. Finally, case studies are also criticised for biasness of the researcher, and this was avoided by reporting all evidence fairly.

3.3 SELECTION OF A CASE AND PARTICIPANTS

3.3.1 Description of sampling procedure

In this study, the selected case was two multi-grade primary schools in the Riba-Cross District of Education in the Limpopo Province. The two schools are situated in the rural communities of the district where there is a scarcity of economic resources and poor infrastructure. Only schools with a staff of three teachers or less were selected because those were the smallest schools with the lowest enrolment.

Schools with lower enrolment generally have 5 to 10 educators, while schools with the most learners have 12 to 19 educators. In this circuit, there are 17 primary schools and three of them have the lowest enrolment. The tables below indicate the learner enrolment of primary schools in the circuit under study as compared to its neighbouring circuit in the 2014 academic year.



Table 2: Statistics showing enrolment per primary school for 2014 academic year in the circuit under study

<i>District</i>	<i>Circuit</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Phase</i>	<i>Sector</i>	<i>Learners No</i>	<i>Educators</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>325</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>140</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>136</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>192</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>J</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>315</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>180</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>285</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>458</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>432</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>133</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>180</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Q</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>595</i>	<i>19</i>

In Table 2, the shaded rows indicate multi-grade primary schools while the rows, which are not shaded, are mono-grade primary schools. Ten primary schools out of seventeen schools have low learner enrolment and few educators. From the table it is evident that the circuit has primary schools that are more multi-grade. Schools A and F in the table formed part of the sample and in School E a request for permission was denied. In the



neighbouring circuit, however, there are nineteen primary schools and only six of these schools are multi-graded. Supposedly, this may be attributed to the fact that the communities where the schools are situated are closer to town where there is a dense population settlement.

Table 3: Enrolment statistics per school for 2014 academic year in the neighbouring circuit

<i>District</i>	<i>Circuit</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Phase</i>	<i>Sector</i>	<i>Learners</i>	<i>Educators</i>
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	33	2
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	826	23
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	130	4
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	102	5
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	305	9
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	N/A	N/A
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	242	10
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	64	3
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	741	20
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>J</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	232	7
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	46	3
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	637	20
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	744	17
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	945	23
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	389	10
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	317	10
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Q</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Independent</i>	87	6
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	237	8
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Public</i>	295	7
<i>Riba Cross</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Independent</i>	54	7

The schools and the participants were selected through three sampling strategies, namely snowball sampling, purposive sampling, and homogenous sampling. The schools were selected by using snowball sampling because the researcher met one of the participants in one of the educators' workshops. According to Creswell (2008) snowball sampling occurs when a researcher asks research participants to identify other individuals to become members of the sample.

In addition, purposeful sampling was also used. It assisted the process of intentionally selecting individuals and sites in order to understand the central phenomenon in detail. The two schools were chosen with an aim of understanding the reality of small schools



that have limited human resources. Both schools have the lowest enrolment compared to other schools in the circuit.

Although it was initially decided to use homogenous sampling, which is defined in Creswell (2008) as a sampling strategy whereby the researcher select sites or individual based on common characteristic, this sampling strategy no longer applied in this study. This was because in one of the selected schools access was declined; it was then decided to choose another school that had only two teachers. Therefore, the schools selected in this study have different characteristics, namely a staff of two and three educators.

3.3.2 Description of the community context

Village A is a strip of village situated between two mountains about forty kilometres north-east of Burgersfort. The first school in Table 2 is located in this village and will be referred to as School A. There are hundred and twenty-two households in this village; fifty four of the houses are RDP houses. In addition, there are approximately thirty shacks. Most of the houses are built on the high lying area of the village and most of the shacks can be found there. The houses are sparsely scattered at the foot of the mountains on both sides of a road that runs between Burgersfort and Penge. Visible effects of soil erosion mark the landscape of the village; a significantly sized and deep donga runs across the village, making it difficult for the houses to expand further.

In this village, there are ruins of houses and shops that are dilapidated. This could be attributed to the employment level of the residents as well as migration to other areas. According to information from the school a high percentage of the villagers are unemployed. Those who are working are semi-skilled or unskilled. Skilled and literate individuals have migrated to other neighbouring villages where there are better services.

There is also no running water, and only a spring on the other side of the mountain where people have to walk to on foot in order to collect it. The local school in this village also has three teachers, and the learner enrolment is less than one hundred. The economic standard of the village shows a high level of poverty, as there are a lot of shacks and RDP houses.



The most beautiful characteristic about the area is its closeness to nature. In the sky, there are no visible signs of air pollution and the landside is also clean showing no littering of landfill sites. This could probably be associated with the collection of waste material for recycling. At one of the opposite sides of the village where the grass is not burnt, the dry grass is long – reflecting the rich fertility of the soil. The area appears to be good for stock farming, because cattle and goats can be seen grazing in the field. The village has a close-knit community because the women walk in groups as they go to fetch water from the spring.



Photos 1 and 2: Pictures showing the village where School A is situated

Village B is situated in a mountainous area about 35km north of Village A. School F from Table 2 lies in this village and will be referred to as School B. The village is one of the few villages around the former Penge mine which is now closed. The village is about 75km from the nearest town of Burgersfort and has a sparse population of about ninety-one households. There are visible ruins of broken houses that belonged to people



who have left the village. The village is surrounded by huge mountains across the Olifants River.

Most of the inhabitants of this area were working in the mine before it was closed. When the mine was closed in 1990, most people were left unemployed. Because of this, most people depend on arable land by ploughing in the fields along the banks of the tributaries of the Olifants River. The villagers enjoy wide-open spaces and use it for arable farming. Some of them mainly depend on selling fruits and vegetables from their farmlands while others rely on selling firewood that they collect from the surrounding mountains.



Photo 3: Picture showing the village where School B is.

The flooding of the Olifants River in 1996 and 2000, however, forced many people, especially the younger generation and the educated ones to migrate to other villages that are situated on higher ground. Only the elderly generation and the poor who were unable to move were left behind. Lack of service delivery and poor infrastructure forced more people to move to other places. The result was a drop in the levels of learner enrolment in the local school; some teachers were redeployed to other schools that have higher learner enrolment.



3.3.3 The historical background of the schools.

School A from Village A was founded in 1992 as an initiative from the community members. It was a single block of three classrooms built from the contributions of the parents. When the school started, it had only two educators. One of the educators was qualified, having a Primary Teachers' Certificate (PTC) and the other one was under-qualified having a standard 8 or what is currently regarded as Grade 10. The school catered for Grade 1 to 4 learners.

In 1996, the government built a new block of four classrooms and the grades were increased, as was learner enrolment and the educator component. Problems originated from parental conflicts within the community and some parents started to relocate to other neighbouring areas. Some of the remaining parents took their children to the neighbouring schools that resulted in the drop in learner enrolment numbers and the redeployment of five teachers.

Community members founded school B in Village B in 1972. The school was built from mud bricks made by parents, but was unfortunately destroyed by heavy rains between 1995 and 1996. Community members organised concrete bricks and built a new block of three classrooms in 2000. Heavy thunderstorms destroyed the roof of the block and it was renovated in 2003. The government in 2010 built an additional block of four classrooms.

When the school started, it also had two educators; one was qualified with a Junior Primary Teachers' Diploma (JPTD) and acted as a principal. Learner enrolment in the school increased until the educator component was nine. The flooding of the Olifants River in 1996 and 2000 forced many families to relocate to other neighbouring areas. Learner enrolment in the school continued to drop until some of the educators were redeployed to other neighbouring schools. The school was left with three educators.

It is evident that the factors, which led to a decrease in learner enrolment and the consequent decrease in the number of educators in the two schools, vary. Apparently existing conflicts between parents in School A contributed to low learner enrolment, while in School B flooding of the local river led to reduced learner enrolment.



Table 4: The history of the two selected schools showing learner enrolment

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
School A	79	73	77	66	66	54	51	50	48	47	41	34
School B	109	112	110	108	70	72	69	68	68	64	59	56

3.3.4 Research participants

In this study, the participants were five instead of six teachers from two multi-grade primary schools. The educators in the two schools are all qualified and are permanently employed. Two of the educators have diplomas and junior degrees, and two more have postgraduate qualifications. Only one educator has less than twenty years teaching experience while the other educators have more than twenty years teaching experience. Although the educators have worked in the sampled schools for more than five years, they have also worked in other schools previously – these previous schools were not multi-graded.

In both schools, the educators are not staying in the village, but far from the school and are travelling in their own cars. Only one educator is a community member and has moved to a nearby township. The ages of the educators fall between 40 and 59 years and in both schools the principals are male. The educators came into the existing school for different reasons. Some came through promotion posts while others came through redeployment. Only one educator has been working in the school since the beginning of her teaching career.



Table 5: Information about the Research participants

School	Respondent	Gender (male/female) and residency	Age group	Teaching Experience and no of years in the school	Qualifications A, Certificates & Diploma B. Diploma & 1 Degree C. Diploma & 2 Degrees			
A	1	Male (non- resident)	50-59	20- 30yrs(8)			C	
	2	Female (non- resident)	40-49	10- 20yrs(9)		B		
B	1	Male (non- resident)	50-59	20- 30yrs(20)		B		
	2	Female (emigrated resident)	40-49	20- 30yrs(22)	A			
	3	Female (non- resident)	50-59	20- 30yrs(20)			C	

3.4 DATA GENERATION AND DOCUMENTATION

In this section, the methods used to generate data will be presented. Data collection is defined in Creswell (2008, p. 10) as the “process by which the researcher identifies and selects individuals for a study, get their permission to ask them questions or observe their behaviours”. Multiple methods of data generation were used in order to enhance trustworthiness. The data was collected using observations, interviews, and document



analysis. The aim was to get rich information in order to understand the perceptions and experiences of educators in multi-grade schools.

3.4.1 Observations

For purposes of this study, observations were used to generate data. An observation is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects, and occurrences without questioning or communicating with them (Creswell, 2013). This data generation method allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being observed. Personal experience and reflection were used in order to see how the setting was socially constructed in terms of power, communication lines, discourse, and language.

Observations were conducted both inside the classrooms with the educators and outside the classrooms without the educators on different occasions. The educators and the learners were observed at their schools in their classrooms. Although the educators were observed for thirty minutes, the observation period lasted for about one week per school. This was because during each visit to the research site, some noticeable events were observed.

Observation in qualitative research is defined in Forster (1996) as a way of generating information about the nature of the world as it unfolds indirectly to the researcher through the accounts of others. Through this method, information was ordered, interpreted and given meaning. The researcher discovered and understood the reality of educators' experiences in multi-grade primary schools.

In order for the researcher to make sense through observations, information was received from the surroundings, and also processed and interpreted. According to Forster (1996, p. 4) "observational data is often combined with information from conversations, interviews and documents to provide an in-depth picture of the perspectives and cultures of educators and pupils as far as possible, from an insider's point of view". In this particular study, the researcher played the role of an observer-participant who went with the educators into their classrooms and observed the actual



teaching-learning situations of multi-grade classrooms. The teacher-learner activities, learner interaction, as well as teacher-learner interaction were observed.

According to Forster (1996, p. 12) the observations are advantageous in providing detailed information about aspects of school which could not be produced by other methods. In this case, the researcher was able to see the actual contexts of multi-grade classrooms that could not be obtained from interviews or document analysis. In addition, observations allowed the researcher not to rely solely on what was said by participants about their schools during interviews (Maree, 2011). With regard to this study, what was discovered from the school contexts and the classroom settings was compared and contrasted to what was said by each individual in order to make evaluative judgements about the accuracy of their content.

The usefulness of observations includes that important information that may be taken for granted by participants may be observed by the researcher and be revealed through proper and careful planning (Creswell, 2005). The researcher was able to do this by taking pictures and making sketches to substantiate or supplement what was said or omitted by the participants.

One of the weaknesses of observations is that sometimes gatekeepers may not give permission (Mertens 2005; Foster 1996). In this case, the initial request to conduct observations in School A was not granted due to preparations towards mid-year examinations. This was resolved by negotiating another time. It was only after schools re-opened for the third term that observations were conducted at this school.

In addition, observations are criticised for making it difficult to observe the behaviour or phenomenon of interest because it is inaccessible (Mertens, 2005). In this study, educators were unable to provide lesson plans, however they were able to provide subject policies, assessment frameworks and pace setters which were mainly used as guidelines in their schools situations. Lastly, observations have a weakness of providing a partial view of the behaviour (Maree, 2011; Creswell 2005). The researcher took various pictures as evidence of what was actually happening. In order to avoid any biases and inaccuracies, the researcher tried as much as possible to reflect and maintain the role of researcher (Maree, 2011).



The researcher used an observation schedule and an observation protocol as guidelines during the observation process as is shown in Addendum I. Detailed sketches of the areas where observations occurred were made; the sketches of the classroom contexts are shown in disc that accompanies this study.

3.4.1.1 Observation record

The following observation record indicates where and when the individuals were observed.

Table 6: A Dates and times when educators were observed

Venue	PARTICIPANT	DATE	TIME
School A: Setting 1	Participant 1	08 August 2014	08h30
School A: Setting 2	Participant 2	08 August 2014	09h30
School B: Setting 1	Participant 1	10 June 2014	09h00
School B: Setting 2	Participant 2	10 June 2014	11h00
School B: Setting 3	Participant 3	06 June 2014	12h00

3.4.2 Interviews

Another data generation method the researcher used was interviews. In Cohen *et al.*, (2000, p.267) an interview is defined as “an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data.” It is a two-way conversation whereby the researcher asks the participant questions with the aim of collecting data in order to learn about the ideas, views, opinions, and behaviours of the participants in a particular situation.

An interview enables participants to discuss their interpretations of their own world and express their own opinions with regard to their own situations (Creswell, 2005). As a data generation method, an interview has the ability to allow pure information transfer. Interviews enabled participants to share their everyday life and define the situation in their own subjective way (Mertens, 2005). By using the interviews, it was possible to supplement them with two other data generation methods.

In order to get detailed descriptions from the participants (Cohen *et al.*, 2004) semi-structured interviews were used. Semi-structured interviews are often used by



researchers to corroborate data coming from other data sources (Maree, 2011). From these types of interviews, it was possible to ask predetermined, flexible questions and probed for more answers. These forms of interviews provided an opportunity to use open-ended questions in order to allow the participants to voice their experiences freely and to create the options of responding (Creswell, 2008). Because open-ended questions are flexible, they allowed for deeper probing and the clearing up of any misunderstandings. Cooperation was encouraged and rapport established with the participants.

Before the actual interview, an interview schedule as is shown in Addendum I, as well as an interview protocol were prepared. Permission was granted by the relevant institutions, namely the University of Pretoria, the Limpopo Province, the Riba-Cross District of Education and the selected schools (See Addendums A, B, C, D & E). Consent was also obtained from the educators who participated in this study (see Addendum F for an example of a letter of informed consent to educators).

Like any other data generation method, interviews also have their limitations. Respondents may be unwilling or uncomfortable to share all that the researcher hopes to explore. To deal with this situation in this case, a relationship of trust was established with the interviewees. Secondly, the respondents may not be familiar with the language or may not be fluent enough to express themselves. In this study, English and Sepedi were used, and participants were allowed to express themselves in their own mother tongue – which was later translated.

Interviews are also criticised for their ability to produce large volumes of data of low quality. In order to deal with this situation two other methods of data collection were used in order to integrate the information obtained. Finally interviewees may have poor listening skills. The researcher maintained eye contact and framed the questions, using gentle probing for further elaboration from respondents.

3.4.3 Documents and document analysis

In addition, data was generated by using document analysis which enabled the researcher to gain rich and relevant information. Document analysis was also helpful in



saving time for transcription of data (Creswell, 2008). Documents and records provide information and have an accessibility cost if they are available. However, the limitation of document analysis is that the documents may not be authentic or credible and their information may represent a limited population (Creswell, 2008). Lastly, documents are not always easily accessible or freely available.

Both private and public documents were analysed. Public documents included circulars, learners' attendance registers as well as policies and regulations from both the provincial department of education and the district. With regard to private documents, the researcher sought to analyse educators' portfolios, which were, however, not available. It was possible to analyse timetables, work schedules, pace setters and end of term schedules.

The data obtained from the documents provided a significant background to the descriptions of the contexts. Therefore, the researcher and the supervisor decided that data collected from document analysis be attached to the descriptions of the school contexts (See section 3.5.4).

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

After data were generated through observation, interviews, and document analysis, it was analysed and interpreted. Data analysis is the act of the researcher making sense of the raw data by means of interpreting and theorizing (Creswell 2005; Maree, 2011). The process commences from organising, reducing, and describing data and progresses to making conclusions and justifying the findings.

According to Mouton (2011, p. 108) analysis of data involves "breaking down" the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships. In Rule and John (2011, p. 75) it is highlighted that "data analysis and interpretation constitute a critical stage in the research process." The main aim was to comprehend the various constructive elements and to establish whether there was a link between the concepts, constructs, or variables.

Before analysis was done, the data was grouped according to data collection methods used in the study, observations, interviews, and document analysis (Creswell, 2008).



Data were also grouped according to sites and respondents, site A and B or respondent 1, 2 or 3. It even involved creation of files and decision to transcribe data manually or electronically.

The researcher analysed data inductively by starting from the general to the particular as is indicated by Creswell (2008). Inductive analysis of data provided the researcher with an opportunity to notice relationships between codes and to classify codes into significant themes.

Content analysis was also used in the data analysis and interpretation process. In Maree (2011, p.101) content analysis is regarded as an “inductive and iterative process where we look for similarities and differences in the text that would corroborate or disconfirm theory.” Through this process, a researcher is able to view raw data from various points with the intention of comprehending the central ideas in texts.

During data interpretation, the data was described textually and structurally as is stated in Maree (2011). Notes obtained from observations, texts from the interviews and document analysis were described in this study. Interpretation is defined in Mouton (2011, p.109) as the “synthesis of the researcher’s data into larger coherent whole.” Data interpretation assisted the researcher in establishing whether the findings support an existing theory or the researcher’s theoretical assumptions. In addition, the researcher gave descriptions of the research sites, the villages, and the participants. To make more sense of the data, sketches of the schools, classroom settings and sitting positions of the learners were made.

Data analysis and interpretation was an on-going and iterative process that involved data collection, processing, and analysis as is indicated by the following diagram:

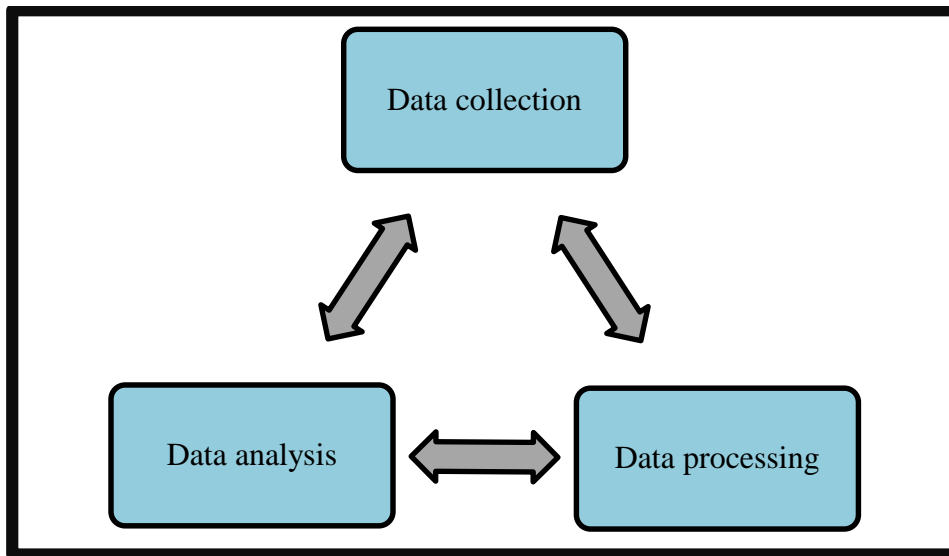


Diagram 4: An illustration of data analysis and interpretation

3.5.1 Analysis and interpretation of observations

During observation, an observation protocol as well as an observation schedule was used. For this study, the observations were analysed by checking whether patterns of educator and learner behaviour in the two schools converge or diverge. It also involved linking the observed data with what was mentioned by educators during interviews. The data obtained from observations will be discussed in Chapter 4.

3.5.2 Analysis and interpretation of interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five educators and tape-recorded. Before transcription, the data was organised into sites and participants as well as questions and participants' responses. The recorded data was organized for transcription, coding, and analysis.

3.5.2.1 Transcription and coding of interviews

The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, by first listening to the tapes and writing the words down. Thereafter, everything that was said by the respondents or participants was typed over electronically. In transcribing, the researcher created a table of three columns whereby the text was put in the centre, the codes in the left margin and the themes in the right margin. According to Creswell (2008, 251) coding is defined



as a “process of segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes”. The codes and the research questions were written in italics and the selected codes in the centre of the text were underlined.

The codes were labelled or given names. Codes are regarded as “labels” which are used in describing a piece of text or a picture. For this study, *in vivo* coding was used. In Creswell (2008, p. 640) *in vivo* codes are defined as “labels for categories (or themes) that are phrased in the exact words of participants rather than in the researcher’s words.” A total of 297 themes were identified and clustered together for reduction purposes. The reduction process involved comparison of themes to look for similarities and differences between them. From the reduction process eight major emerged.

The researcher wrote down some notes, and sub-divided the notes into small groups or clusters in order to look for patterns or categories which were refined to make tentative conclusions. According to Cohen, *et al.* (2004, 148) grouping of data involves matching, comparing and contrasting notes and putting them together to make a coherent whole. In this case, the data was prepared and organized, explored and coded. After the data was coded, findings were described and themes were formed or identified. These themes were represented and interpreted for reporting the clear meaning of the findings.



**Table 7: A section of transcribed interview with codes, text, and themes
School A: Participant 2**

Codes	Text (Researcher question and respondent's response)	Themes
<p><i>That is not easy. Teach children of three different grades at the same time. I am not giving enough work. We don't have a photocopier here. I have to divide the chalkboard into three sections. When busy with grade one's I have to give work to the grade two's and three's. They end-up making noise. Assessing at the same time is difficult. Learners from lower grades write activities belonging to the higher grades. We don't have grade R here. Grade ones need more attention because their level of ability is not the same as that one of grade twos and threes. It is not easy. I wish I can do more than this</i></p>	<p>1. <i>How do you perceive your duties as a facilitator in a multi-grade classroom?</i></p> <p>Eish...! Mam, that is not easy. (Pause: <i>Why?</i>). I have to teach children of three different grades at the same time. I am not giving the children enough work. (Pause: <i>What do you mean?</i>). Because we don't have a photocopier here, I have to divide the chalkboard into three sections. When I am busy with grade ones, I have to give work to the grade twos and threes, but they end-up making noise. Assessing them at the same time is also difficult, because some learners from lower grades end-up writing the activities belonging to the higher grades. In addition, we don't have grade R here so the grade ones need a lot of attention because their level of ability is not the same as that one of the grade twos and threes. Really Mam, it is not easy. (Gake kgone feela, feela ke a leka. {<i>I cannot but I try</i>}). I wish I can do more than this.</p>	<p>Perception, challenge, self-judgement, challenge, strategy, strategy, discipline, administration, challenge, challenge, responsibility, perception, self- judgement</p>



3.5.2.2 Creation of major themes or categories

After transcription was completed, the themes from each question were grouped according to research site and participants. In both schools, the themes showed similarities and differences. The following themes or categories emerged:

Table 8: An example of groups of themes from each participant

Site and respondent	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
B- P3	Role, challenge, lack of time, responsibilities, perception, roles, consequence	Roles, challenge, lack of time, responsibilities, perception, roles, consequence,	Strategy, context, challenge, diversity, strategy, lack of time, challenge, consequence, consequence, strategy	Duty, policy, challenge, duty, lack of time, strategy, commitment, sacrifices, strategy, strategy, perception, strategy, strategy, human rights.	Opinion, commitment, opinion, policy, opinion, commitment, opinion, challenge, time, challenge.

The clusters of themes were analysed, sorted, and reduced to form small sub-themes. In the reduction process, similar themes were put under one big category. Each of the themes that emerged was represented in a diagram and will be discussed in the following chapter. An example of the grouped themes is shown below:



3.5.2.3 Grouping or clustering of themes

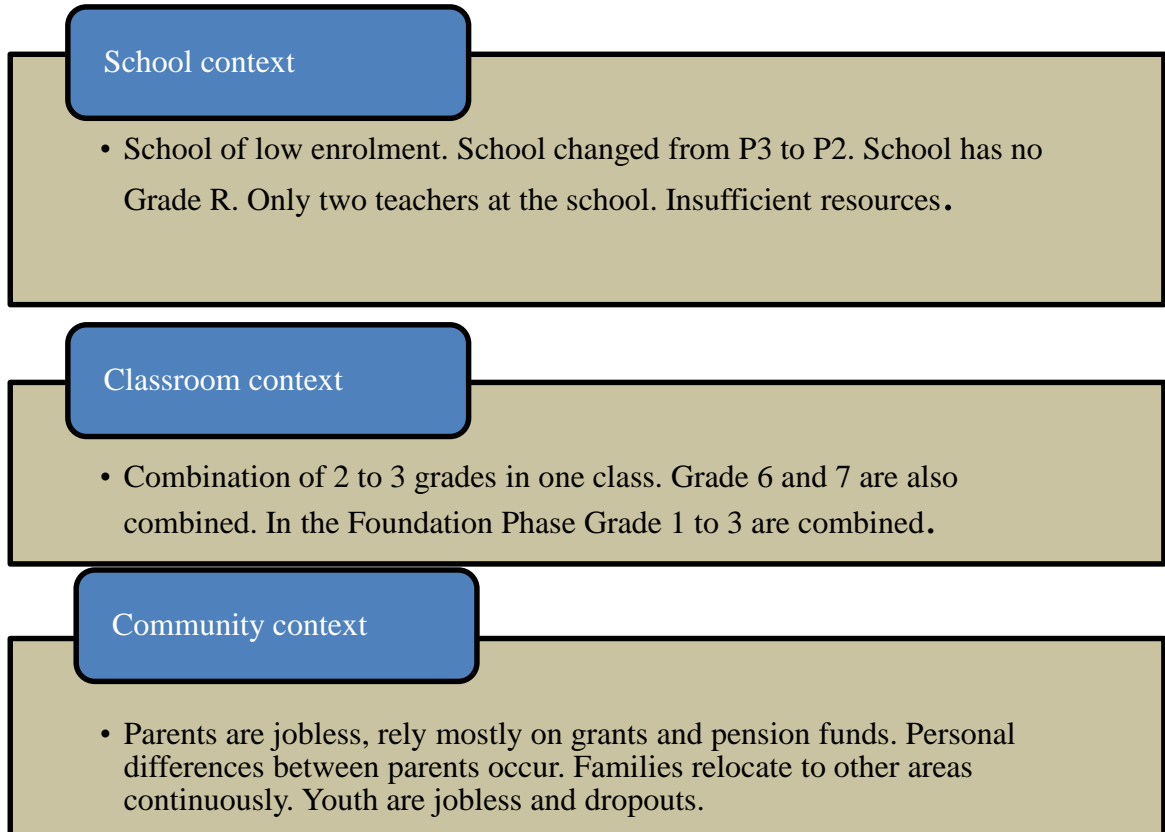


Diagram 5: Theme 2: Context

3.6 QUALITY CRITERIA

In this section, the researcher elaborates on the quality criteria which were used and how they were implemented. Quality criteria are useful to establish the authenticity of the study. Authenticity is often referred to as the trustworthiness of a study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 991), trustworthiness is often defined in terms of confirmability, credibility, dependability and transferability in qualitative research.

3.6.1 Confirmability

This is one of the standards or principles of verifiability. It requires the researcher to support or establish the authenticity of the data collected. This was ascertained by articulating any biases and assumptions with regard to data collected. Direct quotes were also given in order to support the findings and the choice of methodology was



clearly explained. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 991) confirmability refers to the extent to which findings are based on data obtained from interviews and observations rather than the researcher's own personal constructions. In order to do this, reference was made to literature and findings by other authors that confirm the interpretations in this particular study.

3.6.2 Credibility

The concept of credibility shares a common meaning with truth-value. It deals with the value of truth or the credibility of information in a study. According to Mertens (2005, p. 180) this can be ascertained by maintaining that correspondence between that which is being researched and the participant's information. In order to achieve this, what the participants said during the interviews was compared to the information obtained during observation in class and from the documents.

3.6.3 Transferability

Transferability is often used synonymously with applicability. It refers to the applicability of the results of a test or study to other similar situations. For the purposes of this qualitative study, techniques such as purposive sampling and snowball sampling were made use of. This provided a sample that was representative of the bigger actual situation. Thick descriptions of the research site, the time and duration of the research process were also provided (Mertens, 2005, p. 183).

3.6.4 Dependability

The concept of dependability is also referred to as consistency. This is the ability of a test or study to produce the same results when applied repeatedly. In order to ascertain the dependability of this particular study, each step of the research process was clearly described to ensure quality and relevancy (Mertens (2005). According to Cohen *et al.*, (2000) dependability can be ensured through triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, member checking and persistent observation in the field. For the purposes of this study, trustworthiness was based on methodological triangulation. Triangulation is a scientific concept that relates to a technique applied in the technological process during construction to strengthen structures or objects. Triangulation involved the use



of multiple sources for data generation, namely interviews, observations and documents analysis.

For purposes of making this study dependable, data was collected by using three data collection methods. During interviews, questions were repeated in order to verify the consistency of the participants' answers.

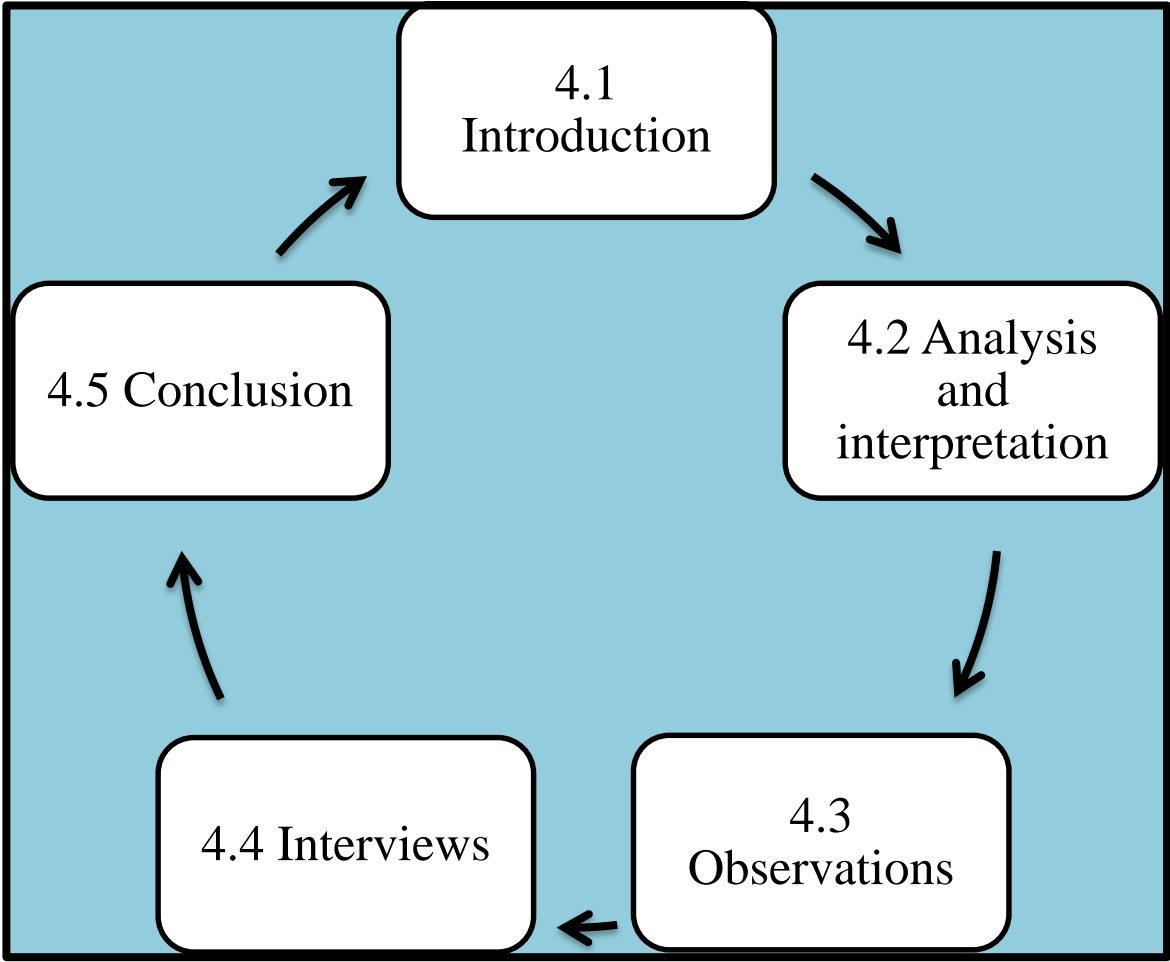
CONCLUSION

In this chapter, aspects dealing with the research process of this particular study were discussed. The paradigmatic perspective has been discussed under research approach and meta-theoretical paradigm. The research methodology involved a brief discussion of research design, selection of a case and participants as well as strategies that were used for collecting data. In addition, data analysis and interpretation have been discussed in detail. A discussion of quality criteria, ethical considerations as well as the limitations of the study was also included.

In the following chapter, the findings of the study will be revealed through the sequential presentation of the case. In the presentation information, which were collected from the research sites through the three data collection methods used during data collection namely, observation, interviews and document analysis, will be used.



CHAPTER 4
DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTEXT AND DATA





CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF SCHOOL CONTEXTS AND DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the chosen methodology for collection of data during this study was described. The reasons for choosing each data collection method and the instruments used were also presented in the previous chapter. Data was collected by means of a qualitative approach and an interpretive paradigm. A case study design was used.

The researcher used three data collection methods, namely: semi-structured interviews; non-participant observations; and document analysis. Two multi-grade primary schools were selected using three sampling techniques, i.e. snowball sampling, purposive sampling, and homogenous sampling. Five educators served as participants.

In this chapter, a detailed description of the schools' contexts and the classroom settings will be presented together with their sketches and photographs which formed part of observation for clarity. Thereafter, the data was analysed, described and interpreted from documents and observations. The data collected from interviews will be discussed in Chapter 6 as the main essence of the findings of this study.

4.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOLS

School A consists of one block made up of four classrooms. One of the classrooms serves as a principal's office. The old dilapidated block is used as a make-shift kitchen (Photo 6). On the veranda, in front of the classrooms there are visible holes in the ceiling (Photo 4 and 5). According to information, the school experiences constant vandalism, whereby food provided for learners through the NSNP (National Schools Nutrition Programme) is constantly stolen by either thugs or hungry people from the community.

The school toilets are falling apart and they are not safe to be used (Photo 7). Firewood is used for cooking learners' food (Photo 8). The food is stored in one of the classrooms on top of the tables (Photo 9). The informal ECD (Early Childhood Development) outside the school also shows signs of poverty. It is a shack of corrugated iron with a



single window. Outside the shack, old tyres are lying around and are used by children for playing during break. In this school the teaching-staff is made up of two educators.



Photos 4 and 5: Holes in the ceiling at School A



Photo 6: Old block of classrooms with make shift kitchen



Photo 7: Toilets at School A



Photo 8: Firewood in one of the dilapidated classrooms



Photo 9: Food storage at School A



School B consists of two blocks of classrooms of which one is bigger with four classrooms while the other has three classrooms. One of the classrooms of the smaller block serves as an office and one serves as a food storage. The third classroom in the smaller block is used to store broken furniture and old books. Behind the principal's office, there is a makeshift kitchen.

Compared to School A, School B is better resourced in terms of infrastructure. There are new toilets that are better than the toilets at School A with regard to safety. The learners' food is stored safely in a separate classroom unlike in School A where the food is stored on tables in the classrooms with other items. According to the principal the school rarely experiences vandalism. A single incident of vandalism occurred, when solar panels, which were used for the telephone landline, were stolen; this affected many schools in the area (See the steel frames behind the block of classrooms in Photo 11).



Photo 10: New block of four classrooms at School B



Photo 11: Old block of 3 classrooms at School B



Photo 12: Kitchen at School B

Water is mainly supplied to the school by water pipes from the streams in the mountains. The streams serve as the main source of water for the village and the school. This water is used in the households and for arable farming. Some community members have made gardens on the school grounds for planting sugar cane, groundnuts, vegetables and fruit trees. In this school the staff component is made up of three educators. The learner enrolment in the school is less than one hundred. The sketches of the research sites, School A and School B (cf. attached disk).

From the discussion above it is evident that the contexts of the schools play a role in the quality of the learners' education. Donald, Lazarus, and Lolwana (2004) believe that if an educational environment is disadvantaged, it is likely to cause barriers that result from "poor teaching, inadequate resources and ineffective curriculum or inappropriate educational policies". In their argument they highlight that "...learner needs are the result of commonly occurring extrinsic factors, which are barriers of context relating to the socio-economic and political structure of society and the resources and responses of particular communities, families within the structure" (Donald *et al.*, 2004, p. 22).

The arguments of the two authors make sense because the contexts of multi-grade schools are disadvantaged by many factors. Firstly, the schools in this study are disadvantaged by the geographic location and poor service delivery. Secondly, educational policy determines the number of educators and funds to be allocated in each school. Thirdly, socio-economic and political factors in the communities of the two



schools play a role in the education of the learners. Low literacy levels make it difficult for the parents to be employed. Those who are employed work as migrant workers in the neighbouring town about 75km from the villages. Most parents work in the fields where they cultivate and sell crops as it is their only means of income. Therefore, assisting their children with educational matters is considered something like a milestone.

4.3 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DOCUMENTS

The information obtained from the different documents provided rich information. Therefore, the researcher and supervisor agreed that the rich data from the documents should form part of the school contexts. In the study, both private and public documents were analysed although some were not easily accessible. For the sake of privacy, some of the information revealed by certain documents was not permitted to be disclosed. For purposes of this study, public documents refer to the documents that do not belong to a single individual, but belong to the school and the Department. They are as follows:-

4.3.1 Class registers

These are the documents used by educators to record enrolment of learners in each grade. They also provide a record of daily attendance of learners to school, as learner attendance is recorded each day of the term throughout the year. In addition to learner attendance, class registers also indicate the patterns of learner absenteeism. Another part of the class register is used to record the personal information of each learner's parents, such as who they are, where they live, their type of work and personal contact details. This particular part of the register indicated that most of the parents – especially the mothers – are unemployed. It also indicated that some of the learners are staying with their grandparents as their guardians. The reasons for this may include migrant labour of the young parents as well as death-related matters.

Information from class registers indicated that learner attendance in both schools is good with low levels of absenteeism. According to the educators, absenteeism in the two schools is associated with ill health whereby learners have to travel to the hospital



in the neighbouring village to seek medical help. Additionally, the class registers revealed the learner enrolment in each grade as is shown in Table 9 below:

Table 9: Learner enrolment in the two schools during the time of this study

School	G-R	G-1	G-2	G-3	G-4	G-5	G-6	G-7	Total
A	00	12	05	04	04	04	03	02	34
B	08	07	11	04	09	01	06	04	56

Previous class registers indicated two different patterns in which learner enrolment in the two schools decreased. In School A, there is a continuous drop in the number of learners, presumably due to the perpetual disputes of conflict between families in the village. In School B, however, the trend shows a slight stability in the decrease in the number of learners. The attributing factor could be the newly constructed bridge across the Olifants River and the supply of electricity in the village. According to the principal of School B, new shacks in the village belonged to some of the residents who have migrated to the nearby township in search of services. This is shown in Table 10:

Table 10: Trends of learner enrolment in the two schools

School	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
A	79	73	77	66	66	54	51	50	48	47	41	34
B	109	112	110	108	70	72	69	68	68	64	59	58

The class registers also revealed information about the socio-economic background of families from which the learners come. In School, A most of the data was not available, due to the overwhelming workload the two educators are faced with. The information in Table 11 below was obtained from School B.



Table 11: Socio-economic background of families for different learners

Grade	Boys	Girls	Total	Father available	Mother available	Father working	Mother working	Father deceased	Mother deceased
R	4	4	8	1	8	-	-	-	-
1	3	4	7	1	7	1	-	-	-
2	3	9	12	9	11	4	-	1	1
3	4	1	5	5	4	1	-	-	1
4	4	5	9	7	8	3	-	2	1
5	1	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	-
6	4	2	6	4	5	2	1	2	1
7	5	5	10	10	9	5	-	-	1

Table 9 shows that most of the mothers are not working. This is likely because most of the fathers in the area are working as unskilled or semi-skilled labourers in the neighbouring towns or mines. Most of the parents mainly rely on arable farming in the village. Because of this, some learners are staying with grandparents as their guardians.

4.3.2 EDUCATOR’S TIME BOOK

Data obtained from these documents showed a drop in the number of educators in relation to the number of learners enrolled in each year. For purposes of this study this may be associated with Departmental regulations of allocation of posts. According to the formula of teacher-learner ratio the number of learners enrolled in a particular school will determine the number of educators to be allocated to the school for that particular year. This is shown in Table 12 below:

Table 12: Number of teachers for School A and B from 2003

School	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
A	05	05	05	03	03	02	02	02	02	02	02	02
B	05	04	04	04	04	04	04	04	04	04	03	03

Information from the time book further shows that educator absenteeism is rarely associated with illness or personal matters. On most occasions educator absenteeism is due to educators’ attendance to meetings, workshops, briefing sessions and other matters such as memorial services and union meetings.



4.3.3 Circulars

Analyses of the Departmental circulars provided a great deal of information. They also varied in content and sphere of management or authority. The circulars were invitational, instructional, or informational, and it was noted that some events fell on the same day at the same time. It can be assumed that these events were arranged based on the assumption that each school will be able to delegate an individual for each occasion. For example, on one of the dates there was a written work audit at the circuit level, a management meeting at district level, and a provincial workshop. On another date, there were two briefing sessions for two different subjects at two different venues simultaneously. In such situations, the educators say that their decision on which event to attend mostly depends on a cost-benefit analysis.

4.3.4 Schedules

These are end of term documents that indicate the performance of learners in each grade. Schedules show how learners in a particular grade performed during the year and it also indicates the promotion of learners from one grade to another. Interestingly, even if the classes are multi-graded, the schedules for each term are not combined. Each grade has its own schedule at the end of each term. For example, even if Grade 6 and 7 are combined, there is a schedule for Grade 6 separate from that of Grade 7.

4.3.5 Departmental policies and regulations

The information provided by subject policies, work schedules, assessment frameworks and pace setters showed different patterns of similarities and variations. Firstly, the grades that belong to different phases and the subjects and medium of instruction for different phases are not the same.

In Foundation Phase, there are four subjects and the language of instruction is in their home language with the exception of English, which is taught as First Additional Language (FAL). Although the number of subjects and time allocation for each subject is the same in Foundation Phase, the level of difficulty of the assessment tasks differs. The grades for Foundation Phase range from Grade 1-3. Grade R does not form part of



Foundation Phase and has only three subjects while there are four subjects in Grade 1-3.

Secondly, in Intermediate Phase, there are six subjects and the language of teaching is English, with the exception of Sepedi which is taught as home language or mother tongue. Intermediate Phase ranges from Grade 4-6. Even in this case the number of subjects, the number of formal assessment tasks and the time allocation for each subject is the same. However, the content coverage and level of difficulty of the subject matter is not the same.

In Senior Phase, there are nine subjects and the medium of instruction is English, excluding Sepedi that is taught in the same way as in Intermediate Phase. Senior Phase ranges from Grade 7-9, although Grades 8 and 9 form part of secondary school. The number of formal assessment tasks for the grades in Senior Phase is the same, although the content coverage and level of difficulty for each subject differ from grade to grade. An example of content coverage in Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase is contained in the attached to the disk. The following tables give an indication of time allocation and formal assessment tasks:

Table 13: Time allocation or instructional time in the Intermediate Phase

Subject	Hours per week
Home Language	6
First Additional Language	5
Mathematics	6
Natural Sciences and Technology	3,5
Social Sciences	3
Life Skills	4



Table 14: Formal Assessment Tasks for Intermediate Phase per year

Summary of Formal Assessment		Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Total
Home Language		2	2	2	2	8
First Additional Language		2	2	2	2	8
Mathematics		2	2	2	3	9
Natural Sciences and Technology		2	3	3	4	12
Social Sciences	Geography	1	1	1	1	4
	History	1	1	1	1	4
Life skills	Creative Arts	1	1	1	1	4
	Physical Education	1	1	1	1	4
	Personal and Social Wellbeing	1	1	1	1	4

4.4 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF OBSERVATIONS

The researcher’s observation of educators in the two schools was like a journey which could be told as a story. The reasoning for this being that what was observed outside the classrooms also adds to the rich contexts of the schools. The story is made up of two parts in each school. The first part deals with the first visit to the schools and the second part deals with the days of classroom observations.

4.4.1 Observation as a story

A SHORT GLIMPSE: THE LIVES OF TEACHERS AND LEARNERS IN MULTI-GRADE PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

PART I

My journey was approximately similar to the one of Alice in wonderland. The only difference is that in Alice’s dream she met a white rabbit and a host of other animals. In my story the story is about a grey rabbit, and the journey was a reality of experiences.

On my first visit to School A, I was overwhelmed with mixed emotions. I was anxious about not knowing what to expect and



afraid of rejection and disappointment. At the same time I was excited and curious of the fact that I did not know what I will discover. On entering the school premises I thought for a school of only two educators, I will be greeted by a commotion of learners' noise.

To my surprise it was very quiet. Adding to my surprise, smoke was coming out of the windows of one of the classrooms that appeared to have been a block of three classrooms. I later learnt that the room serves as a makeshift kitchen. I was greeted by a friendly lady in casual attire. I was later told that she cooks meals for learners.

She directed me to the first classroom of the new block in which she said she saw the principal entering. After several knocks the learners responded in a group that the principal was in Grade 7. They were alone and were busy writing down classwork from the chalkboard. On enquiring where Grade 7 was, one boy hurried towards me and pointed to the last class in the block. I could hear them whispering to each other saying "Maybe she is our new teacher."

I found the principal busy teaching and waited in the adjacent classroom which was serving as an office. When the principal finally came I thought I will hear noises from the two unattended classes but there was none. I clarified the purpose of my visit. When all formalities were done, the principal offered to show me the school surroundings.

There was no sign of littering, the school was clean. In the school yard there was a single Jojo tank, old corrugated iron toilets and older concrete toilets which I learnt were not used as they were full. The school had no libraries or laboratories, only steel cabinets used for storage. The toilets are slanted and clearly can fall anytime. When site-seeing was done I left after making an appointment for my next visit.

PART II



On my next visit to School A, I observed the educators and learners in their classroom settings. I went with the principal from class to class to read to them my letter of information explaining my presence in their school. Before the letter was read the learners' faces were full of smiles as they giggled happily. After the letter was read I could see the disappointment on their faces because they were still thinking that I was going to be their new educator.

In the first classroom of my observation was a Maths lesson about fractions and the educator was using only one textbook. At one stage the educator called the learners to the front to show them diagrams and pictures from the book. It was a struggle of survival of the fittest as the learners hurried and pushed each other for better positions.

Before the lesson ended the educator said to me: "I cannot call learners individually to the table for illustrations, because in our school time is always not on our side. Right now when I am here the other group is alone". I left the class to go and see the group that was unattended.

The learners were alone, huddled in one corner of the classroom doing English activities. Each learner had a book. It was evident from their puzzled faces that they did not understand what they were doing. It was as if they expected or hoped that I would teach them.

In the third classroom the teacher was giving tests to the learners. The chalkboard was fully divided into sections on which questions were written. In one part of the classroom books were lying on the floor. From time to time one learner walked to the cupboard to look for a book. According to the teacher, learners had to take books out of the cupboards to use the diagrams in answering the questions because there was no space and time for drawing.

To clarify my confusion she said: "Giving a proper test with pictures and diagrams is always a challenge for us, because the chalkboard was meant for one grade, not three. Conducting a test for these learners is tiresome because I have to write for



each grade on the board and thereafter move between the learners to ensure that the lower grades are writing the right stuff'. She also added that a test of this nature can take a day or two because younger learners write slowly.

PART III

My first visit to School B was less stressful compared to the previous school. Because the school is situated in the most remote village, I expected to find dilapidated buildings in the school. The surroundings was clean. There was a big garden next to the entrance. It was evident that water was not a problem here.

Outside one learner was coming from the toilets and was running towards the classes. I called her to ask where the principal's office was. She pointed the office out to me but told me that the principal was in their class. A learner came to tell me to wait in the principal's office. After waiting a couple of minutes the principal came and I explained the purpose of my visit.

I was informed that they have been expecting me. Two of the colleagues were introduced to me and returned to their classes. Then the principal offered to show me the surroundings. Inside the office were lots steel cabinets with books and files. Behind the principal's office there was a small room serving as a kitchen. Inside this room there were big pots and a heap of firewood. Unlike in School A, food was stored in a separate classroom. Just like in the other school there was order. No noise was coming from the classrooms. The only noise audible was from the neighbouring secondary school.

Outside there were two more gardens, with vegetables such as butternut, spinach, beetroot and tomato. I was told that the gardens were not done by the learners but by community members. The classrooms were not visited to avoid disturbance. We agreed on the day I would be returning for classroom observations and interviews.



PART IV

During this visit, School B teachers and learners were observed in their classrooms. Before observations were conducted in each classroom I read a letter of information to them. My first observations in this school were done in a classroom containing four grades and the classroom was a bit congested.

The educator started by giving activities to the Grade R and Grade 1 students. While the educator was busy with the two younger groups, the Grade 2s and 3s were busy whispering to each other. Some were giggling together and some were writing things on pieces of papers and passing them to each other under the desks.

After some time she focused her attention to the higher grades. It was a Sepedi lesson dealing with phonics. While she was still busy teaching, the Grade R and Grade 1 students went to submit their activities for marking. Then, frustrated the educator calmly and kindly requested them to sit down. Slowly, with their heads bowed down they took their seats.

Out of boredom and being aware that their educator was focused on the older learners, the younger learners started disturbing the older ones. All the learners were excited as I was taking pictures and they were posing happily. When I bid them farewell, their happy faces changed. I later learned from their educator that they thought I was going to be their new educator.

Observation in the second classroom setting was not as eventful as in the previous one. No misbehaviour was observable – probably due to the lower number of learners. In this class there were nine Grade 4 learners and one Grade 5 learners. The lesson was about degrees of comparison. At the end of the lesson the educator said: - “This is an exceptional class, because normally we teach content of the higher grade. For this year we have only one learner in Grade 5, and it will be unfair if we teach Grade 5 content to these many Grade 4 learners.”

The last classroom that was observed had Grade 6 and 7 learners. It was a Maths lesson about the rounding-off of numbers to the nearest 10, 100 and 1000. Just like in the previous



class, no misbehaviour occurred. Unlike in the lower grades these learners were shy, maybe it was because they laughed each time when one of them got the answer incorrect.

This marks the end of my observational journey into multi-grade schools. Although it was not the same as the one of “Alice in wonderland”, I met the white rabbit and the mad hatter in my own way.

4.4.2 The classroom settings

The classroom setting in the two schools vary from grade to grade. In School A, there is no Grade R, and therefore Grades 1, 2 and 3 are combined in one classroom. Grades 4 and 5 are in one class and Grades 6 and 7 in another classroom. The sketches for the classroom settings of both schools are contained in the attached disk. The classroom settings for both schools were described separately with an understanding that even if classes in a school are different subsystems, they are overlapping (Donald *et al.*, p. 2002). It was also understood that boundaries occur between systems (School A and B) and that the functioning of the systems depends on the flexibility or rigidity of the subsystems (classrooms) (Donald *et al.*, 2002).

4.4.2.1 Classroom settings at School A

Observations were done in three classroom settings at School A. Classroom setting no. 1 belonged to Intermediate Phase and the learners were seated in two groups, namely one for Grade 4 and another one for Grade 5. The educator was teaching fractions and was using one textbook. Because learners did not have the textbook, they surrounded the educator’s table to see the diagrams and pictures for clear understanding, which depicted the negative impact of shortage of resources in multi-grade schools. This is indicated in the photos below:



Photo 13 and 14: Learners standing around the teacher's table

At the same time in classroom setting no. 3, there were Grade 6 and 7 learners. These learners were unattended and were busy with activities from English workbooks. Some learners were seated in a group while others were seated individually. The learners' behaviour depicted a sense of independence and discipline. However it was unclear whether they understood what they were reading because some appeared unfocused on the work.

The classroom setting also reflected the three aspects of Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory. According to this theory the social context, language and mediation play a role in the child's cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). In the situation above, for a Grade 6 child in a multi-graded classroom where the educator is attending another class, doing the assignments alone will be a big task if the language is too complex and there is no assistance from the educator or the other Grade 7 learners as is shown in the photos below:



Photo 15 and 16:- Grade 6 and 7 learners alone in the class

Classroom setting no. 2 consisted of Foundation Phase learners, Grades 1, 2 and 3. The educator was busy giving a test to the learners. Firstly the chalkboard was divided into sections, after which the educator wrote the first question down for all the different grades in each section. After writing down the question, the educator waited for the learners to answer that particular question, before proceeding by writing down the next questions. This was done until all the tests were completed.

The classroom setting was affecting the speed at which the learners were writing. According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecosystemic Perspective, a child's development is shaped by proximal interactions which are affected by person factors, process factors, contexts and time. In this instance the classroom space was used for book cupboards, food on tables (see Photo 9) and the three groups of learners. The learners were seated in groups according to their grades. For learners who are physically short some words were not visible and they had to stand up frequently to see clearly. Additionally, the



learners had to go to the cupboards to look at diagrams or drawings (see the story). Other pictures are displayed on the walls of the classroom (See Photo 17).

According to the educator, tests can take a day or two because at the school, there is no photocopier and they solely rely on using the chalkboard. The educator also mentioned that the classroom is convenient for the storage of food because it is the only one with burglar bars on the windows.



Photo 17: Grade 1, 2 and 3 learners writing a test

4.4.2.2 Classroom settings at School B

In School B, Grades R, 1, 2 and 3 are combined in one classroom, Grades 4 and 5 are together in one classroom and Grades 6 and 7 are in another classroom. The classroom settings showed variations in the seating arrangement of learners. Although the learners were seated in groups, the members of each group belonged to the same grade. Some classrooms had more space, while others were congested. Learners in the lower grades were sitting close to one another, probably because there were four grades in one classroom while learners in the higher grades had more space.

Classroom Setting 1 (Photos 18 and 19) belonged to Foundation Phase and the learners were seated in heterogeneous groups according to their grades. There were charts displayed on the walls as well as a notice board at the back of the classroom similar to



that of School A. It was a clean class with approximately thirty learners. Classroom setting No. 2 (see Photo 21) consisted of Grade 4 and 5 learners. Charts, posters and notice boards were also displayed on the walls, although they were not as many as in the previous setting.



Photo 18 and 19: Grade R, 1, 2 and 3 in the classroom setting 1

Unlike Classroom Setting no. 1, this class had fewer learners – ten learners in total. In Classroom Setting No. 3 (Photo 20) there were no charts and posters on the walls as compared to the other two classes. The only things on the walls were calendars and old time-tables. In addition, there was broken furniture stacked neatly in one corner of the classroom.





Photo 20 and 21:- Classroom setting 2 and 3

In both schools the grouping of learners in the phases was the same, although there was a minute difference in the Foundation Phase in School A as it has no Grade R. Another noticeable similarity was that in both schools the lower grades had more learners than the higher grades. Lastly, there were no charts or posters displayed in the classrooms for Grades 6 and 7 in both schools. For a clearer understanding of the classroom settings, the sketches are included in the attached disk.

4.4.3 Teacher-learner activities

In addition to classroom settings, the researcher observed teacher-learner activities, learner interaction and involvement as well as teacher-learner interaction. As in the case of classroom settings, the teacher-learner activities are discussed according to phases. This is done to illustrate that even while the phases form part of a whole, their interaction, and interdependence still affect each other indirectly.

4.4.3.1 Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase

In the Foundation Phase at School A teacher-learner activities were not very clear as compared to School B because the learners were writing a test. Interestingly, the learners kept on going to the library cupboard to check for pictures in the books. The educator explained that, “For a test of this nature the learners have to share the books this way because the books are few. The pictures in the books cannot be photocopied, as we do not have a photocopier here. Even if I can draw the pictures, the space on the



chalkboard is not enough for the other grades. Besides, there is no time for making drawings on the board.” This is shown in the photos below:



Photo 22: Books used by learners

Photo 23: No space on the chalkboard

There was, however, a similarity in the manner in which the educators paid attention to the younger learners. In School A, in the Foundation Phase, the movement of the educator concentrated more on the Grade 1s to make sure that they were answering the right questions. In the same phase in School B, the teacher started by first giving Grade R and Grade 1 learners their own activities in their workbooks. Thereafter her attention was shifted to the Grade 2s and 3s. At first the topic was introduced, and then explanations, descriptions and discussions were made by the educator (See Photos 26 to 29 in this Chapter).

During observations in both schools, it was noticeable that educators were not only faced with the challenge of curriculum management as is indicated in Chapter 2 (2.6.2) but also how to deal with classroom and time management. Apparently this was due to the fact that the Foundation Phase in both schools was overcrowded compared to the



other two phases as is indicated in the school settings in (cf. attached disk.). For example in School A, in the Foundation Phase, the educator's lesson was interrupted by the attention needed by the younger learners. Some learners kept on asking which question to write because the chalkboard was divided into three sections.

Although the educator demonstrated her ability of using peer tutoring by asking one learner to show her classmates which tasks they were supposed to write, more time was needed for giving explanations and switching back and forth between grades. Therefore the educator could not attend to special needs learners who possibly required more attention.



Photo 24: Foundation Phase learner at School A showing her peers what to write

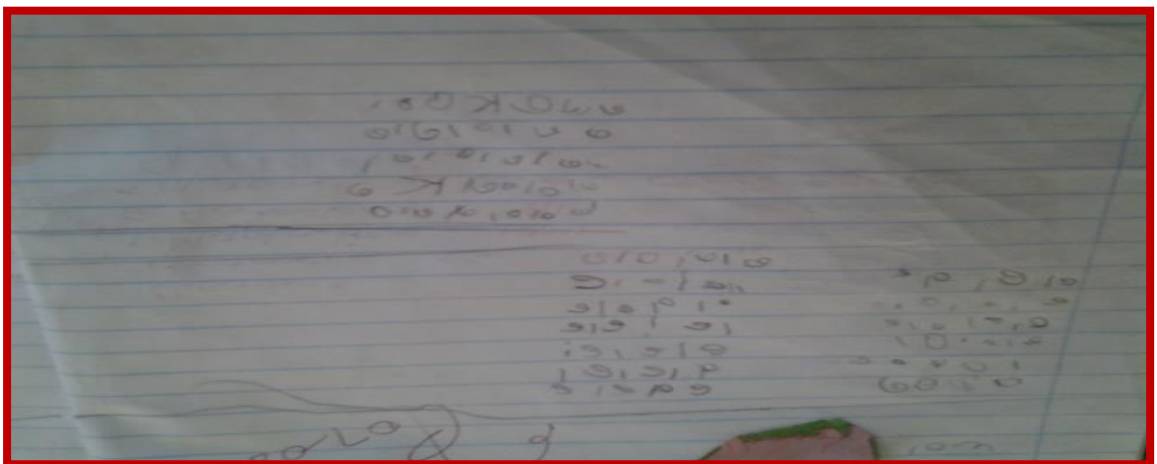


Photo 25: The page of a special needs learner



In School B the educator's time was consumed by giving and explaining tasks to the Grade R and 1 learners and then focusing on the Grade 2s and 3s. While she was still busy teaching the higher grades, the learners in the lower grades wanted to submit their tasks for marking. Even when the educator was giving individual attention, the attention was not directed to one learner but to one grade.



Photo 26: Learners submitting their tasks for marking at School B





Photo 27-28: Teacher monitoring test to Grade 1-3 learners in School A



Photo 29-30: Grade 1 and R learners before and after submitting their tasks in School B

One of the basic elements of the Systemic Theory is cycles of cause and effect (Donald et al, 2006). According to this aspect, an action in one part of a system is not likely “to cause an effect in another part of the system, but triggers and affect one another cyclically”. If the educators in primary multi-grade schools are insufficiently trained then the way in which they plan, manage and organize the teaching and learning process in their classrooms will be negatively affected. Shortages of resources also have an impact on the way educators plan their lessons. Therefore, learners with special needs such as the one referred to in Photo 24 will not be benefitting from multi-grade schools. Then the aspects of inclusivity and equal education for all are not wholly catered for.

As for Intermediate Phase in both schools, the educators asked questions in order to determine prior knowledge. Firstly the topic was introduced after which the concepts were clarified, and demonstrations were made. Although the subjects were not the



same, both educators used both two languages for instruction. This is mainly because it is in this phase when integration begins, meaning that learners start to be taught in English instead of their mother tongue. No group activities were given because the groups were small and not proportional; especially in School B where there were nine Grade 4 learners and one Grade 5 learner.

4.4.3.2 Senior Phase

The Grade 6 and 7 learners in School A were alone because the educator was busy teaching the Grade 4 and 5 learners. Despite this, the learners were busy with their English activities from their textbooks. In support of this Pridmore (2007, p. 562) says “In a multi-grade class the educator cannot be constantly available to teach each student and need to use strategies that encourage students to support each other’s learning”. The main difference between School A and B is that in School A one of the classes has to be left unattended because there are only two teachers, while in School B there are three educators.

In School B the teacher’s attention is focused more on Grade 6 than on Grade 7, because the topic for the day was new to them. The educator made use of various methods, of which one that was particularly enjoyed by the learners entailed doing activities on the chalkboard. In both schools the chalkboard was mainly used for note taking and doing activities.

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecosystemic Perspective is an integration of Ecological Theory which is based on the principle of balance and Systems Theory which is centred on the premise that the functioning of the whole system depends on its parts. According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2006, 37) “when the relationships and cycles within the whole system are in balance, the system can be sustained”. It is clear that there is no balance in the above subsystems and the whole system may be threatened (Donald et al, 2006). If learners in School A are without an educator each day in a week, it means that by the end of the term they would have missed a lot of content not only in one but more subjects. Then it would be unfair if such a learner is given a common assessment task and expected to perform on the same levels as a learner in a mono-graded



classroom. The question one needs to ask is what causes the disturbance in multi-graded classrooms and how can balance be restored or maintained.

Moreover, for a learner with special needs (see Photo 24) the aspect of inclusivity is doing nothing but pure injustice to him or her. For this learner multiple factors such as the contextual, social and interpersonal factors interact together as barriers in his or her learning and development. According to Donald *et al.*, (2006, p. 43) “...we may need to concentrate on some levels of systems more than others in addressing any one challenge.” The different levels of the system are illustrated in the Diagram in Chapter 1.



Photos 31: Grade 6 and 7 learners alone in the class in School A Photo 32: Grade 6 learner doing activity on the board in School B

4.4.4 Learner interaction and involvement

4.4.4.1 Foundation Phase

In School A the Grade 3 learners were writing faster compared to the other grades. This may be attributed to a number of factors such as level of development, understanding and experience. In School B the Grade 3 learners were responding to the questions more frequently than the Grade 2 learners, probably because the content was familiar to them. Even if the educator was busy with the two higher grades, learners in lower grades – particularly the Grade Rs – wanted to submit their books for marking. It appeared as though finishing the work was considered to be more of an achievement to them.



This was apparent in their disappointment when they were ordered to sit down. Disappointment was detected from the change of their pace when they returned to their seats. They paced slowly with their heads bowed down unlike when they were first submitting their books walking faster with their heads upright.



Photos 33 and 34: Foundation Phase learners in School A and B

4.4.4.2 Intermediate Phase

In both schools the level of interaction between these learners is higher compared to the level of interaction of those learners in Foundation Phase, presumably because learners in the InterSen Phase are more likely to have a sense of responsibility. The learners also showed more involvement in the lessons. This may probably be attributed to the learners' level of understanding of the language of teaching and their understanding of shortage of resources in their classroom. For example in School A learners were interested in looking at the pictures in the educator's book as is shown in Photo 10 because there was only one copy used by the educator. In School B it appeared as if the learners enjoyed answering the questions asked by the educator.



Photos 35-36: Learner interaction and involvement of learners in Intermediate Phase in School A and School B

4.4.4.3 Senior Phase

The learners in this phase in School A demonstrated discipline, responsibility and the ability to study independently. Although they were left alone they were not running around or making noise. To some of them the tasks seemed difficult as they stared in front of them or bit their pens. In School B the level of confidence became more visible when learners did activities on the chalkboard. In both schools the learners showed self-determination and self-motivation, for example in School A, even while the learners were alone, they seemed determined to complete the tasks they were given. In School B determination was visible when the learners got their answers wrong, but continued to try until they have managed to get them right.

4.4.5 Teacher-learner interaction

4.4.5.1 Foundation Phase

In this phase, both educators had more responsibility in managing the groups because the learners were more than in the higher grades. The educators interacted with learners in a friendly atmosphere. In School A the learners were writing tests, and sat quietly without disturbing each other. The teacher kept on moving around doing monitoring – particularly of the Grade 1 learners. In School B, even when the learners submitted their books to the educator, she was not harsh towards them, but told them in a friendly tone to sit and the learners obeyed.



Photos 37-38: Educator-learner interaction of Foundation Phase learners in School A and School B

4.4.5.2 Intermediate Phase

A friendly atmosphere prevailed between learners and the teachers. The teachers in both schools tried to engage all the learners. Repetition of concepts occurred frequently and both educators varied their teaching methods. Learners enjoyed correcting each other when they gave incorrect answers.

4.4.5.3 Senior Phase

There was not much teacher-learner interaction to observe in School A because the learners were alone. What was observable was their interaction with each other. Some of them are in their teenage years, but even though some misbehaviour or misconduct could have been expected, they were all seated and busy with their activities. In School B the learners displayed tolerance and respect towards each other as well as towards their teacher who, in turn, treated them in a friendly manner.



Photos 39-40: Interaction in Foundation Phase at School A and School B

In summary, teacher-learner interaction in the two schools reflected an atmosphere of care and respect. All the educators were exemplary in portraying a sense of respect and care. According to Donald, *et al.* (2002, p. 25) “Care and respect have to be cultivated at all levels of education, and between all those who are part of the process.” Care and respect can be considered essential in the education system, as well as in society as a whole.

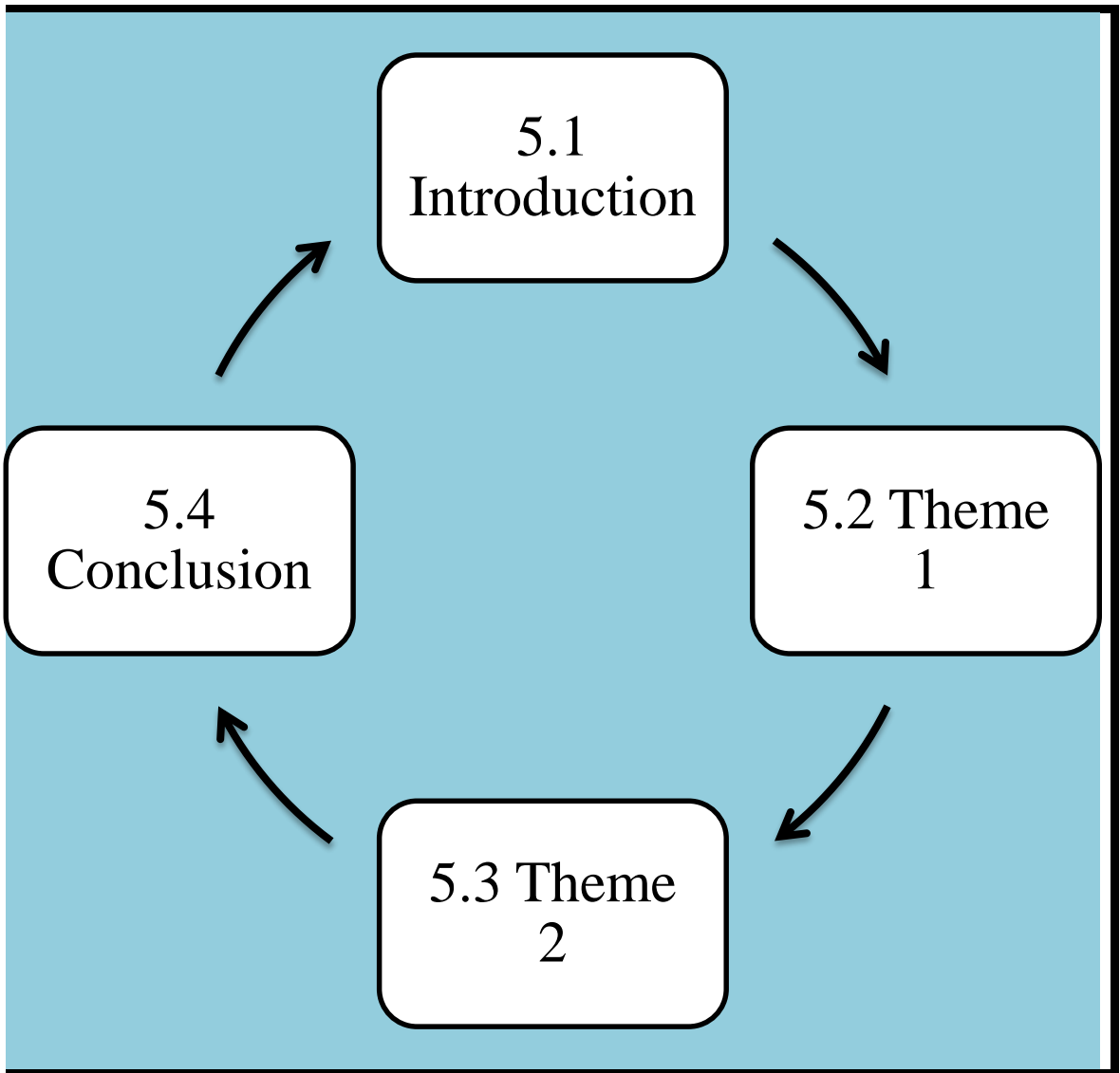
4.5 CONCLUSION

The preceding chapter dealt with research methodology, selection of case, data collection, and documentation. Quality criteria within the context of this study were also provided.

In this chapter, an analysis was made and collected data was interpreted. The raw data was described, discussed, and integrated with photos and sketches. In the following chapter the findings will be discussed in relation to the research problem as was presented in Chapter 1. Furthermore, the data obtained from interviews with educators will also be discussed.



CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS





CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the themes, which emerged from the interviews, will be discussed and inter-grated with data from observation and documents as mentioned in Chapter 4. From the interviews, three themes and sub-themes emerged and each will be discussed according to the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecosystemic Theory in Chapter 1 and the literature from Chapter 2. The themes and sub-themes, which emerged, are presented and discussed below.

Table 15: Themes and subthemes

<p>Theme 1: Daily practices of multi-grade educators Sub theme 1: Rules and responsibilities Sub theme 2: Strategies used by educators</p>	<p>Theme 2: Challenges experienced by educators Sub theme 1: Lack of support Sub theme 2: Lack of resources Sub theme 3: Management</p>
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5.2 THEME 1¹: DAILY PRACTICES OF MULTI-GRADE EDUCATORS

A practice is a theoretical term that simply means to perform, do or act. In the context of this study, the daily practices of educators in multi-grade schools refer to what educators in multi-grade schools do every day in their classrooms. According to Govinda (2007, 188) pedagogical practices refer to “the procedures adopted for the delivery of the various subjects in the school curriculum”. This theme examines educators’ experiences of their daily practices in multi-grade schools inside and outside the classroom situation.

Two sub-themes emerged from this theme namely (i) roles and responsibilities and (ii) strategies. These sub-themes will be discussed according to the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecosystemic perspective and according to the three phases in the school namely the Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase and the Senior Phase. In the

¹ The themes and subthemes discussed in this section are inspired by data from participants



context of this study the phases in the school are regarded as subsystems which are interacting and overlapping together according to the Systems Theory.

5.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Roles and responsibilities

A role is a kind of behaviour expected of a given person in a given situation. In the context of this study, it refers to what is expected from educators in multi-grade schools. A responsibility is regarded as an action that is presumed to follow a person's social-, political- or economic status. Regarding this study, responsibilities refer to duties which must be performed by educators both inside and outside of the classroom situation.

From what the participants said, it was evident that they understood their roles and responsibilities clearly. Apparently the educators in the Inter-Sen experienced more challenges as they shared or talked more about these challenges when asked about responsibilities. Presumably this may be attributed to the higher number of grades in one classroom, the variation in the language of teaching namely English and Sepedi, the variation in the content between grades and the age difference between learners. The sub-theme above is divided into three system levels according to Systems Theory, namely the classroom, the school and the outer community as shown below:



Responsibilities in the classroom

- Teach all subjects to all learners.
- Manage the time for all the subjects.
- Deal with assessment.
- Attend to the needs of all learners.

Responsibilities in the school

- Do extra-mural activities.
- Admission of learners.
- Do administrative duties.
- Deal with NSNP, SA-SAMS and other extra-curricular activities.
- Do office work.

Responsibilities outside the school

- Attend meetings and workshops.
- Parental involvement.

Diagram 6: Sub-theme 1: Roles and responsibilities of teachers according to data from the interviews

5.2.1.1 Foundation Phase

In this phase, the educators from both schools perceived their roles and responsibilities as huge and not easy. The educators indicated the following:

SA (P2) Q1 My role and responsibility in a multi-grade school is big.
SB (P1) Q1 It is very difficult, but it is my responsibility.

In addition, Teacher P1 in School A further stated that she had to accommodate all the levels of achievement of the learners. Similarly, in School B, Teacher P1 pointed out



that she had to ensure that all learners are educated – starting from Grade R to 3. In addition, she highlighted that she had to devise some means to ascertain that all the subjects are taught and to ensure that all learners captured what she said.

To summarise, this implies that the educators do not regard teaching as their only role and responsibility, but they also consider ensuring all grades are taught, that syllabi for all subjects are covered, and that the learners learn as important roles and responsibilities. In support of what the educators said, Aksoy (2008) mentioned that educators in multi-grade school are faced with dual or multiple roles. The question needs to be asked as to whether it is fair for educators in multi-grades schools to be expected to deliver the curriculum in the same manner as educators in mono-grade schools do.

5.2.1.2 Intermediate and Senior Phase

The educators in the Intermediate and Senior Phases had this to say:

SA P1 (Q1) I am heading a school of low enrolment. I am also faced with the responsibility of dealing with the personal differences of parents.

SB P2 (Q1) I am a class teacher and a subject teacher. I have to be responsible for two classes at the same time. In Q4 the same teacher added in the following: I am the principal of this school and I am an educator as well. I have to perform some management duties.

SB P3 (Q1) My role and responsibility in a multi-grade school involves many roles as a teacher. There is no time to teach individual classes. You have to do other jobs, for example SASAMS, admission of learners is my responsibility.

From the above it can be seen that the responsibilities of educators vary between situations and contexts. In both phases, the roles and responsibilities of educators in the classroom range from teaching all learners, accommodating all achievement levels and ensuring that the content of all subjects is taught. Within the classrooms the educators



have the responsibility of curriculum implementation to the diverse groups of learners. The educators have to perform other responsibilities that are not curriculum related, such as sporting activities, admission of learners, NSNP and SA-SAMS as indicated by P3 in School B.

The main issue is not the existence of multi-grade schools, but the functionality of these schools within the education system as a whole. Given the number of subjects and the amount of time the educators need in order to make proper preparations, it is questionable whether what they do in the classrooms has quality. The educators in both phases from the two schools regarded the education the learners receive as of poor quality. Miller (1991, p.4) highlighted that the biggest problem for multi-grade schools is “extra time needed for preparation and planning lessons” and “the difficulty of attending individual learners, planning and classroom discipline”. The crux of the matter is that, even if the educators in these schools understand their roles and responsibilities, they need enough time to do their duties.

Furthermore, the educators have other duties to attend outside the school within the circuit, district, and province. According to Higgins (2004, p. 271) systems adopt in different ways to function in order to find solutions to problems. In the same manner, the two schools in the case study operate differently in dealing with their problem of educator shortage. This is shown in the figure below:

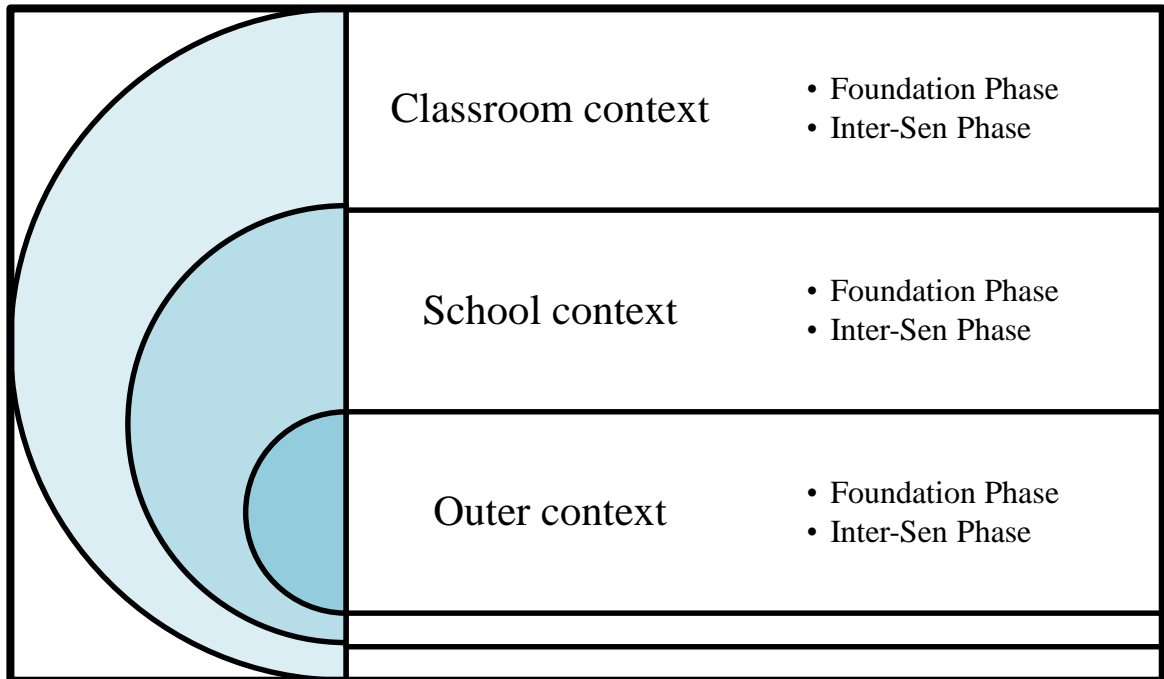


Diagram 7: The responsibilities of teachers in the classroom, the school and the outer community showing overlap of phases

Since Bronfenbrenner’s Ecosystemic Perspective embodies Systems Theory, the roles and responsibilities of educators in the two schools affect the performance of learners. According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2006, p. 39) “role contradictions create problems for the person involved in terms of how other people in the system relate to the person”. For example, the contradictions for the educators in the two schools occur when they teach the learners of two grades the same content but during common assessment the learners are assessed separately. In this case, learners whose content was not taught are more likely to fail.

One of the principles of Systems Theory is that, within a system different sub-systems interact and overlap. In addition, Systems Theory is characterised by the element of patterns of functioning, in which whatever happens in one part will affect all the other parts. Therefore, what happens in Foundation Phase indirectly affect what happens in Intermediate Phase either positively or negatively because of the overlapping phases (Refer to Chapter 4: teacher-learner activities).



Moreover, cycles of cause and effect that exist in these schools will affect what happens in the whole education system. Therefore what happens in the classroom affect what occurs in the school and ultimately what happens in the whole education system becomes affected. For example, if there is a two-day circuit or district workshop for a particular grade's subjects and one of the educators attends the workshop, learners in more than one grade will lose content for more than one subject.

In this way, what happens in the circuit, district, or province affect not only one subject or one grade such as will be the case in mono-grade schools, but more subjects and more grades get affected. For example, when there is a workshop which requires a principal and educator from School A to attend, all the learners are sent home, while in school B the time used for sporting activities is sometimes used for teaching. Consequently, the classroom contexts which are directly related to contextual factors of the schools, circuit, district, and the broader education system cannot be ignored. Thus the educators experience their roles and responsibilities as challenges. This will be discussed further in Theme 2.

From the above it is evident that the complexity of working in multi-grade schools not only lies in the classroom and school contexts but also in the broader environment in which the school is situated. Despite the complexity of the contexts, the educators in these schools have to device working solutions in the best interest of the learners. In support of this Aksoy (2008, p.224) stated that "teachers in multi-grade schools have an extra duty of doing administrative work".

5.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Strategies used by educators

A strategy is defined as the art or science of planning. It is understood to be an intellectual and practical skill that can be used to get a solution to a problem. The teaching strategies used by educators in both phases show similarities and variations. The similarities are probably due to the combination of grades and the number of subjects in the classroom. In both schools Grades 4 and 5 are in one classroom while Grades 6 and 7 are also in one classroom (cf. the attached disk). However, the variation is more related to the number of educators allocated in each phase. In School A, one



educator is responsible for Inter-Sen Phase whereas in School B two educators are responsible for Inter-Sen. To illustrate, the strategies used by educators in both schools are grouped into three in the diagram below:

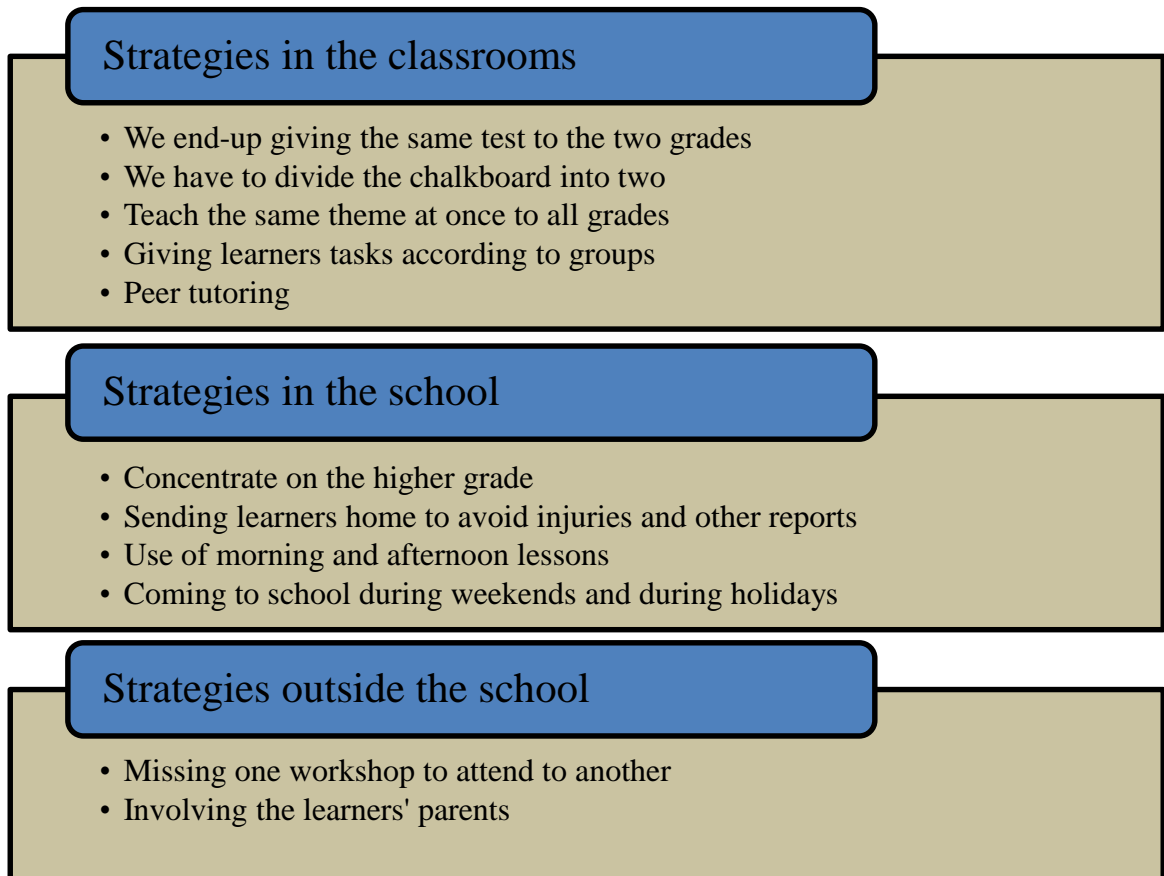


Diagram 8: Sub-theme 2: Strategies used by teachers according to data from the interviews

5.2.2.1 Foundation Phase

In both schools, the educators use their own discretion in designing different strategies to deal with their classroom contexts. Apparently, the Foundation Phase educator in School A is experiencing challenges when using some of the strategies. Consequently the strategies which they use vary from situation to situation. In School B the strategies used by the educator in the Foundation Phase differ from those used by the Foundation Phase educator in School A. For example, Educator P2 in School A is more concerned



about younger learners copying from older learners, while Educator P1 in School B encourages clever learners to assist the slow-learners.

However, some of the strategies used by Educator P1 in School B are more or less similar to the ones used by educators in the Intermediate- and Senior Phases in School B. For example, educators in School B use the strategy of coming to school for morning or afternoon lessons. Presumably, the educators may have agreed in one of their school policies to use this strategy. This may likely be associated with what Systems Theory regards as boundaries between subsystems. According to Donald *et al.*, (2002, p. 50) “the functioning of a system or subsystem is affected in various ways by how rigid (closed) or flexible (open) the boundaries are”.

This is what both teachers in the Foundation Phase said:

SA P2 Q3 When I group the Grade 1s, 2s and 3s together the older ones do the activities for the younger ones, and copying becomes the problem. When I group the Grade 1s, 2s and 3s apart, I have to prepare three activities and this is time-consuming. Another form of dealing with the difficulties is by dividing the chalkboard into three.

SB P1 Q3 Sometimes I even come as early as seven o'clock. I give them work to do at home. I even call the parents, one by one. And even those who are clever enough, they work as teachers for the slow-learners.

The difference in strategies used by the two educators in both schools can be associated with factors such as lack of training, the experience of educators, qualifications and interaction of the school with the community. The contextual factor of having no photocopier at School A, also contribute to the type of strategy used by the educator in dividing the chalkboard into three. For example, if there are only two educators in School A, and three educators in School B, then it is highly possible that educators in the latter school can share more teaching ideas with each other than would be the case in the former school.



5.2.2.2 Intermediate and Senior Phase

As in the Foundation Phase, the strategies used by the educators in the two schools indicate both similarities and differences. One similar strategy is that sometimes educators are compelled to teach the curricula of the senior or exit grade in the phase. Another similarity is that educators use trial and error in finding solutions to their problems. The difference in strategies in this phase is context related as is mentioned in the Foundation Phase above. The situation in School A makes it impossible for four grades to be taught in one class simultaneously, because one educator is responsible for teaching the four grades.

A more concerning strategy involves sending learners home in order to avoid reports from other learners and possible injuries, which shows the dilemma the educators in School A are confronted with. When the principal attends activities or events outside of the school the Foundation Phase educator cannot keep the learners from the Intermediate and Senior Phase in her class, because she already has three grades to attend to. On the other hand, she cannot monitor them in their classes while she is busy with her own. If the learners are kept in their classroom unattended, their safety is compromised, which suggests that the only solution is to let them go home. The validity of the action taken by the educators in this school stems from the Policy on the Safety of Learners in Schools. According to Starr and White (2008, p. 10) “small schools are not immune from macro and meso influences of policy and the micro impacts of structural reforms”. This is also stated in Aksoy (2008, p. 224) “when teachers are attending meetings and workshops arranged by circuits, districts or province the school closes down and classes are cancelled”. This is what the educators in the Intermediate- and Senior Phases said:



SA P1 Q3 When I teach Grade 6 and 7, I have to give classwork to the Grade 4s and 5s to keep them busy. This means I have to miss one workshop to attend to another. And my learners have to be send home to avoid reports from learners and injuries.

SB P2 Q3 You have to sacrifice. Sometimes you must have to come for morning classes and afternoon classes. And when time allows, even during weekends you may ask the learners to come and be with them.

SB P3 Q3 We just use our own discretion. What I really do is to teach the content of the highest standard (grade).

Another strategy used in this school is to leave the Grades 4 and 5 learners unattended, in order to attend to Grade 6 and 7 (See Photo 30 in chapter 4). The question should be asked as to how much content the learners in this school are missing in the process. Even on a day which is presumed to be normal, when both educators are present, the learners miss a certain amount of content because the syllabus of only one grade is being taught, depending on the circumstances. This is what is stated by P1 in School A:

“On the other hand because of the difficulty of the language we concentrate on the higher grades and it becomes difficult if four grades are combined.”

It is clear that equal education in this school is not achievable, which makes it unrealistic to expect a learner from this school, who enters secondary education, to perform on the same level as his peers who come from mono-graded schools. This could serve as an explanation of why there are so many school “dropouts” in this community.

It is evident from the discussion that the educators are able to work well together in order to make something positive of their school contexts and situations. Even if the educators use their own discretions to develop strategies, the educators show dedication, commitment, creativity, and hard work. This justifies what is highlighted in



Mulryan-Kyne (2007, p. 504) that “for teachers to teach effectively, they need to be well trained, well resources and feel positive towards teaching, the children that they are required to teach and themselves as teachers”. It may be presumed that if the educators received relevant training to teaching in multi-grade schools, they would have been in a better position to create strategies that are more effective. This is in consistent with what is mentioned in Miller (1991, p. 4) that “the benefits of multi-grade classes are individualised instruction, tutorials by older students and a greater opportunity for teachers to be innovative.” Without proper training, the educators cannot be innovative enough to design effective strategies that result in education of good quality.

5.3 THEME 2: CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS

A challenge is defined as a problem which an individual encounters in a particular situation. In this study a challenge is seen as any obstacle, barrier or limitation that makes it difficult for someone to achieve a particular goal. Challenges are situational and their complexity depends on internal and external factors in that situation. The challenges faced by educators in the two schools are grouped into three sub-themes namely (i) lack of support; (ii) lack of resources; and (iii) managing difficulties. Some of the sub-themes will be discussed according to the context outside of the school context and not according to the phases, due to the nature of the relevant theme.

5.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Lack of support

Support is defined as a form of assistance given or provided to an individual. Lack of support to the two schools will be discussed in relation to the school and the community as well as the school and the government. Support from the community will include businesses and other stakeholders. Regarding the government, support will extend from the Department of Basic Education to other Departments and Non-governmental Organisations. The support is related to the allocation of resources such as LTSM, provision of human- and financial resources. In addition, Aksoy (2008) mentions lack of administrative- and financial support as one of the greatest problems experienced by educators in multi-grade schools. It can, however, further be stated that educators in multi-grade school not only need physical- or material support but also moral- or emotional support.



According to the participants in this study, support from the community in School A is low due to conflicts between the parents. Families keep on relocating to other areas or transferring their children to other neighbouring schools. It can further be noted that, in addition to parental conflicts the infrastructure in School A, (refer to Chapter 4, Photos 4-9) also contribute to the drop in enrolment. Even if the parents are not literate enough, they cannot be impressed by the context of School A. Another lack of support is indicated by continuous vandalism in the school. It can be stated that poverty does not justify crime, and even if people in the community have food shortages, they need to find supportive ways that will result in mutual benefit.

In School B, the literacy level of the parents makes it difficult for them to assist their children with schoolwork. According to the participants, even if the parents were prepared to provide assistance to their children, their educational status makes it impossible for them to do so. Impressively the parents in this community are able to do gardening projects that are beneficial, as in this manner the parents indirectly provide the security needed by the school. The lack of support to the two schools is shown in the following diagram:



Support from the community

- Informal ECD is ineffective.
- Continuous relocation of parents occurs.
- The neighbouring mines are unwilling to help.
- Conflict between parents.

Support from the government

- Department is doing nothing.
- No workshops on multi-grade classes.
- During work audit assessment units are expected to be normal.
- Lack of moral support from the government.

Diagram 9: Sub-theme 1: Lack of support according to data from the interviews

In addition, the schools in the two communities experience a lack support from the government, especially the Department of Basic Education. Other departments could also provide support in the form of service delivery and improvement of infrastructure. According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecosystemic Perspective, the interactions of the various parts of the system act together for the functioning of the whole system. For example, the participants indicated that the local municipality could provide assistance with regard to service delivery. If service delivery is good in the villages then forces, which push people to relocate from Village B, will reduce.

According to Beukes (2006) educational stakeholders, such as policymakers, planners and professional support staff have little knowledge about the needs of multi-grade classes. Consequently, when they compile common papers they do not consider multi-grade classes. For example, P1 in School A said:



SA P1 Q3 On the other there are demands from the Department regarding work audit and assessment units are expected to be normal.

SA P1 Q4 Lack of moral support from the Department; as teachers we are constantly reprimanded that we are not working enough. Departmental officials keep on giving us threats and criticism.

In support of this Starr and White (2008, p. 3) state that “...principals in multi-grade schools are expected to comply and respond in the same way as principals of larger schools”. In this instance a pattern of functioning which occurs, indicates that lack of support from the communities and the government influences the multi-grade schools in this study negatively. Taole and Mncube (2012) argue that lack of support for the educators is the main impediment to implement multi-grade teaching successfully; they state that “it is vital for the government to provide support for multi-grade teaching in order for the teachers to provide quality education in multi-grade schools”. Therefore, if the education in the two schools is of low quality then the parents will keep on sending their children to other schools. Consequently, the schools will keep on having low learner enrolment and will not grow.

Aikman and Pridmore (2001, p. 534) propose that “teachers need to be given support to deal with everyday problems in their teaching process, but also need support in communication networks and transport”. The relevancy of this argument applies in this situation because the educators in both schools are not staying within the village. In School B there is no bridge with which to cross over the river during the rainy season and the communication network is only accessible in the high-lying areas where it is not safe. The local businesses in the area include the mines which could assist in building a small bridge across the river. Unfortunately, according to information from the principal in School A, the mines are not prepared to contribute their Community Service Investment (CSI). This unwillingness to assist the schools around the villages in which the mines do business can be considered unreasonable, especially in the case of the village of which School A forms part. According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p. 45) “when there is major discord or disturbance, however, the



relationships and interdependence may become so distorted that recovery as a whole is threatened”. The educators’ negative attitude towards working in a multi-grade school environment cannot only be attributed to the remoteness of the schools, but also to the government’s unwillingness to support these schools.

5.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Lack of resources.

A resource is defined as a supply of materials, aids and ability that can assist the performance of any process. Lack of resources will be discussed with regard to resource allocation, resource availability and resource adequacy. In the context of this study, resource allocation refers to the distribution of equipment such as LTSM, food, as well as human- and financial resources to schools. Regarding resources in the two schools, there are both similarities, as well as variation in resource shortage.

The similarity concerns the criteria used by the government in allocating human- and financial resources. Human resources, Norms, and Standard Funds are allocated to schools according to the number of learners enrolled in that school. The financial limitations of the two schools make it difficult for them to procure the necessary resources that could be useful to both learners and educators. For example, in School A they have only one photocopier that is damaged and have been sent for repair. Additionally, most of the charts and posters on the walls are hand-drawn. This is shown in Chapter 4 (Photos 23 and 33). Another similarity is related to policies such as R&R that led to the transfer of educators from the two schools.



Resource availability

- We have a backlog of textbooks.
- Wrong material is delivered.
- We don't have a photocopier.

Resource adequacy

- We are only three.
- Insufficient workbooks.
- Funding from the Department is very low.

Resource allocation

- The criteria used for teacher-learner ratio is not suitable for small schools.
- The allocation of the Norms and Standards funds is directly related to the number of learners.

Diagram 10: Sub-theme 2: Lack of resources according to data from the interviews

The chalkboard serves a multifunctional purpose in School A because there is no photocopier in the school. In School A there are insufficient workbooks and a backlog of textbooks. Even the makeshift kitchen in School A shows clear signs of poverty. According to the principal, they have been promised a kitchen and a gas stove by the Department of Basic Education four years ago, but they are yet to receive it. Compared to School B, School A has poor conditions and there is no food storage – the food is stored on desks in one of the classrooms (see Chapter 3).

It is evident from the information above that the educators in the two schools lack support in various ways. According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecosystemic Theory, (see Chapter 1) the process of child development is also affected by five nested systems such as powerful social- and economic structures such as the Department of Basic Education in their allocation of human- and financial resources to schools. This is consistent with what is said by Mulryan-Kyne (2007, p. 504) that "multi-grade schools are poorly resourced and are generally perceived negatively by teachers, government officials, parents and learners. Education support to multi-grade teachers is a necessity in multi-grade schools, for effective quality education."



5.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Management

To manage is to supervise different things elements within the school system. Management involves planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. The educators in this study experienced a challenge of managing the time, the curriculum, and the extra-curricular as well as co-curricular activities. In both schools, the teachers further faced the challenge of dealing with different grades in all the phases.

Educators from both schools indicated their challenges in managing time. Firstly, it is difficult for the educators to design a timetable for the different subjects in each grade. For example, there are six subjects in Grade 6 while there are nine subjects in Grade 7. According to the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), document (Department of Basic Education, 2012) the instructional time for each subject differs from grade to grade. In this situation, the challenge faced by the educators is to optimise the combination of the two classes without lowering the quality of education. Secondly, the educators lack the time to prepare for the different subjects. In a mono-graded school, the educators have free periods that they use for lesson preparations. Unlike mono-graded schools, free periods do not exist in multi-grade schools. Following this, the question can be asked as to when and where educators in multi-grade schools are supposed to prepare thorough or proper lessons – at home or at school? Two of the educators in both schools highlighted this matter, SB P2 Q2 said “because to start with, we don’t have free periods. And then if you are gone for a day, that means you have lost that day”.

Lastly, the educators in the two schools face the challenge of effectively utilising the little time they have at their disposal. From the educators’ responsibilities mentioned in Sub-theme 1, it is evident that the teachers need the time to plan, organise, prepare, and assess their work for all the subjects in the various grades. During preparation, the content for different grades needs to be integrated, because the level of difficulty for each grade is not the same. In order for a lesson to have quality, it must be prepared thoroughly to cater for individual needs of the learners. The question is whether the educators in the two schools have time for this. In addition, the educators in the two schools need time to perform extra-curricular activities such as sporting and cultural



activities and co-curricular activities such as attending workshops and holding meetings.

This is what the educators in School A said about the issue of time:

SA P1 Q2 It is difficult to attend both classes at the same time...we have to divide the chalkboard into two and the issue of time management becomes a problem. The main challenges encountered are in planning, teaching, assessment and time-tabling.

SA P2 Q1 Assessing them at the same time is also difficult. I have to spend more time explaining to different groups. I have to prepare three different activities and this is time-wasting. This is not easy to manage, even the time allocation.

In School B, what the educator said about time management is slightly similar to what was said in School A:

SB P1 Q4 And when you are teaching the slow learners for long time, the gifted one get bored.

SB P2 Q1 I have to be responsible for two classes at the same time.

SB P2 Q2 You don't even have a corner where you can recover that time.

SB P3 Q1 There is no time to teach the individual classes.

From the educators' responses in the above table it is evident that the issue of time is a challenge in all the phases. The issue of time is an umbrella challenge overlapping in the other two sub-themes, curriculum management, extra-and co-curricular activities. Even if the number of grades and subjects are not the same in each phase, the challenge is the time needed to manage them. This is also indicated by Taole and Mncube (2012, p. 158) who stated that "educators find it challenging to manage different grades at the same time".



With regard to managing the curriculum, educators in both schools find it difficult to prepare, organize, and assess the different subjects. Managerial challenges experienced by the educators occur in the classroom, in the school, as well as outside the school. Firstly, in the classrooms the grades are combined, the subjects are more and the curriculum content is diverse. Within the schools, the challenges range from extra-curricular and co-curricular activities to parental involvement. In addition, the curriculum is not as flexible as it appears because it is designed to cater for the needs of mono-graded schools where one educator can teach one or two subjects. Therefore, educators in these schools are expected to put in more effort than educators in the mono-graded schools. The sub-themes are indicated below:

Managing the time

- To teach all grades at the same time is not easy.
- Assessing them at the same time is hard.
- Attend two classes at the same time.
- Not easy to follow the time-table

Managing the curriculum

- In reality it means I have to teach 27 subjects to Grade 4-7 and my colleague has to teach 12 subjects. (SA P1 Q4)
- We teach subjects that we did not do.
- Not easy to prepare for 25 subjects.
- Not easy to follow the time-table.

Managing the extra-curricular activities.

- Workshops for different grades occur at the same time.
- Funding from the Department is very low.

Diagram 11: Sub-theme 3: Managing difficulties according to data from interviews

If multi-grade schools were developed to provide equal education for all as is indicated in Chapter 2, then there is a need to determine whether the education in such schools is of good quality. All the educators in this study felt that the education received by



learners in the school was of poor quality. The question is whether the educators are the only ones who notice the low quality of education in such schools? If not, what is the extent of assistance provided by the government and other stakeholders in assisting to improve the working conditions of multi-grade school educators?

According to Taole and Mncube (2012, p. 161) “in South Africa, in order to attract and retain properly qualified educators and to compensate and provide adequate numbers of educators in rural areas, the Department of Education set up a bursary scheme which contributes to the training of educators such that once training is completed the educators will be deployed into rural areas of their hometown”. The main issue is not that the educators are under-qualified, but that they are trained to teach in mono-graded classrooms. If the educators receiving the bursary scheme above are trained in the same manner as the educators who are presently teaching in multi-grade schools, then the solution to the problem will be cyclical. Firstly, this is because most learners in these communities drop out of school. Secondly, for those learners who manage to reach secondary levels generally obtain poor matric results that limits them to qualify for the bursary scheme. Lastly, even if educators who have succeeded to get the bursaries are deployed to these schools, when their repayment to the fund is completed they will transfer to better schools and the problem will reverse.

According to Donald *et al.* (2006, p. 16) “transformation of the process of education requires individual people to examine and modify their values and practices”. Policy makers need to design a training programme specifically suited for the needs of multi-grade schools like the Escuela Nueva in Colombia. If such a programme could be available then the curriculum and the LTSM could also be restructured specifically for the multi-grade schools. Then even at the top level there will be curriculum advisors hired specifically for designing assessment and quality assurance in such schools.

In Bronfenbrenner’s view the challenges experienced by educators form part of the exosystems, because they form part of the child’s proximal interactions. Presumably the child in a multi-grade school has no influence over the challenges experienced by educators but the challenges affect the quality of learning of that child. Therefore, children in multi-grade schools are likely to perform poorly as compared to other



learners in mono-grade schools not because they are not sufficiently intelligent, but because they have missed a lot of content in their grades. As a result, such learners will not only lose their confidence in performance but also their interest in school. Therefore the government's goal in providing equal education for all will not realise. The vital issue concerning multi-grade schools does not lie in their existence but in the provision of support to these schools for their sustainability. It is important to be able to identify what threatens their ability to offer quality education. Donald et al., (2006) make an appeal for development of school ownership which is the holistic participation of stakeholders. The question can also be asked as to whether there exists an apathetic attitude towards children in multi-grade schools.

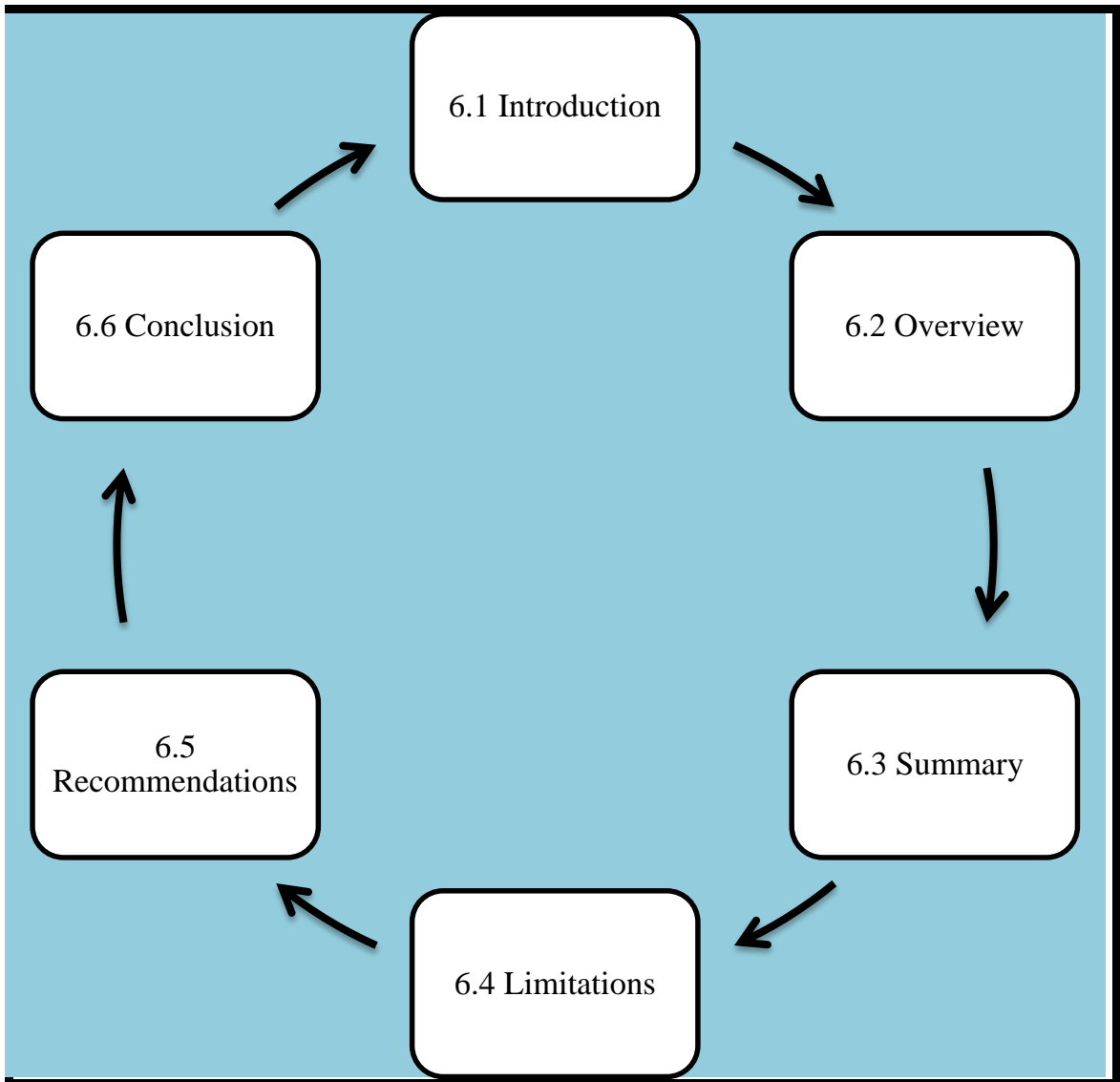
5.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the findings of the study based on the data collected from the interviews were discussed. The discussion included an elaboration on the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews regarding the experiences of educators in multi-grade primary schools. All the themes and sub-themes were integrated with the literature from Chapter 2 as well as the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's Ecosystemic Perspective.

In the following chapter, an overview of the study will be provided together with a summary that includes a discussion of the findings in answer to the research questions. Finally the limitations of the study will be indicated by means of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the study. Furthermore, the discussion will include recommendations for future research as well as conclusions on the results of the study.



CHAPTER 6
OVERVIEW, SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND
CONCLUSIONS





CHAPTER 6

OVERVIEW, SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, a short synopsis of previous chapters will be presented, where after a discussion of the findings and secondary research questions as indicated in Chapter 1 will follow. Thereafter the limitations of the study will be discussed in detail. The chapter will include recommendations as well as conclusions on the findings of the study.

6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

The section below provides the summaries of each chapter pertaining to the study.

Chapter 1

This chapter provided an introduction about the changes in the education system that led to the development of multi-grade schools in South Africa after 1994. It also included a discussion on the purpose of the study, research questions, as well as working assumption. Concepts related to this study, as well as the theoretical framework was clarified and ethical considerations that served as the foundational guidelines of the study were discussed.

Chapter 2

This chapter contained a literature review on multi-grade schools. In the discussion local and global sources for different factors contributing to the occurrence of multi-grade schools particularly in developed and developing countries were considered. The challenges experienced by educators in multi-grade schools were explored with regard to the form of support provided to educators teaching in multi-grade schools. Finally, the discussion was extended to include the resource provision in multi-grade schools and the strategies used by educators in multi-grade schools.



Chapter 3

This chapter dealt with research methodology with a focus on the methodological approach, research paradigm and research design. A qualitative approach was used in order to make sense of the experiences and perceptions of educators in multi-grade schools. The study was conducted through an interpretive meta-theoretical paradigm. The chapter also included an explanation of why case study design was selected in the study. Descriptive case study was used to describe, analyse, and interpret the experiences of educators in multi-grade schools.

The discussion extended with the selection of a case study and participants. Two multi-grade primary schools were selected and five educators participated in the study. The data was collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data was analysed and interpreted inductively by using content analysis. In conclusion, the quality criteria such as conformability, credibility, transferability, and dependability in this study were discussed.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, an analysis and interpretation of the research data were provided. Data analysis and interpretation involved discussion of data collected through observation on the basis of educator-learner activities, learner interaction and involvement as well as educator interaction. The data obtained from the interviews was analysed and interpreted. The data was not only analysed and interpreted but also represented through different tables and diagrams.

Chapter 5

This chapter discussed the central findings of the study. In the discussion the themes and sub-themes which emerged from the interviews were elaborated on. The themes and sub-themes were discussed according to the theoretical framework of Systems Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecosystemic Theory. The themes were also integrated with data obtained from the observations and document analysis.



6.3 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study explored the perceptions and experiences of educators in multi-grade primary schools. The data was collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Participants answered the following research questions from a sample of two multi-grade primary schools.

The study revealed that educators in multi-grade schools experience many challenges from the school itself, from the communities as well as from the education system. In addition to these challenges, the educators lack support from the different stakeholders. The educators from both schools felt that the quality of education received by learners in multi-grade schools is poor. Some of them also indicated that what occurs in multi-grade schools place the learners at a disadvantage because they are treated differently from mono-graded schools. Learners in multi-grade schools miss a lot of content but are expected to perform in the same manner as learners in the mono-graded schools. The study also indicated that educators in multi-grade schools have more responsibilities. Besides teaching content of different subjects to the different grades, they also have to do extra-curricular activities inside and outside the schools. The learners are also highly diverse based on their grades, ages, abilities, and family backgrounds. In addition to low human resources, the schools in this study also have poor infrastructure and lack of resources.

The educators have to use their own strategies to deal with the challenges they experience in these schools. Moreover, the educators did not receive any training to teach in multi-graded schools specifically, even though most of them have good qualifications. Although the educators in this study face various challenges, they try to make sacrifices in an effort to teach all the learners. One of the educators indicated the following: “You have to teach the children though they are multi-graded, there is no time to teach the individual classes” and “we are really sacrificing in teaching these learners because we are unable to teach them. We are trying our level best to teach”.

The limited time for the educators in these schools is further minimised by floods during the rainy season. This makes the schools inaccessible and thus causes delays in teaching. In addition the educators need to use their limited time to attend to other issues



in the circuit, district and province as part of their responsibilities. They also have to devise suitable mechanisms to make up for lost time.

From the findings of the study, it is evident that the complexity of working in multi-grade schools not only lies in the classroom and school contexts, but also in the broader environments in which the schools are situated. It is also obvious that most of the events are beyond the educators' control. For example, they cannot force the government to change its policies or train them. They also cannot force the parents to change their choices in sending their children to other schools. Neither can they force different stakeholders to support these schools. The bone of contention is not the existence of multi-grade schools but the functionality of these schools within the education system as a whole. When considering Bronfenbrenner's Ecosystemic perspective in this situation, one should ask whether a balance exists in the education system. If not, answers need to be sought on to what causes disturbance in one part of the system so that the whole system cannot be threatened. The solution to multi-grade schools can call for what Donald *et al.*, (2006) regard as school ownership. The future leaders of this country are not only in the elite, famous, and expensive schools, but also in the remote, rural, and marginalised schools.

6.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is limited by the small sample size. This can be ascribed to contextual factors within and outside the two selected schools as well as weather conditions. Firstly, the study was limited by data collection methods and the sample. The sample was formed by schools that are multi-grade primary schools with three teachers only. Because there are only three schools of this nature in the circuit, access to two of them was negotiated.

Interestingly one of these schools was supposed to be merged with another school in the neighbouring community according to departmental regulations. This caused unhappiness in the community and as a result, the chief instructed that all letters to be submitted to the school – either private or official – should be submitted to the chief's house. When access to the school was denied permission had to be gained from the third school.



Unfortunately, in the third school their third post was an ad hoc post. In addition, for the 2014 academic year ad hoc posts in the Limpopo Province were suspended. The researcher ended up with a sample of five educators because the other post was not renewed. Negotiation of access from one school to the other and the waiting period for the response added a limitation to the study.

Secondly, other limitations of the study were also factors beyond the control of the researcher, like when the educator became absent due to an illness or transport on the day of the interview or observation. Thirdly, factors such as examinations, workshops and other unplanned events in the circuit, for example principals' meetings, departmental briefing sessions, memorial services and union meetings, had a great impact on the duration of the data collection period.

Fourthly, the study was limited by unfavourable weather conditions such as thunderstorms or floods when the schools become inaccessible due to slippery roads or the overflowing river. Lastly, events or activities in the community such as protests about service delivery or lack of jobs resulted in the blocking of the roads that made travelling to the selected schools difficult. Throughout these challenges, patience was of the essence and the researcher had to wait for the right time to collect data from the two schools.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.5.1 Recommendation 1: Policy development for multi-grade schools

Currently, the curriculum policy is given, irrespective of whether a school is multi-grade or mono-grade. The government must design and develop a policy to suit the needs of multi-grade schools specifically. The policy need to be developed with regard to curriculum provision, training, learner-teacher support material and resource development. The policy should also cater for the time needed for preparations and teaching, because the main challenge appears to be the lack of time for educators to prepare their lessons. The educators in multi-grade schools should be given fewer contact time with the learners to enable them to prepare thorough lessons. For example, instead of having seven working hours in class they can have five working hours.



Alternatively, multi-grade schools could be provided with ready-made self-help kits such as the ones used in the Escuela Nueva in Colombia to enable learners to work independently in the absence of the educator. Finally, loss of content in most grade schools need immediate attention from all educational stakeholders. This means that assessment policies for multi-grade schools should be different from the mainstream schools. Presently learners in multi-grade schools are assessed in the same way as mono-grade schools. It can be considered unreasonable to expect learners in multi-grade schools to perform equally to learners in mono-grade schools while they miss so much content.

Policy development for multi-grade schools should start at national level on a short and long term basis. In the short term, a team of policy developers should be formed or appointed to design a national policy for multi-grade schools. As for the long term, provision should be made in each province to ensure policy implementation in support of multi-grade schools. At this level, specialised personnel should be hired to oversee distribution and allocation of financial- and human resources to various multi-grade schools according to relevant legislation. For example, in the critique provided by Ticky (2011) towards the South African Education Roadmap it is stated that schools and teachers have to be held accountable for poor examination grades and other forms of philanthropy while the politicians and elites are excluded.

At district level, various support teams need to be formed to manage curriculum in multi-grade schools in parallel with the mainstream curriculum. These teams would provide expert and co-ordinated professional support services to multi-grade schools. The function of the support teams will not only be managerial, but also evaluative in nature involving monitoring and quality assurance.

6.5.2 Recommendation 2: Training programme for teachers

According to Smit and Humpert (2002, p.1153) in order to prepare educators for teaching in multi-grade schools, differentiated instruction is the most suitable form of teaching. It is a type of teaching which mostly deals with the heterogeneity of a class (Smit and Humpert, 2002) particularly in small schools with a combination of classes where the groups of learners in the classrooms are mostly heterogeneous. In support of



this Higgins (2007) propose that differentiated curricula and multi-year curricula spans are two strategic approaches suitable for dealing with multi-grade schools.

Even if this approach is suitable for multi-grade schools, proper training for educators is essential. Educators need to be trained according to a relevant program in order to be able to cater for the diverse needs of learners in multi-grade schools. If educators are not properly trained to teach in multi-grade schools, then they use their own discretion when preparing lessons. Therefore learners in multi-grade schools end-up missing a lot of content and this promotes unfair treatment.

6.5.3 Recommendation 3: On-going support for multi-grade schools

Educators in multi-grade schools not only need training, but also need support from different stakeholders such as the government, businesses, parents, and non-governmental organisations. Research indicates that multi-grade schools receive minimum support from different stakeholders. Multi-grade schools could be provided with learner-support materials (LTSM) such as charts, posters, models and other facilities such as libraries and laboratories. Funding can also be provided to enable schools to hire part-time assistants to help teachers with administrative work.

Support for multi-grade schools also needs to be provided by the community members and the chief (or the headman). Community members need to be enlightened and made aware that the school as an institution has multiple ownership. Multi-grade schools usually occur in remote rural areas where poverty is high and service delivery is poor or low. Therefore when community members are frustrated by poor service delivery they block roads and burn schools, on the assumption that schools are state properties.

The funding provided to multi-grade schools by the government is insufficient to be used for anything other than curriculum support. Local businesses need to be supportive towards multi-grade schools by providing additional funds through donations and other services. If educators in multi-grade schools can be provided with relevant and adequate financial support, then the quality of education received by learners in such schools will also improve.



6.5.4 Recommendation 4: Merging not an option

Learners in multi-grade schools often perform generally poor as compared to learners in mono-grade schools. Poor performance leads to an increase in drop-outs and continuous low learner enrolment. Consequently funding of multi-grade schools appears to be a financial burden.

Seeing that performance in multi-grade schools is generally poor, the government often decide to merge or close down such schools. Before the government could consider merging such schools, it should be established whether the distance between the two schools is safe and short. If not, arrangement should be made to transport the learners to the neighbouring school to avoid drop-outs, absenteeism, as well as child rape and missing children.

Merging is unfavourable for multi-grade schools because such schools are geographically remote and far apart from each other. If schools are merged, girls and younger learners are unsafe to travel the long, remote distances to and from school. Resultantly some learners are likely to start school at an older age while others may become dropouts. Merging schools limits the learners' rights to equal basic education.

6.5.5 Recommendation 5: Future research

Research in the future could focus on explaining the type of training programme suitable for educators in multi-grade schools. If educators in multi-grade schools could be trained according to a relevant programme, then the quality of education in such schools may likely be higher and learner achievement could improve.

Future research could also be directed towards finding ways of motivating educators to work in multi-grade schools. Even if multi-grade schools are situated in remote, inaccessible areas, the learners in such communities also have the right to good quality education. If there are incentives for educators in multi-grade schools, then the negative attitude towards such schools could be minimised.

Finally, future research could focus on the impact of multi-grade schools on the Grade 12 results. It can also be stated that multi-grade schools negatively affect the



performance of learners in matric. Presumably, provinces and regions with more multi-grade schools are more likely to perform poorly in Grade 12; this might need further research for validation. Research could indicate whether there is a positive relationship between multi-grade teaching and matric results.

6.6 CONCLUSION ON FINDINGS

Research indicates that multi-grade schools were developed to provide the need for equal education opportunities for all in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's). The results of the study provided evidence that even if the learners in multi-grade schools are supposed to do the same curriculum content as mono-grade schools, they miss a lot of content because the educators use their own discretion when preparing their lessons. Given the form of support provided to educators in multi-grade schools, it is clear that broad inequalities between multi-grade schools and mono-grade schools exist.

When multi-grade schools are treated in the same way as mono-graded schools, inequalities widely occur. Multi-grade schools need to be treated in a unique manner that is different from mono-grade schools in order to improve quality education. According to Birch and Lally, (1995, p. 6) "if multi-grade schools are treated equally with other schools, they cannot be expected to achieve their educational goals". For example, the success of the Escuela Nueva can be attributed to it having its own curriculum, policies, time frames and forms of teaching and assessing.

Multi-grade schools were created to ensure provision of equal education for all. However, the type of education provided in multi-grade schools is of a very poor quality. Learners in multi-grade schools perform poorly not because they are less intelligent but because they miss a lot of content in various subjects. As a result the secondary schools whose feeder primary schools are multi-graded tend to have poor matric results. For example, three of the schools which obtained 0% in the 2014 academic year are multi-graded and are also fed by primary multi-grade schools.

The working conditions in multi-grade schools are generally poor because of geographical conditions, poor service delivery, lack of resources, and lack of support



by the government. Such communities are characterised by low population density, low literacy levels, high levels of drop-outs as well as high unemployment levels. Therefore multi-grade schools are viewed negatively by the learners, educators, community members, as well as the government.

Despite the fact that educators in this study experienced frustrations and challenges, their commitment, dedication and determination to succeed against all odds is commendable. The educators in this study make an effort and make sacrifices to ensure that learners are taught. For example, they would sacrifice their time in the mornings, during weekends, as well as during holidays by coming to school. Like they said: “I have to see to it that they know what they are here for” and “I just told myself that I am here to work, and there is nothing I can do” and “Even if you don’t feel well sometimes e...h you just force yourself to come to school and then decide to see the doctor later”.



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ADDENDUM A: REQUEST TO THE PROVINCE

Enquiries: Shayi M. H.

P.O. Box 960

Contact: 0731806753

Burgersfort

1150

.....2014

The Head of Department

Limpopo Provincial Department: Department of Education

Private Bag x9498

Polokwane

0700

Dear Sir/ Madam

Application for permission to conduct research.

I hereby request permission to conduct research in your province. I am a student studying MEd in Learner Support Guidance and Counselling at the University of Pretoria. The topic of my research is "Perceptions and experiences of educators teaching in primary multi-grade schools." In order for me to achieve the objective of my study, I need your permission to conduct the research in your province. The research will be based in the Riba Cross District of Education. Two primary schools with three educators only, including the principal, will form part of my study.

The research will use qualitative methodology and case study design. Data collection will involve semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The interviews will be conducted in a private setting without interrupting the normal running of the school, after the learners contact time. Interviews will last for 45-60 minutes and will be tape-recorded for data analysis. Observation will occur in the normal teaching time in the classroom for about 45- 60 minutes.

The names of the schools and the educators will be kept anonymous as part of research ethics. Participation is voluntary, meaning that educators are free to discontinue their participation at any time during the research process.

I hope my request will be considered.

Regards

Shayi M.H. (student no: 04370023)

.....Researcher.....Supervisor



ADDENDUM B: REQUEST TO THE DISTRICT

Enquiries: Shayi M.H.	P.O. Box 960
Contact No: 0731806753	Burgersfort
	1150
2014
The District Senior Manager	
Riba Cross District	
Private Bag x	
.....	
.....	
Dear Sir/ Madam	
Request to conduct research in your district.	
I hereby request permission to conduct research in your district. I am a student studying MEd in Learner Support Guidance and Counselling at the University of Pretoria. The topic of my study is “Perceptions and experiences of educators teaching in primary multi-grade schools.”	
I need your assistance by granting me permission to conduct research in your district. The study will involve interviews, observations and document analysis. The respondents in the study will be two primary schools with a staff of three educators only, including the principal. Participation is voluntary, educators are free to discontinue their participation at any time during the research process.	
The interviews will be conducted in a private setting with educators after learners contact time to avoid any interruptions. Interviews will last for 45-60 minutes and will be tape-recorded for data analysis. Observation will occur in the normal teaching time in the classroom for about 45- 60 minutes.	
I guarantee that data collected will be treated with confidentiality. The names of the schools and respondents will be anonymous for compliance with research ethics. The findings of my research will be available on request.	
I hope my request will be considered.	
Yours faithfully	
ShayiM.H. (student no: 04370023)	
Researcher	Supervisor.....



ADDENDUM C: REQUEST TO THE CIRCUIT

Enquiries: Shayi M. H.

P. O. Box 960

Contact: 0731806753

Burgersfort

1150

.....2014

The Circuit Manager

.....
Dear Sir/ Madam

Request to conduct research in your circuit.

I hereby request permission to conduct research in your circuit. I am a student studying MED in Learner Support Guidance and Counselling at University of Pretoria. The topic of my research is "Perceptions and experiences of educators teaching in primary multi-grade schools."

In order for me to attain the objective of my study, I need your assistance by allowing me to conduct research in your circuit. The research will take place at two multi-grade primary schools which have a staff of three educators only including the principal. The research will be conducted through interviews, observations and document analysis. The interviews will be conducted in a private setting without interrupting the normal running of the school, after the learners contact time. Interviews will last for 45-60 minutes and will be tape-recorded for data analysis. Observation will occur in the normal teaching time in the classroom for about 45- 60 minutes.

Participation is voluntary, meaning that educators are free to decide to stop taking part in the research at any time.

I guarantee that all data collected will be treated with confidentiality. The findings of my research will be accessible on request.

I hope that my request will be considered.

Yours faithfully

Shayi M H (Student no: 04370023)

Researcher..... Supervisor



ADDENDUM D: REQUEST TO THE SGB

Enquiries: Shayi M. H.

P.O. Box 960

Contact: 0731806753

Burgersfort

1150

.....2014

The SGB Chairperson

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Dear Sir/ Madam

Application for permission to conduct research in your school

I hereby request permission to conduct research in your school. I am a student at the University of Pretoria studying MEd in Learner Support Guidance and Counselling. The topic of my research is "Perceptions and experiences of educators teaching in primary multi-grade schools."

In my study, I am going to do interviews, observations and document analysis in order to collect information. I am asking your permission to interview educators and to observe the educators and the learners in the classroom.

The interviews will be done after school to avoid any disturbance. The name of the school and the educators will be kept confidential in order to comply with research ethics. The interviews will last for 45-60 minutes. The observation will last for about 45-60 minutes.

I guarantee that all the information collected will be treated with confidentiality and that the participants will be anonymous for compliance with ethics of research. Participation is voluntary, meaning that educators are free to decide to stop taking part in the research at any time.

I hope my request will be considered.

Yours faithfully

Shayi M. H. (Student N0: 04370023)

Researcher

Supervisor



ADDENDUM E: REQUEST TO THE PRINCIPAL

Enquiries: Shayi M.H.
Contact No: 0731806753

P. O. Box 960
Burgersfort
1150

.....2014

The Principal

Dear Sir/ Madam

Request to conduct research at your school.

I hereby request permission to conduct research at your school. I am a student at the University of Pretoria studying MEd in Learner Support Guidance and Counselling. The topic of my research is "Perceptions and experiences of educators teaching in primary multi-grade schools."

In order to achieve the objective of my study I need your assistance by permitting me to conduct research at your institution. The research will be conducted through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The interviews will be conducted in this procedure:-

- After learners contact time to avoid disruptions.
- Names of schools and educators will be kept confidential to comply with research ethics.
- The interviews will last for 45-60 minutes. Open-ended questions will be used.
- Observation will occur in the normal teaching time in the classroom for about 45- 60 minutes.

I guarantee that all the data collected will be treated with confidentiality and that the participants will be anonymous for compliance with ethics. Participation is voluntary, meaning that educators are free to discontinue their participation at any time during the research process.

I hope my request will be considered.

Yours faithfully

Shayi M.H. (Student No: 04370023)

Researcher..... (Supervisor).....



ADDENDUM F: REQUEST TO THE EDUCATOR

Enquiries: Shayi M. H.
Contact: 0731806753

P.O. Box 960
Burgersfort
1150
.....2014

Dear Educator

I am a student at the University of Pretoria studying MEd in Learner Support Guidance and Counselling. The topic of my research is “Perceptions and experiences of educators teaching in primary multi-grade schools.”

The research will use qualitative methodology and case study design. Data collection will involve semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. I would like you to be one of the participants in my study. Your participation will involve an interview to discuss your perceptions and experiences of teaching in a primary multi-grade school. The interviews will be conducted in a private setting without interrupting the normal running of the school, after the learners contact time. Interviews will last for 45-60 minutes and will be tape-recorded for data analysis, with your permission.

I will observe you during normal teaching time in the classroom for about 45- 60 minutes in any subject of your choice. I would like to peruse aspects of critical documents as a form of document analysis, such as timetables, curriculum policies, seculars and class registers, which I would like to photocopy. Any identifying particulars such as the name of the school, teachers, or learners will be deleted through black ink. These documents will inform the context for the case study design. Furthermore, I would like to peruse your portfolio, such as your classroom preparation, from which I will make notes (called field notes in research terms). Once again your identity will remain confidential.

Your participation will provide valuable information regarding a multi-grade teaching program. The results of the research will be published as a dissertation and an article. There are no foreseeable risks involved if you participate. If you have any question concerning the study, you may call me at this numberor contact me at this e-mail address..... As a participant in this research, you need to understand the following conditions:-

1. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time.
2. Your identity will be confidential; your name will not be disclosed.
3. Your questions and concerns about the research will be addressed.
4. You may grant the researcher permission to tape-record the interviews. The recorded information will be used for transcription.
5. You may also grant the researcher permission to analyse your portfolios.
6. The collected data will be transcribed and be used to compile a dissertation and will be stored in a safe area and will only be held by the researcher and the supervisor. The research results will be used for publication.

I hope my request will be considered.

Yours faithfully

Shayi M. H. (Student NO: 04370023)

ResearcherSupervisor



ADDENDUM G: LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR LEARNERS

Enquiries: Shayi M. H.

P. O. Box 960

Contact: 0731806753

Burgersfort

1150

.....2013

.....
.....
.....
.....

Dear Learners

Letter of information

My name isI am a student at the University of Pretoria. This letter serves to inform you of my presence in your school today. I am doing research on “Perceptions and experiences of educators teaching primary multi-grade schools.” I am going to collect information from the classroom when your teacher is busy teaching.

During observation the researcher will be seated in the back of the classroom to avoid any disturbance. While the educator will busy teaching, the learners will be busy interacting with each other and responding to the teacher’s instructions. The researcher will be taking notes.

I will observe some of the things that will be taking place in the classroom. I would like you to feel free and behave and react in the same way as you always do. Your educator will be keeping discipline as usual. My observation is going to last for about 45-60 minutes.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Shayi M. H.



ADDENDUM H: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

A checklist for interviewing

Question	Yes	No
1. Who will take part in my interviews?	/
2. What type of interviews, will I use?	/
3. Is the interview setting comfortable and quite?	/
4. Is the interview audiotaped? Have I tested the equipment?	/
5. Have I obtained consent from the participants to participate in the interview?	/
6. Do I talk less and listen more during the interview?	/
7. Do I use probing for clarification and elaboration by the participant?	/
8. Do I avoid leading questions? Do I use open-ended questions	/
9. Do I keep the participants focused and ask for concrete details?	/
10. Do I avoid being judgemental avoid debating?	/
11. Have I been able to thank the participant after the interview?	/



Interview protocol to be used during the interview

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of the interviewee:

Interview process: 1. Description of the purpose of the study.

2. How will I collect data?

3. What will I do to protect the confidentiality of participants?

4. How long will the interview last?

5. Did the interviewee read and sign the consent form?

6. Has the interviewee agreed to be tape recorded?

7. Did I turn on the tape recorder? Is it working?

Questions to use

1. What are the roles and responsibilities of educators in multi-grade schools?

2. How do teachers in multi-grade schools perceive their duties as facilitators?

3. What strategies do teachers implement when teaching in the multi-grade classroom?

4. What are the challenges experienced by teachers regarding management and administration of work in a multi-grade school?

5. What are the opinions of teachers in connection with interventions needed by teachers and

learners in multi-grade schools?



ADDENDUM I: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE AND PROTOCOL

A checklist for observation

Question	Yes / No
1. Did I gain permission to do a study in this school? /
2. Do I know my role as an observer? /
3. Have I any means to record my notes? /
4. What will I be observing? /
5. Will I enter and leave without disturbing the setting? /
6. Will I be able to do multiple observations at the same time? /
7. Will I develop a rapport with the participants? /
8. Will I be able to take descriptive and reflective notes at the same time? /
9. Will I use complete sentences to make detailed notes? /
10. Will I thank my participants at the school? /



Observation Protocol to use.

1. Setting.....
2. What to observe.....
3. Role of observer.....
4. Starting time from.....to.....
5. Duration.....

Description of what is observable.

Reflection of what is observable.

1. Classroom setting.

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2. Teacher and learner activities.

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3. Learner interactions and involvement.

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4. Teacher and learner interaction.

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5. Classroom management.

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