

# Reflections on Ten Years of Basic Education

Challenges to the Transformation  
of Basic Education in South Africa's  
Second Decade of Democracy



N E L S O N M A N D E L A  
F O U N D A T I O N

*Living the Legacy*

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of Basic Education in South Africa's  
Second Decade of Democracy

Nelson Mandela Foundation

*Made possible in part by the generous support  
of the Royal Netherlands Embassy and Dr. Wim Hoppers*

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## Contents

Executive Summary	5
1. Introduction	7
2. The purpose of education in a democratic South Africa	8
2.1. The policy framework	8
2.2. Education, democracy and development	9
2.3. Some core objectives of education	10
3. How far have we come?	14
3.1. Access to basic education	14
3.2. Effective communication skills	17
3.3. Confident numeracy and understanding of the physical world	17
3.4. Understanding society, building relationships and affirming the possibilities of life	18
4. Considering transformation: within the school gates	20
4.1. Early childhood development	20
4.2. Resource distribution	21
4.3. Classroom experience	24
4.4. Language policy and practice	25
4.5. Learners with special needs	26
5. Considering transformation: beyond the school gates	27
5.1. Household income	27
5.2. Unemployment	29
5.3. Social grants	30
5.4. Nutrition	30
5.5. Household educational access	31
5.6. Access to stable housing	32
5.7. Access to basic services	32
5.8. Civic documentation	33
5.9. Diseases of poverty and access to health care	33
5.10. HIV/AIDS	33
6. Thinking ahead...	34
References	37

## Figures

Figure 1	Percentage of 5- to 20-year-olds attending educational institutions, 2001	14
Figure 2	Secondary school enrolment	16
Figure 3	Matric exam—candidates, pass rates and exemptions	16
Figure 4	National household income by socio-economic quintile, 2000 (pre-tax %)	28
Figure 5	Highest educational levels, adults over 20-years old—by race group, 2001	31

## Boxes

Box 1	Flow-through rates	15
Box 2	Understanding society, relationships and the possibilities of life	19
Box 3	Patterns of ECD provisioning, National Audit, 2000	20
Box 4	Educator distribution	22
Box 5	Infrastructure development	23
Box 6	Learning and teaching support materials	23
Box 7	The classroom experience	25
Box 8	Special schools—1996 to 2000	27
Box 9	Disparities of provision—the special needs sector	27
Box 10	Household income	29
Box 11	Child nutrition	31
Box 12	Educational qualifications—adults over 20-years old	31
Box 13	Basic services provision	32
Box 14	Health care	33
Box 15	HIV/AIDS	34

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## Executive Summary

As we enter the second decade of our democracy, the Nelson Mandela Foundation has commissioned this paper which focuses on the challenges that have proven to be most intransigent in the project of transforming the system of education in South Africa. At this “ten-year moment” in South Africa’s democratic history, there is cause for celebration of our achievements. Successes in the transformation of education have been phenomenal. Ten years of education have brought an overhaul of the apartheid education system. A single, united system of education has been created from a system deeply divided on the basis of apartheid conceptions of ethnicity and race. Budgetary systems have been overhauled on the basis of the principle of equity. The curriculum has undergone a massive transformation, and now reflects the values of diversity, creativity and engaged learning.

The starting point for this paper is that the ten-year moment provides the occasion for South Africans to reflect with pride on their achievements in creating a democratic South Africa.

The particular mandate of this paper, however, is not to focus on the successes but rather to critically examine the challenges that have proven to be most intransigent in the transformation process in education. This paper intentionally seeks to highlight challenges beyond the achievements and, as the second decade of our democracy begins, to provide the basis for new strategic conversations about how to tackle these challenges. The paper focuses on the persistence of inequities in both our education system and our society at large. It suggests that despite great achievements, there persist “two worlds within one nation”.

The paper is organised into five sections. In the first section, we take a step back and consider the purpose of education in the building of a democratic South Africa. We explicitly relocate the purpose of education within the wider challenges of democracy, development, and the expansion of real freedoms. We highlight six core objectives of the basic schooling system that are particularly important to education within the context of deepening democracy and development.

In the second section, we examine the extent to which we are achieving these objectives. We conclude that the deep-seated effects and practices of apartheid are proving far more difficult to eradicate than was expected in 1994. Outcomes in education—from attendance rates to learner performance data—continue to reflect historical divides. Black learners—and particularly black girl learners and black rural learners—continue to face the legacy of poor provisioning and poor quality teaching and learning. There is little evidence to suggest that education is meeting the objectives of confident literacy and numeracy for the majority of learners, let alone objectives such as understanding society and affirming the possibilities of life.

In the following two sections, we examine factors located both within and outside the school gates that impact upon the school experience of learners. We examine five in-school factors—early childhood development, resource distribution, classroom experience, language policy and practice, and opportunities for learners with special needs. In each case we conclude that historical inequities persist. Current policy tools, despite their intentions, have not yet been capable of shifting these patterns, and in some cases current realities may be deepening rather than alleviating the divides.

We explore several factors that impact upon children’s lives outside the school gates. Educational research has long shown that the socio-economic circumstances of

children outside school have a profound impact upon educational experiences and outcomes. We explore patterns of household income and unemployment, social grants, nutrition, household educational access, housing, basic services, civic documentation, health care, and HIV/AIDS. Patterns of provisioning continue to reflect historical inequities, and pose the danger of deepening “two worlds in one nation” for young people.

We conclude by sharing thoughts on the critical questions raised in this discussion, and point to a new vocabulary for education that will motivate the transformation required as we enter our second decade of democracy.

# 1. Introduction

“The relative success of educational change in middle class schools combined with abiding shortcomings in service delivery in schools catering for the poor is beginning to reveal a fragmentation of the education system in South Africa. This trend needs to be arrested by applying strategies that are focused on ensuring that the policy frameworks have the desired impact on education outcomes for the poor.”

ANC 51st National Conference, 2002:  
*Social transformation: Fighting poverty and building a better life*

This paper reflects on challenges that remain in rebuilding the basic education system in South Africa in the second decade of our democracy. The starting point of this paper is that the devastation of the system of basic education under apartheid cannot be overstated. The system of education under apartheid was devised to undermine human dignity, to erode the capacity for creative and new thinking, to divide people into categories of worth, and to undermine the possibilities of learning for most young South Africans. The very meaning of learning and teaching was eroded. While the common question of “how do we compare to other nations” is useful as a systemic benchmark, it should not override the conclusion—that the challenge of educational transformation in this country is unique, given the depth of the scars of our history.

A decade into the process of transformation provides us with a moment to reflect on the successes and limitations of transformation of the system of education. While we have achieved successes, some of the inheritances of apartheid are proving difficult to shift. Few could have predicted the exact pressures of the global economic and political environment, and the challenges that they have posed for transformation. Within this context, this paper considers the extent to which education continues to challenge or implicitly reinforce the inequities that we have inherited from the past. Implied in this question is whether the divisions of the past are being sustained through the persistence of “two worlds” in our society and in our education system.

This paper is not intended to evaluate the performance of the government during the first ten years of democracy. It is first and foremost a discussion document and consciously focuses more attention on the challenges that remain than on the successes that we have achieved. The approach is intended primarily to engender reflection within the ranks of people and organisations long committed to South Africa’s democratic project, focusing our attention on the challenges facing education as we move into our second decade of democracy.

The paper is organised into five sections. In the first section, we take a step back and consider the purpose of education in the building of a democratic South Africa, and we suggest six core objectives of the basic schooling system. In the second section, we reflect on the progress that we have made in achieving these core objectives. We conclude that while important progress has been made, we have a long way to go in achieving both quality and equity in respect of these core objectives. In the following two sections, we consider the factors both within and outside the school gates that constitute some of the most important remaining challenges of transformation. In the final section, we reflect on some of the conclusions that emerge from this discussion.



## 2. The purpose of education in a democratic South Africa

At the end of the first decade of democracy, we have an opportunity to take a step back and reconsider the purpose of education in building a democratic South Africa.

### 2.1 The policy framework

We the people of South Africa,

Recognise the injustices of our past...

We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to—

Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;

Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law;

Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and

Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

The South African Constitution underlines the critical role of education in the transformation of our society. It enshrines education as a human right for the public good. In the preamble, a commitment to establishing “a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights” is underscored. It further affirms the role of the state in “freeing the potential of each person”, while the founding provisions include a commitment to equality (1.1). The Bill of Rights affirms the right of *all* children to *access* basic education (2:29), and more than this: children have the right to an education that is based on *building social justice and freeing the potential of each person*. The Constitution holds in balance human rights, social justice and the potential of each child to learn and grow and develop. The relationship between the individual and society is indivisible and interdependent.

From this starting point, a range of educational laws articulates the purpose of education. The South African Schools Act (SASA, 1996) requires a new national system to redress past injustices in educational provision and progressively to provide higher quality education as the foundation for:

- developing each person’s talents and capabilities;
- transforming the social order;
- combating racism, sexism and unfair discrimination;
- contributing to the eradication of poverty and promoting the economic well-being of society;
- providing for diversity;
- advancing a human rights culture; and
- developing responsibility among school communities.

SASA affirms the purpose of education as being both about nurturing individual capacities and changing the social order.

The relationship between education, social development and democracy has been taken further through several other policy processes. Articulating the role of education in relation to social values and creating a culture of democracy have been particularly important. Key elements in nurturing democratic values among learners

include the development of intellectual abilities and critical faculties, and an inclusive approach to diversity. Our social reality is understood through history, which becomes one of the most important ways of keeping memory alive and of developing compassion, awareness and perspective. Relationships are built in a spirit of tolerance, openness and respect, and communication is improved through a commitment to multilingualism (DoE, 2002b; DoE, 2001b).

## 2.2 Education, democracy and development

“Development can be seen, it is argued here, as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. Focusing on human freedoms contrasts with narrower views of development, such as identifying development with the growth of gross national product, or with the rise in personal incomes, or with industrialization, or with technological advance, or with social modernization... Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states.

“What people can positively achieve is influenced by economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education, and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives.”

*Sen, Development as Freedom: 4, 5, 13*

The purpose of education affirmed through the Constitution and educational legislation is consistent with some important contemporary ideas about the relationship of education, freedoms, democracy and development.

Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze advance a number of ideas about the relationship between education and development. While they do not engage substantially with pedagogy, they establish the relationship between education, freedom and development, and suggest how social interventions more broadly impact upon the development possibilities of societies (Dreze and Sen, 1999, 2002, 2003; Sen, 1999).

Dreze and Sen focus on the relationship between participation, freedom and development. The context of their discussion is India where the first Premier, Jawaharlal Nehru, spoke of having a “tryst with destiny” in liberating India from colonialism. Nehru pointed to the basic need for the removal of the central constraints that made human lives limited, insecure and unfree. By unambiguously affirming the importance of eliminating these unfreedoms, he was outlining a freedom-orientated commitment to development.

Sen and Dreze regard freedom as both a “means and an end” of development. They argue, first, that development (the “ends” of development) can be judged only by the expansion of substantive human freedoms—not merely by economic growth, technical progress or social modernisation. At the same time, they argue that substantive freedoms are the primary determinant (or principal “means”) of an individual’s social effectiveness or agency—that there is an exceedingly important relationship between the enhancements of freedom and social participation.

The concept of human agency is central to their thought about social development. They use “agent” to refer to a person who “acts and brings about change” according to her own values and life objectives. Agency refers to the role of an individual as a participant in economic, political and social action. They argue that agency is the primary engine for social development.

The role of a state becomes centrally linked to the expansion of real freedoms and the elimination of unfreedoms for people in society, rather than to notions such as economic growth or technical advances *per se*. Freedoms are largely the capacities to engage in the activities that enhance the lives we lead. Unfreedoms include the things that undermine the capacity for positive social action—poverty, tyranny, social deprivation, unemployment, illiteracy. Sen and Dreze remind us that the inseparable nature of human existence makes these freedoms interdependent. Democratic and civic rights, for example, may produce demands for economic rights and may be the source of public pressure in the face of policy failure—as in the case of famines. Women’s rights and participation in society affect the economic, political and social rights of men, women and children more broadly. Development is contingent, then, on a set of “jointly relevant concerns” impacting upon freedom, including education, health care and social security.

These ideas link democracy and development. Democracy resides not so much in electoral and parliamentary processes as in deepening and broadening the participation of citizens in social life, and their active engagement in public issues that affect their day-to-day lives.

Education, and basic education and literacy in particular, is critical to freedom and participation. Beyond notions of simple “human capital”, educational capabilities must be embraced as both the engine for democratic participation and the central idea of active citizenship. Basic education provides the capabilities required for democratic participation.

Following on from these ideas, education in the post-apartheid state needs to be of a high quality if it is not to lead to social rejection and apathy. It must provide the basic “capabilities” necessary for a person to exercise social choices and avail himself of the opportunities for engagement in life. It must enhance the ability of the poor to participate as effective and informed citizens in the body politic, and be able to influence the decisions of policy-makers and planners. Through it, communities—and especially poor communities—should be able to engage and intervene with day-to-day concerns (whether local or not) and in so doing become agents for social change and development.

### **2.3 Some core objectives of education**

The relationship between education, democracy and development provides the broader framework for linking growth in individual capabilities and the wider social good. In this section, we suggest six core objectives of education that align with these ideas: (i) effective communication skills; (ii) numerical confidence; (iii) understanding the physical world; (iv) understanding society; (v) developing meaningful relationships; and (vi) sensing the possibilities of life. These objectives are not intended to be exclusive, but rather provide areas of focus consistent with the wider project of deepening democracy in South Africa. In this section, we define these areas; in the following section, we begin to consider how far we have progressed in each of these areas in the first ten years of democracy.

#### **• Effective communication skills**

Meaningful education implies that children are provided with the means to read, write and communicate effectively. Millions of people throughout the world who cannot read and write find themselves living severely limited lives. Literacy is essential to human dignity and self-respect. It enables people to recognise their names in writing; it enhances participation in social, cultural, religious and civic life; and it banishes the category of ignorance to which so many people have been relegated for so long.

Without reading and writing skills, people are vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and misery.

A large part of human knowledge and experience is mediated through the written word. A citizen with the capacity to read an editorial in a newspaper, to fill in a form, to apply for an ID document, to open a bank account, to interpret a till slip, to read a novel, to help a child with homework, and to write his or her own story is better able to participate in society, as well as to make choices in life. The ambit of literacy reaches beyond the most basic skills of reading and writing, and includes sparking a culture of reading, facilitating the exploration of ideas, and encouraging public debate and discussion.

In a world where English is dominant as a global “economic” language, effective skills of communication include the development of other languages. The task of developing other languages in a country with eleven official languages is both daunting and exhilarating. The challenges are many. They include the expansion of access to confident English skills as the basis for entering a wider social dialogue. They include maintaining strong mother-tongue instruction in the early phases of education in order to establish a sound basis for conceptual knowledge development. They include an expansion of access to African languages—a child without access to African languages is ill-prepared for life in South Africa. Perhaps most importantly, they include an ongoing process of developing the reach and depth of all South African languages in order to ensure their strength during a time where local languages are often undervalued and undermined.

- **Numerical confidence**

The second core objective of education concerns the power of quantification—the ability to measure, analyse, plan, and relate through numbers. These abilities are essential in daily life. It is difficult for those who are numerate to imagine how difficult life can be if one does not have a confident grasp of numbers, including sizes, measurements, quantities, dimensions, costs, and interest rates.

Confidence with numbers is essential to the daily survival of families. A young person who is starting a family needs to know how to manage finances and to balance daily household, education and health expenses. What is the relative cost of buying expensive shoes, investing in a business, or buying schoolbooks for one’s children? So, too, someone who is starting her own business must have some understanding of interest rates, access to capital, production costs, fluctuations in commodity prices, and the management of input and output costs. An employed person should have some understanding of wages, inflation, salary increases and taxes. A young person who is trying to make sense of society requires tools to understand the quantity of resources used in society, quantify their value, as well as the trade-offs and consequences of society’s resource choices. Without numerical confidence, how can we assess the trade-offs between investments in education, military hardware, water services, health care or roads?

- **Understanding the physical world**

Education needs to provide children with tools for understanding the physical world. At its most basic level, science education must promote the curiosity of young people. Rooted in the skills of observation, smell, touch and measurement, learners must be encouraged to sense, understand and respect the physical world in which we live.

Understanding the physical world has many aspects. Children who understand nutrients, plant and animal biology, and the human body are in a better position to care for their bodies, families and environment. Concepts such as matter, energy, atomic structure, periodic tables, and the nature of chemical reactions help children to understand the makeup of the physical world. An understanding of the universe, albeit limited, helps place our earth in perspective in its interrelationship with the planets, sun, stars and galaxies. It encompasses wonder in contemplating what science has not fully grasped—the interrelationships between living things and the essence of quantum relationships.

Science education can help to develop an understanding of the challenges of sustainable development and of the environmental consequences of contemporary human lifestyles. It must provide children with a consciousness of their impact on and responsibility for their physical environment. It must provide the seeds of inquiry for future scientists and innovators in the areas of sustainable and environmentally sound technological developments.

An emphasis on the physical world needs to foster a broad approach to science, harnessing indigenous as well as “Western” knowledge and traditions.

- **Understanding society**

A core objective of education is to provide learners with an understanding of society and of their role as agents within it. Education must provide an understanding of the complexities of society—its demographic makeup, its geographic, regional and cultural diversities, its socio-economic realities and patterns. Understanding society implies an understanding of social power in all its forms—the power of government, civil society, the private sector, organised labour, technology, and individuals, men, women and children. It also implies an understanding of powerlessness, and the social and historical backdrop to patterns of vulnerability. In historically marginalised communities, it is particularly important in the way it allows children to “see” and challenge the inherited patterns of powerlessness that may otherwise limit their lives.

A good educational system teaches us how to think critically about the things we see around us. It challenges common-sense notions of how society works. It enables us to ask difficult and sometimes uncomfortable questions about the nature of society, with a view to making it more democratic, humane and fair.

Understanding society requires young people to understand and sense our history and the struggles of previous generations. They need to understand the patterns of today’s South Africa—and the patterns of poverty and privilege in South Africa and across the world—within the context of our colonial and apartheid legacies. Passing on an understanding of history is one of the most powerful tools in building social justice. It can provide a defence against racism, act as a catalyst in empowering young people to act consciously in transforming society, and can teach empathy, justice and compassion. It provides society with a collective memory of crimes against humanity which may prevent history from repeating itself—or at least provide a critical voice when democracy is in peril.

Understanding contemporary society also includes an understanding of technology—its scientific basis, its uses, social benefits and dangers. Young people must have a functional grasp of the use of telephones, computers, the Internet and the media. More than that, they must have a sense of the relationship between technological choices and developments and human livelihoods, as well as a critical capacity to assess where the usefulness of technology begins and ends.



- **Developing meaningful relationships**

Apartheid has had a profound impact on relationships in South Africa. Its overarching effect was to deny our common humanity. Apartheid's authoritarian and inequitable social structures reinforced the value of obedience over creativity, of hierarchical authority over engagement, and of violence over democratic process. Historically, there has been an unrelenting attack on equity, tolerance, openness and compassion.

It is the responsibility of the education system to provide young people with an experience of how to develop diverse relationships of trust and respect. Young people need to interact with a range of people who are different from themselves in order to recognise their common humanity, and they need to build their confidence in working collectively to confront the complex problems of our society. In practice, this means modelling respectful relationships, combating racism, prejudice and stereotyping, and preventing the bullying and silencing of children within our schools.

The concept of Ubuntu implies that we constitute ourselves through how we interact with other people. It is a profound call for humanness, and is deeply rooted in the importance of human relationships of compassion and care. The challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic make all the more important this higher call for compassion, respect and care. Rather than consequential, it should be a conscious and core objective of a democratic education system to provide young people with the experience and skills of developing meaningful relationships.

- **Affirming the possibilities of life**

The system of education under apartheid served to undermine children's belief in their own capacity, their own beauty, and the strength and capacities of their home communities. This legacy still devastates our nation—culturally, socially, psychologically and economically. One of the most important objectives of public education is to provide young people with a sense of confidence in their own person and in life's possibilities.

It is true that when a child can read, write and communicate, is numerate and can understand society better, her self-confidence is enhanced greatly. But this objective reaches beyond the achievement of other specific outcomes of education.

This objective is about providing a child with a sense of her own self, beyond any achievement in any specific skill area. It is about instilling the sense that failure in an exam represents a challenge for further study rather than a reflection of a limited person. It is about providing children with a sense of "I can"—I can learn, I can do new things, I can contribute to my community and to the world. It is fundamentally about teaching young people both *how* to learn and the *love* of learning as a tool for navigating a complicated world. It is importantly about a belief in the intrinsic beauty and capacity of all young people, and providing them with an internal guide to finding their strengths rather than sinking into patterns of fear and self-doubt.

This objective is also about consciously reviving within the school curriculum the great legacies of all of our people. A young person who understands the achievements and struggles of her people is better equipped to respect herself in the contemporary world. The apartheid curriculum was by definition Eurocentric in orientation. Unless we consciously embrace the project of shifting the curriculum away from an overly European orientation, we will continue to do a disservice to the confidence of our young people. Until the history of civilisation in ancient Egypt is fully appreciated as the predecessor of developments in ancient Greece and Rome,

we will not be providing our children with an accurate or empowering understanding of history.

This relates closely with providing children with a strong sense of local meaning and understanding. Ngugi wa Thiong'o draws the analogy of a person who wants to travel to Johannesburg and gets lost. For that person to be able to receive directions, she has to have a good understanding of where she is at that moment. In order to get from "here" to "there"—whether from one place to another, or from today to a better tomorrow, one has to be grounded in an understanding of both today (one's self, one's community) and the possibilities of tomorrow. If the orientation of the school curriculum does not value the local, young people are left without a solid base from which to navigate the wider world with confidence.

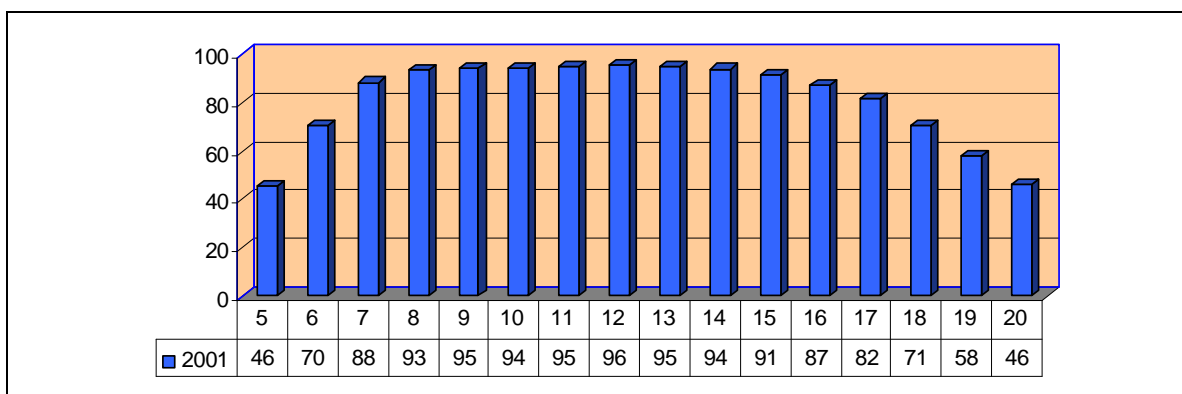
### 3. How far have we come?

In the previous section, we reflected on the purpose of education and suggested six core objectives of education in a democratic South Africa. In this section, we take a step back and consider how far we have come in realising these objectives in the post-apartheid period. Rather than undertaking a detailed evaluation, we consider evidence that paints a broad picture in each area. We begin by considering the extent to which South African children have access to basic education.

#### 3.1 Access to basic education

South Africa enjoys extremely high enrolment rates in basic education, and particularly in primary education. Access to education has expanded significantly in the past 15 years. In 1991, there were 10-million learners enrolled in Grades 1 through to 12 in the public education system. By 1994 this figure had increased to 11.5-million; by the late 1990s, this figure peaked at just over 12-million learners (DoE, 2000). The gross enrolment rate for the primary phase is 99%. At the time of the census (2001), slightly fewer children were attending school than in the previous census (1996), but the number of children in school during the primary phase remains high. The high value placed on education by both learners and parents, as well as the wide reach of educational facilities in the nation, represents one of the country's most important assets.

Figure 1: Percentage of 5- to 20-year-olds attending educational institutions, 2001



Census 2001 (StatsSA, 2003)

While enrolment rates are a cause for celebration, there are limitations to access that represent important challenges for the future:

- **System size**

The growth rate of learners in the system has declined by 2.9% since 1998. The most current data suggest that in 2001 there were approximately 11.4-million learners in the system (DoE, 2003a). This decline is explained by several factors, including the elimination of under- and over-aged learners from the system (Perry and Arends, 2004).

- **Compulsory-aged out-of-school learners**

Approximately 5% of learners in the compulsory age band (7-15) are not in school (Census 2001). There has been a marked decline in the out-of-school problem between the census of 1996 and that of 2001. In 1996, 16% of learners between the ages of 7 and 15 were out-of-school compared to 4.7% in 2001 (StatsSA, 2003). Rates of non-participation are highest among African learners, learners in rural areas, and learners with special educational needs. While the numbers are relatively low, research suggests that these children represent the most marginalised of learners (Porteus *et al*, 2001).

- **Flow-through**

There is a very delicate relationship between enrolment, flow-through, quality and access. Some slow flow-through rates reflect the deep instability in the lives of vulnerable learners who, due to challenges at home and in the community, fall in and out of school (*ibid*). This type of slow flow-through should not be considered a systemic inefficiency. Getting these learners back into the system is in fact a demonstration of the system functioning. On the other hand, some slow flow-through reflects the lack of consistent access to quality learning, and raises concerns about meaningful educational access (see Box 1).

Box 1: Flow-through rates

- On average it takes 3.4 years to complete Grades 1, 2 and 3; four in ten learners repeat a grade in the foundation phase.
- Repetition rates are highest in the more rural provinces.
- On average it takes 7.6 years of learner effort to complete primary school, 14.7 years to complete Grade 11, and 19.4 years to complete Grade 12 (Perry and Arends, 2004).
- One in two 14-year-olds, one in three 15-year-olds, and one in four 16-year-olds is still at primary school (StatsSA, 2001:32).
- Repetition is most prevalent at key transitions: from Junior Primary to Senior Primary; in the first year of secondary school (Grade 8); and in the year before the SCE is taken (Grade 11) (DoE, 2003a).

Systemic Evaluation (DoE, 2003c)

- **Secondary school access**

Access to secondary education has increased dramatically over the past several decades from a GER of 21% in 1975 to the 87% reported in 2000. However, there are still problems with significant drop-out of the system at the secondary level. First, there is concern about the drop-out of learners from primary to secondary phase. Secondly, there is a fairly significant drop-out rate during secondary schooling. Figure 2 follows six Grade 10 cohorts through to Grade 12, demonstrating that only between 60 and 70% of learners who enrol in Grade 10 continue to enrol in Grade 12.



Figure 2: Secondary school enrolment

Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12		% Flow-through Gr 11-12	% Flow-through Gr 10-11
1996	769 377	1997	679 563	1998	603 114	88.8	88.3
1997	807 277	1998	722 065	1999	571 848	79.2	89.4
1998	836 205	1999	738 220	2000	549 203	74.4	88.3
1999	840 803	2000	724 192	2001	488 352	67.4	86.1
2000	836 692	2001	671 849	2002	486 795	72.5	80.3
2001	804 150	2002	719 934	2003	555 118	77.1	89.5

Fatti, 2004

- **Access to a matric pass**

There has been a significant increase in the matric pass rate over the past several years, climbing from 53% in 1994 to 73% in 2003. However, the number of candidates peaked in 1997 and has declined significantly since then. Taken together, the number of matriculation passes has increased modestly (Figure 3). There is evidence that some learners who are not considered ready to pass are increasingly being encouraged not to take the exam (Motala, 2002). It is estimated that only one-third of the learners who entered Grade 12 twelve years previously pass the SCE in the timeframe suggested as a norm (Motala and Perry, 2002).

In 2002, only 17% of matric candidates gained a pass that enabled them to enter higher and further education. Historically, achievement in higher education has been skewed by race, with 30% of whites over the age of 20 and only 5% of Africans having achieved higher educational qualifications (StatsSA, 2003:13, 48). While a minority of candidates achieve SCE passes enabling them to enter higher and further education, the remaining 300 000 (both pass and fail) enter the labour market along with about 550 000 school drop-outs who leave the school system annually. The employment rates of these new entrants to the labour market are very low: in total about 37% find jobs. Disparities across race are vast: only 29% of African entrants find jobs compared to 75% of new white entrants who find work (HSRC, 2004).

Figure 3: Matric exam—candidates, pass rates and exemptions

Year	Candidates	Pass		Exemptions	
		Number	%	Number	%
1990	360 452	191 249	53	60 281	17
1991	403 468	221 407	54	73 054	18
1992	448 491	250 527	56	75 501	17
1993	472 458	242 310	51	88 820	15
1994	495 406	287 343	53	88 497	15
1995	531 453	283 742	53	78 821	15
1996	518 225	279 487	54	80 015	15
1997	559 223	264 795	47	70 127	13
1998	552 862	272 501	49	69 861	13
1999	511 474	249 831	49	63 725	12.5
2000	489 941	283 294	58	68 626	14
2001	449 371	277 206	62	67 707	15.1
2002	443 821	305 774	69	75 048	16.9
2003	440 267	322 492	73	82 010	18.6

Fatti, 2004

The question that remains concerns what educational pathways are available for learners who fall in and out of school, or fall out of school altogether. Most learners who do not achieve a matriculation pass are encouraged to enrol at adult basic education facilities. While beyond the scope of this paper, the roll-out of quality ABET facilities has been slow and uneven. Given that many of these learners come from poor households, access to private further education is not accessible. In a study of rural education currently being undertaken by the Nelson Mandela Foundation, young community researchers were concerned about out-of-school learners, identifying their lives as “stuck”. They identified the lack of opportunities for young people who do not achieve a matric as a “crisis” in the lives of their communities.

### **3.2 Effective communication skills**

A range of studies have been undertaken to consider the literacy levels of South African learners. As a general trend, learners across school phases demonstrate poor literacy performance. A study of Grade 4 learners demonstrated an average score of 50% in literacy (MLA, 1999). As compared to eleven other African nations, this performance ranked in the bottom three of the nations (MLA, 1999; DoE, 1999). A study of secondary phase learners in English literacy demonstrated scores of approximately 33% (Kanjee *et al*, 2001).

In both primary and secondary schools, learners are considered better at receptive skills such as listening and reading comprehension than at productive skills like writing and speaking (*ibid*, 2001; DoE, 2003c; Taylor and Vinjevod, 1999). Consequently, learners perform significantly better on items that allow them to select a correct response than on items that require them to produce their own response (DoE, 2003c: 58-62).

Researchers from the Quality Learning Project found that most Grade 9 and 11 learners: demonstrated a limited vocabulary; were unable to arrange words alphabetically; lacked the ability to find clues in the text that could explain the meaning of words; lacked specific knowledge to organise and access information; knew the literal meaning of words but did not understand the connotative meaning; had difficulty in making inferential judgements using text and pictures; demonstrated limited skills in identifying the main idea of a written text; had limited command of language/grammatical structures; and possessed very limited writing skills. With regard to this last item, they were, for example, unable to fill in a job application form (Kanjee *et al*, 2001: 13).

Patterns of poor performance in literacy tasks suggest that there is a small “world” of learners who are accessing literacy with confidence, and a larger world of learners who are not. Two important factors underlying these patterns of performance are related to the language of instruction and the socio-economic context for learning. These factors are explored later in this paper.

### **3.3 Confident numeracy and understanding of the physical world**

One of the deep scars left by the apartheid system of education was a lack of confidence amongst most black learners in mathematics. Apartheid propagated a myth that effective mathematical skills were beyond the grasp of black people. To this end, post-apartheid education policies have been directed towards reversing this trend, with emphasis being placed on the development of mathematics in previously disadvantaged schools.

Recent international studies conclude, however, that South African learners continue to perform poorly in numeracy and science. In 1996, South African learners ranked

last out of the forty countries which participated in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. Learners performed poorly on tasks that involved graphic interpretation and on tasks that required creatively generated responses. South Africa was the only country with no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls in both mathematics and science. Learners performed marginally better in mathematics than in science (SABC, 2004).

In regional comparisons of Grade 4 numeracy skills with eleven other African countries, South Africa ranked lowest (DoE, 1999; Chinapah, 2000). Three independent studies (MLA, 1999; DoE, 2003c; Kanjee, 2001) indicate extremely low levels of competence in numeracy in Grades 3 and 4, and mathematics in Grades 9 and 11, with average scores of approximately 30%. The studies suggest that learners lack a conceptual grasp of the number system, with counting and ordering tasks being less well done than addition in the lower grades. Understanding of subtraction, division and multiplication is very poor (Taylor, 2001, p.9). It appears that most learners are competent at adding two digit numbers (that is, tens) but do not cope when hundreds and thousands are encountered. Findings from the President's Education Initiative (PEI) showed that at Grade 4 level most educators rarely venture beyond tens and units (Taylor and Vinjevoel, 1999).

The Third International Math and Science Study Report (TIMSS, 1996) reports that 27% of learners in South Africa are taught maths by educators with no qualifications in mathematics, while 38% of learners are taught science by educators with no qualifications in science.

The number of Mathematics and Physical Science candidates enrolled for the SCE has almost doubled over the ten-year period since 1994. There has been a simultaneous decline in the number of candidates taking Maths and Science on the Higher Grade. In 2002, about 25 000 candidates passed Physical Science on the Higher Grade, while about 20 000 passed Mathematics on the Higher Grade. This represents about 5.6% and 4.5% of the entire cohort. While girls appear to perform slightly better than boys in Mathematics in the mid-primary stream, in the SCE girls do significantly less well than boys, with only 41% of girl learners receiving a Maths pass in 2000 as compared to 50% of boys.

### **3.4 Understanding society, building relationships and affirming the possibilities of life**

The final three objectives suggested earlier in this paper are understanding society, building meaningful relationships, and affirming the possibilities of life. Progress in achieving these objectives is difficult to measure. It is difficult to measure whether education enables young people to engage better with their social environment and to deal with complex social realities. Similarly, it is difficult to measure whether education prepares children to challenge historical hierarchies and power relationships, whether it nurtures respect and compassion, and to what extent children leave school with a confident sense of self, rather than self-doubt. However, several studies suggest the following (see Box 2):

- Critical thinking skills and the creativity implicit in these are not yet well-developed in most South African classrooms;
- While the space for a fundamental content shift in curriculum may be available, evidence suggests that learners are not yet exposed to a critical understanding of African and South African history. There is little evidence of a significant shift of curricular content privileging African and South African history and knowledge systems.

- Evidence from educators, learners and parents suggests that schools are not currently places that model effective and caring relationships;
- African languages are not being actively developed at the level of curriculum or pedagogy in primary and secondary schools;
- While some children develop a sense of purpose and possibility through education, a large number of children come out of the school experience doubting their capacity to learn, their talents and their future choices and life possibilities.

Box 2: Understanding society, relationships and the possibilities of life

- In a study considering values in education, almost half of all educators questioned whether human rights were practical in the school context. Over three-quarters of educators believed that an over-emphasis on children's rights undermined classroom functioning (DoE, 2002b).
- Some educators in the study did not feel confident in facilitating an environment conducive to questioning, and many doubted the role of critical thinking in the classroom context. The few educators who support critical pedagogies felt there was little time in class to cultivate critical thinking, that it was not supported by management, or simply that it was not relevant to the curriculum (DoE, 2002b).
- Over 35% of educators in the study felt that we should not teach too much about the history of apartheid because it will divide people (DoE, 2002b).
- Learners and parents identified 'communication' as the most important missing 'value' in schools. Learners felt that they are not listened to, that they were insulted, humiliated, assaulted physically and sexually harassed. They described communication as one-directional, and within the strict norms of hierarchical relationships (DoE, 2002b).
- An overwhelming number of learners described their relationship with educators as authoritarian and violent (DoE, 2002b).
- Almost half of all educators in the study indicated that they did not think that they could establish 'respectful' classroom relationships without corporal punishment (DoE, 2002b).
- Harley *et al* (2000) reported from their classroom-based study that one of the least observed competences among South African teachers was the development of creative and critical thinking.
- The President's Education Initiative (1999) showed a tendency towards transmission models of teaching in most schools. "Survival teaching" is most likely to take place in poor schools, which are typically in rural areas and townships. Studies show that classroom realities in most South African schools support a "banking" model of education (Harley *et al*, 2000; PEI, 1999; Jessop, 1997, 1998).
- The Birth to Twenty Study (BTT), a longitudinal study conducted with over 3 000 children born in greater Johannesburg in 1990, has tracked the development of a cross-section of urban children. The study has found a high incidence of bullying at primary schools, where 38% of children reported having been a victim of bullying.
- Racial discrimination continues to characterise relationships in many integrated schools across the country. The majority of learners interviewed in a study of the deracialisation of schools reported being discriminated against by their peers. Name-calling and negative stereotyping are common (Sekete *et al*, 2001: 58).
- Young people in more privileged schools face another set of challenges. Evidence suggests that learning takes place too often in a socio-political vacuum. Many learners in these schools are not exposed to or challenged to think about the dynamics of power, privilege, and poverty, nor their role in current social patterns.
- Pre-service training fails to prepare educators for the diverse reality of the classroom, with most (85%) reporting no training in anti-discrimination and anti-racism (Sekete *et al*, 2001: 30).
- Many educators are not familiar with the communities from which learners come, and are unable to reconcile the Western knowledge system with indigenous knowledge that children bring to the classroom (*ibid.* 40).
- Schools are not yet modelling relationships of respect between men and women, and girls and boys. Across a range of participatory studies with learners (DoE, 2002b; Porteus *et al*, 2000), both boys and girls identify the different treatment of boy and girl learners, and particularly sexual harassment of girl learners as a major concern.
- There is still little evidence of a massive reorientation of the curriculum from the Eurocentric orientation under apartheid to privilege the history, culture and ideas of the African continent (Mancu, 2003).

Values in Education (DoE, 2002b)

## 4. Considering transformation: within the school gates

At the beginning of this paper, we reflected on the purpose of education, and suggested six core objectives. In the previous section we reviewed the current status of schooling with respect to these core objectives and suggested that, despite a range of fundamental policy changes and interventions, we have not achieved our objectives. The evidence presents a picture of differential access, one which privileges the lives of a small minority of children while leaving others behind. This demonstrates the resilience of many of the dynamics of apartheid education and the persistence of social inequality and divisions in the democratic era.

The challenges for educational transformation are located both within and beyond the school gates. In this section, we consider five central areas within the school gates which particularly impact upon the education of learners from poor communities: early childhood education, resource distribution, language policy and practice, classroom practice, and education for learners with special needs. In the following section we consider the challenges located beyond the school gates.

### 4.1 Early childhood development

Both local and international research suggests that many children born into poverty may confront their greatest and most enduring disadvantages during gestation and the first few years of life. Prior to 1994, the democratic movement developed plans that placed emphasis on the importance of early childhood educational services as a strategy for addressing the deep inequities inherited by our youngest citizens (NEPI, 1993; RDP, 1994).

In 1996, the Department of Education undertook a comprehensive review of the patterns of formal ECD provisioning, and a national audit was undertaken in 2000 (see Box 3). The pattern of ECD provisioning inherited in 1994, detailed in the audit results, reflected apartheid's intent.

Box 3: Patterns of ECD provisioning, National Audit, 2000

- Only one in six children under age 7 has access to some sort of site-based ECD. Children in rural areas have the least access to services.
- Across the four quality indices (support, infrastructure, practitioner and programme), sites servicing African children rate the lowest, while sites servicing white children rate the highest .
- Only 10% of sites catered to more than one population group.
- English is the dominant language of instruction across learning sites. While English was the home language of only 8.2% of learners, it was used as the language of instruction in 83% of the sites.
- Nearly one third (28%) of the sites relied on school fees alone. Fees averaged at R25 per learner per month at one-third of the sites, between R25 and R75 at another third, and over R75 in the final third. Payment of fees is generally poor.
- Some sites depend on limited subsidies from the governmental departments of welfare (20%), education (10%) and health (7%), but the current financial basis of most sites is precarious.
- 99% of ECD teachers are women. 23% of practitioners either have no training and/or do not have recognised qualifications (88%). 60% of the practitioners without any training are African; 61% of practitioners with recognised qualifications are white.
- Low qualifications are associated with low pay. 44% of practitioners earn less than R500 per month. Both qualification and salary profiles demonstrate deep inequalities between African and white teachers.

National Audit of ECD (DoE, 2000)



Policy choices made in 2001 shift the emphasis from integrated services for the nought- to six-year-old cohort toward building a national system of Reception Year classrooms attached to primary schools. The medium-term goal articulated within the White Paper is for all children entering Grade 1 to have participated in an accredited Reception Year Programme by 2010. Limited funding is available in national and provincial education budgets to support this massive transformation challenge.

There are at least two worrying possibilities—the decline in the community/home-based ECD sub-sector, and the relegation of five-year-old learners in poor communities to under-resourced reception classrooms. In 2000, community and home-based centres represented 80% of the sector. The ECD White Paper envisions community sites representing a maximum of 15% in the medium term, with a declining percentage after that. The financial viability of these centres is already marginal. There is a risk that the extraction of five-year-olds to the public system creates a possibility of “crowding out” the community-based sites, leading to an overall decline in services for the nought- to six-year-old cohort.

In 2001, there were 241 525 learners in reception year classrooms, an increase from 156 292 in 1999. There is some concern that the scale of the planned expansion will not happen because of provincial budgeting pressures. There is a greater concern that the lack of expanded educational resources in ECD will inevitably lead to poor quality provision to previously disadvantaged communities. Without adequate resources for infrastructure, materials and educator training, reception classes can quickly deteriorate from educational to “warehousing” functions. Currently, the financial pressures of quality reception year classrooms will rely on locally-based schools fees and other SGB funds.

The impact of these financing policies will be greatest for children living in poor households and communities. Should higher fees be levied, poor children will inevitably be further marginalised. Fewer children under five will have access to services, and the most important period for cognitive, emotional and physical development will be compromised for poor children.

## **4.2 Resource distribution**

There were great expectations that a democratic government would immediately end the inequitable distribution of educational resources under apartheid, and work quickly to redress historical resource inequities. The democratic government inherited a deeply divided educational system—a relatively well-resourced system for white learners and a poorly-resourced system for the majority of black learners. Educational redress, however, did not simply imply an equitable distribution of resources. As a general trend, it takes more educational resources to educate a child facing several socio-economic challenges than a child living in relative privilege. There was an expectation that a combination of increased educational expenditure and progressive educational finance frameworks would serve to enable the situation to move more quickly in the direction of progressive redress.

There has been some progress in redistributing resources. Educational expenditure has increased in the last ten years. To some extent, financial policies have directed resources to underprivileged schools. However, we still remain far from achieving redress. There are several policy choices which help provide an understanding of the patterns of resource inequity remaining in the system. First, the macro-economic policies adopted by government have limited social expenditure. In the context of fiscally conservative macro-economic choices, economists from the Treasury argued that redress should be based on the containment of costs (DoF, 1996). The “release”

of resources from a containment of costs has been both limited and difficult to channel into redress spending. School financing policies have confounded issues of redress. Local school governing bodies bear the responsibility for “taking all reasonable measures” to supplement school resources, primarily through charging school fees. In 2000, it was estimated that schools fees ranged from zero to as high as R8 000 per year. Approximately 70% of schools charge fees of R100 or less per annum, while just less than 20% of schools charge fees of R1 000 or more per annum (DoE, 2003b).

We review briefly the three areas of educational expenditure: personnel costs, non-personnel costs, and capital expenditure.

### • **Personnel**

Educators are arguably the most important investment in the education system. Personnel expenditure is by far the largest investment in the system, representing almost 90% of the budget in most provinces. The distribution of educators represents one of the most critical redress choices facing policy-makers.

Before 1994, educators were distributed across schools in a highly inequitable way. Different provinces had different learner-educator ratios. Schools for white children had significantly lower learner-educator ratios than other schools. The post provisioning model introduced in 1998 sought to equalise educator ratios, targeting a 40:1 learner-educator ratio in primary schools and a 35:1 ratio in secondary schools. The implementation of this policy successfully addressed some of the inequitable patterns of state-paid educators.

There remain limitations to the process. First, the policy did not seek to *progressively* distribute educators through the system to address historical disadvantages—that is, to provide more educators in schools servicing learners with greater socio-economic challenges. While provision was made for a small pool of “redress posts”, these have largely been left unfilled. Secondly, there was a provision for additional educators in secondary schools for “weighted curricula”. Given that these curricular offerings continue to be offered mainly at historically advantaged schools, these schools benefit from additional resources. Thirdly, the more experienced educators remain at the more privileged schools. Perhaps most importantly, local school governing bodies are allowed to hire additional educators using locally raised school fees. Wealthier schools are in a better position to supplement their teaching staff with additional “SGB posts” than other schools.

#### Box 4: Educator distribution

- Gauteng (21.7%) and the Western Cape (13.4%) have the highest proportion of educators paid from local school funds. Provinces more rural in nature have significantly fewer.
- In Gauteng, learner-educator ratios are 27:1 in former white schools and 37:1 in former African schools.
- In Gauteng, learner-educator ratios are 26:1 in the most wealthy quintile of schools and 38:1 in the least wealthy quintile.

GDE, 2003: 23

### • **Infrastructure**

Since 1999, capital expenditure in schools has increased, targeting capital redress investments. Some of the budget allocations have not been used because of a lack of capacity to manage capital investment projects in the provincial education and public works departments.

Some gains are demonstrated in the School Register of Needs between 1996 and 2000 (see Box 5). Important gains were made during this period in the provision of water, electricity and sanitation to schools. Even so, over one-quarter of South African schools still have no access to water. Half of all schools have no access to electricity. Twenty percent of learners in the rural province of the Eastern Cape have no sanitation facilities. While there was some decline in the learner-classroom ratios, more schools were reported to be in poor condition in 2000 than in 1996. Rural and poor urban schools continue to carry a disproportionate burden of the lack of basic services and facilities.

Box 5: Infrastructure development

- National learner-classroom ratios declined from 43:1 in 1996 to 38:1 in 2000.
- 34% of schools had no access to water in 1996, as compared to 27% in 2000.
- 42% of schools had electricity in 1996, as compared to 57% in 2000.
- 12% of schools had no sanitation facilities in 1996; while in 2000, 9% had no sanitation facilities. 55% of learners were without toilet facilities in 1996 compared to 17% in 2000. 20% of Eastern Cape schools had no sanitation facilities in 2000.

School Register of Needs (DoE, 2001c)

- **Learning and teaching support materials (LSMs)**

The budget that is allocated to schools beyond personnel and capital expenditure is intended to cover maintenance, rates and LSMs. Learning and teaching support materials are widely regarded as having some of the most important short-term impacts on learning and teaching quality.

The non-personnel resources distributed to schools are allocated according to an equity-driven formula which is designed to allocate resources progressively toward historically disadvantaged schools. The poorest two quintiles (40% of schools) are allocated 60% of non-recurrent expenditures, while the most privileged two quintiles are allocated 20% of the resources. In practice, the actual non-personnel budget distributed to schools represents on average less than 8% of provincial education expenditure, with poorer provinces distributing the lowest levels. Given the low levels of non-personnel resources distributed to schools, schools increasingly rely on school fees to cover the basic costs of electricity, water, maintenance and textbooks (Kgobe, 2001). The reliance on local school fees perpetuates historical inequities, with schools servicing poorer neighbourhoods having less access to basic educational resources than more privileged schools. Box 6 captures the inequalities between provinces (and particularly the more urban provinces versus the more rural provinces) and schools.

Box 6: Learning and teaching support materials

- In 2000, the average per-learner support expenditure was R275 in Gauteng compared to R35 in KwaZulu-Natal.
- Most (70%) of schools were without computers in 2000. 40% of schools in the Western Cape and Gauteng have computers on site. 90% of schools in Eastern Cape and Limpopo have no access to computers.
- In 2000, only one in five public schools had media centres. At least one in two schools in Gauteng and the Western Cape have media centres. Fewer than one in ten schools in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo have access to any sort of media centre.
- 35% of schools across the country had no sports facilities at all.
- Only 54% of Grade 3 teachers have some books in their classroom (DOE, 2003c).

School Register of Needs (2001c)



### 4.3 The classroom experience

Apartheid education was rooted in notions of racial superiority and inferiority, organised around rote learning, and framed within an authoritarian ethic of obedience and control. In the first ten years of democratic transformation, the government has undertaken a far-reaching and ambitious project of curriculum restructuring. Its most urgent purpose has been to undo the damage done by apartheid curricula and pedagogy. The new curricular framework has emphasised the process of learning and teaching, favoured more experiential forms of learning, and concentrated on measurable outcomes at particular stages in the curriculum.

Educators are critical to the success of any curriculum reform (Fullan, 1993; 1999). Since 1994, the teacher-training sector has undergone some restructuring, with the intention of preparing educators for a different and more democratic understanding of pedagogy. However, the process of transformation of teacher-training curricula remains incomplete. Further, the majority of educators in the system have been trained under the old dispensation (Crouch and Lewin, 2000). Within this context, educators have received limited support in introducing the new curriculum. Most in-service training itself has been focused largely on new and complex terminologies and techniques. As yet, the more nuanced and deeper shifts in pedagogy remain outside the experience and training of many educators. In the DoE's Systemic Evaluation Report, nearly two-thirds of those questioned did not feel confident of implementing OBE. On average, educators reported participating in only 15 hours of in-service training on the new curriculum by 2001 (DoE, 2003c: 46).

There is some concern that the new curriculum has under-emphasised the importance of content knowledge. There is an expectation that educators will abandon the safe and familiar practices of using textbooks and teacher-centred methodologies in favour of the creative selection and development of curriculum materials for group work. There is a real danger that this will lead some educators—particularly those who are less well trained—to abandon texts and content in a way that undermines content mastery, with the result that learners exit with an even lower skills and knowledge base.

The lack of emphasis on content reform has pushed to one side the more controversial issue of content transformation. This has meant that a conscious project of ensuring that the curriculum becomes less Eurocentric, and privileges African history, culture and ideas, has not been centrally driven. Further, there is some concern that the new curriculum is implicitly biased toward a middle-class environment, underplaying the context of poverty and inequity. Analysts fear that this creates a duality for black learners where school life and home life are overly disconnected (Baxen and Soudien, 1999: 138-139).

The implementation of the new curriculum has faltered around some of these issues (see Box 7). As could be expected, a large number of learners in the Systemic Evaluation indicated that they were not actively engaged in class (*ibid*, 2003). In an earlier study, the following classroom practices were reported as the norm: lessons dominated by teacher-talk and a low-level of questions; lessons characterised by lack of structure and the absence of activities promoting higher-order skills; real world examples often being used at a very superficial level; little group work; little reading and writing; and very little use of story. Moreover, educators in general were reported to have low levels of conceptual knowledge and a poor grasp of subject knowledge, and consistently made errors in the content and concepts presented in lessons (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999: 139-143).

#### Box 7: The classroom experience

- 80% of educators felt that they used activities consistent with OBE; only 40% of their learners agreed.
- Less than one-third of Grade 3 learners ask questions in class; 43% indicate that they simply repeat what the educator says.
- Only 14% of learners in the study use calculators, and 9% use computers.
- Only one-third of Grade 3 learners report that lessons start on time.
- Learners are reported to use a workbook once every two days; one-third of learners use a workbook less than twice a week.
- Very little reading and writing takes place in most classrooms; most writing consists of one-word answers, with extended pieces or even whole sentences being rare (Taylor *et al.*, 1999).

Systemic Evaluation (2003)

A further difficulty around curriculum change relates to the absence of a culture of learning and teaching in many classrooms. Teaching time is often consumed by non-teaching activity during lessons, including administration, planning learning programmes, marking, extra-curricular activities, meetings with principals and colleagues, self-development studies, and professional development. In addition, schools report losing about ten days a year to timetabling, boycotts, late registration, lack of teaching resources, absenteeism, and so on (DoE, 2003c).

The implications of the curricular reforms on equity and redress are profound. The differing effects of the curriculum for children in urban and rural settings, in poor and rich communities, in the suburbs and townships, are currently not well understood. The potential for increasing the division between historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged schools lies in the differing abilities of schools to apply the curriculum creatively. There is a danger that the curriculum is more likely to thrive in well-resourced schools, deepening the divide between rich and poor schools.

#### 4.4 Language policy and practice

One of the key findings of the UNESCO-UNICEF Monitoring Learning Achievement Project (MLA) across eleven African countries was that learners in countries where the language of instruction was the same as their home language consistently out-performed their counterparts learning in a second or third language of instruction. The Quality Learning Project (QLP) confirmed this correlation between home language, language of instruction and achievement, as did the Systemic Evaluation (Kanjee, *et al.*, 2001; DoE, 2003c).

The importance of language of instruction is not simply related to educational performance but touches on issues of identity, culture, and nation building. During apartheid, home-language instruction became associated with inferiority and racial ghettoisation (Alexander, 2000:17). It is increasingly recognised that there is a strong educational, political and cultural rationale for home-language instruction, especially in the early years of schooling. In spite of this, translating constitutional obligations regarding language into social and educational reality has proven difficult in the first ten years of democracy in South Africa.

The White Paper (1995), the South African Schools Act (SASA, 1996) and the DoE's Language in Education Policy (1997) all support the constitutional principle of the development and promotion of the equal use of all eleven official languages, as well as the promotion of multilingualism in schools. According to SASA (1996), the implementation of language policies is devolved to individual School Governing Bodies. In 1999, PEI researchers found that most schools had not developed language policies with a view to promoting multilingualism. Many schools have not

changed their language policies, even when there was a change in the language profile of pupils. School language policies evolve from realities on the ground, such as staff language proficiency and parental preference for “high status” languages.

The dominance of English as a global economic language overshadows the critical educational reasons for home-language instruction in the early stages of education. In reality, most schools have opted for English as the language of learning and teaching, if not from Grade 1, then from Grade 4, even though it is the home language of only 8.2% of South Africans (StatsSA, 2003: 14). The Senior Certificate examination remains a key driver of language policy in schools as it is currently administered in English and Afrikaans only.

Beyond school-level language policies, the project to develop meaningful learning and teaching materials in all eleven languages remains limited. There is currently little funding to encourage the massive project of developing learning materials, new literary work, and translated texts in all eleven languages. While some tertiary institutions are starting to orient themselves toward intellectual work across the eleven languages, this arguably remains in its early stages.

#### **4.5 Learners with special needs**

The post-apartheid state inherited a separated system of mainstream and special education. The notion of special education was located within a deficit model in which learners with a range of physical and cognitive “deficits” were placed in special schools. While the new government’s policy has been slow to emerge, it has now clearly broken through the traditional notions of special need and provides a more inclusive framework.

Three important shifts away from the traditional notions of deficit and disability have been made. First, the policy embraces notions of diversity over disability. Secondly, the approach expands the diversity of learning needs away from a narrow focus on disability to encompass social, economic and linguistic barriers to learning. Finally, the policy recognises that special needs is not simply a reflection of individual deficit but is reflective of systemic failures.

This approach has led to the adoption of three primary strategies. First, the policy embraces a small special school sector to cater to learners with severe disabilities and cognitive impairment. The policy envisions the qualitative improvement of these centres, and their conversion into resource centres providing support to neighbouring schools through integrated, district-based support teams. Secondly, the policy envisions the conversion of approximately 500 of the current 20 000 primary schools into “full service schools” better equipped to provide a range of support services to a diversity of learners. Finally, the most important strategy is the location of the majority of special needs cases within mainstream schools. The success of these changes is premised on the allocation of resources to support them. However, a financial commitment to supporting this transformation strategy has not yet been forthcoming.

With reference to special schools, the sector remains relatively small, catering to fewer than 1% of learners (DoE, 2002a). Important changes have taken place in the sector since 1994 (see Box 8). Despite these improvements, the transformation process has remained limited. Patterns of provisioning still reflect the deep historical divides of the past (see Box 9).

#### Box 8: Special schools—1996 to 2000

- There were 270 special schools in 1996 as compared to 290 in 2000.
- Computer access has improved from being in 27% of special schools to 52% in 2000.
- 33% of special schools had libraries in 1996; 52% have them in 2000.
- The learner-computer ratio has decreased from 68 to 19.
- In 1996, 37.4% of special schools were state-paid; 94.6% were state-paid in 2000.
- 33% had access ramps in 1996; 66.7% had access ramps in 2000.
- The learner-classroom ratio has improved from 18:1 to 14:1.

School Register of Needs (DoE, 2001c)

#### Box 9: Disparities of provision—the special needs sector

- Over 50% of special schools are located in the wealthy, urban provinces of WC and Gauteng.
- Special schools are largely located in urban areas; only about 50% have boarding facilities. Almost half of learners in special schools are boarders.
- The special school sector inherited in 1994 was fragmented according to race. White learners continue to have significantly greater access than other learners.
- 16% of all disabled children were out-of-school in 2001 (StatsSA, 2003). 17% of African disabled children were out-of-school, while 9% of white children were out-of-school (StatsSA, 2003).
- Children with multiple disabilities (27%), emotional disabilities (25%), or communication disabilities (31%) were most likely to be out of school (StatsSA, 2003).
- One in four children (25%) with a physical disability is out-of-school; 12% of physically disabled white children are out-of-school (StatsSA, 2003).
- The Special Needs sector is significantly more expensive than the mainstream system. Learner-educator ratios nationally were 11:1 in both 1996 and 2000.

School Register of Needs (DoE, 2001c)

The majority of the “special needs” debate lies outside the special school sector. If the term special needs includes a combination of socio-economic deprivation and other psychological, health, and linguistic barriers—including the impact of HIV/AIDS—the size of the special needs population approximates more closely to the majority in the system rather than being a sub-set within it.

There is a range of ways in which it is hoped that the new curriculum may help educators better address the diversity of special needs in the classroom. While the importance of curricular reform and related educator development cannot be underestimated, policy will remain limited unless it engages more fully with expanded notions of “special needs” and the consequences of this for increased educational resources. Without a greater investment in a range of support services for educators and learners, and without a post-provisioning model that advantages learners from historically impoverished backgrounds, the patterns of provision will still work against the most vulnerable learners in our system.

## 5. Considering transformation: beyond the school gates

In this section we consider some of the most important elements of the socio-economic context in South Africa that impact upon a child’s educational pathway. These include: household income and employment status, childhood nutrition, household educational access, access to housing and services, and HIV/AIDS.

### 5.1 Household income

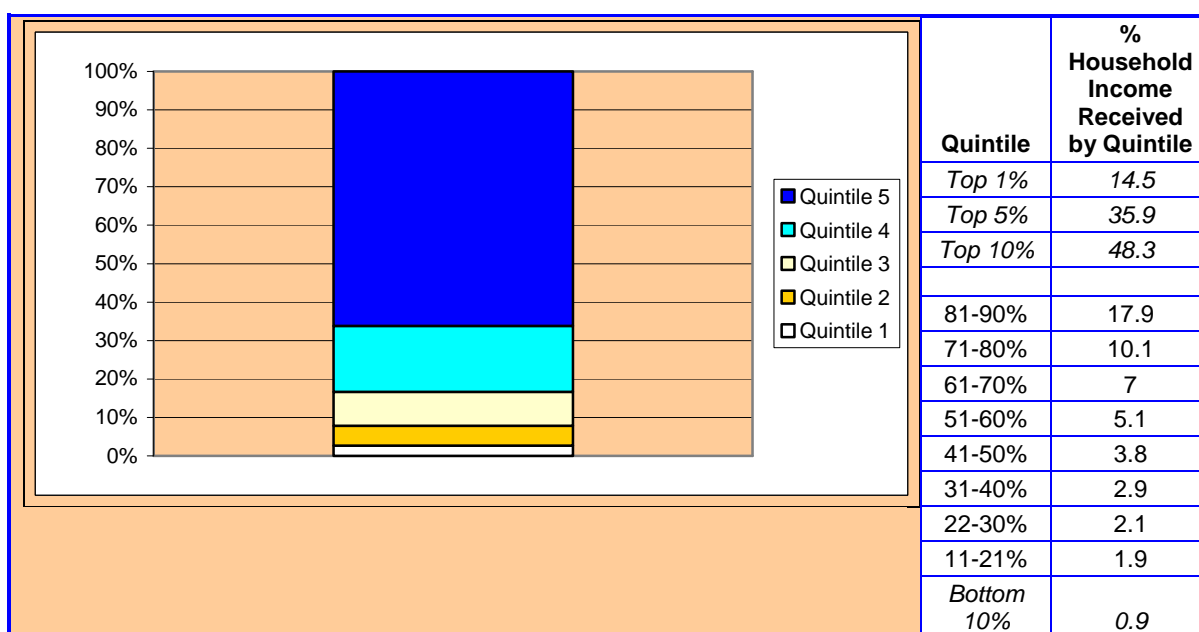
There is overwhelming international evidence that, as a trend, the challenges of poverty negatively impact upon the educational pathways of children.

There is a range of survey data on the socio-economic circumstances of children in South Africa (Bray, 2002). It remains unclear whether the number of children living below thresholds of poverty is stabilising or increasing slightly. What is clear from the data is that there has been no dramatic *decrease* in the number of children living below poverty thresholds. Using different poverty lines and data sets, various studies estimate that between 58 and 75 percent of South African children live below the poverty line (Bray, 2002; StatsSA, 1998-9; Streak, 2002: 3-4).

Patterns of national household income continue to demonstrate the inequities in our society. The figures below (Figure 4) divide households into five quintiles, from richest to poorest. The poorest quintile has an average annual income of R4 385, as opposed to approximately R119 000 for the richest quintile (Wildeman, 2003: 8). Cumulatively, 20% of households command approximately two-thirds of the national household income, while the remaining 80% of households account for approximately one-third. The poorest 20% of the population account for only 2.8% of the total household income. The share of the richest quintile is worth double the cumulative share of the rest of the population. The wealthiest 10% of households account for almost 50% of national household income. The poorest 10% account for less than 1%.

The extreme inequities of household income reflect racial privilege; the apartheid gap between average household incomes does not appear to be decreasing, except among the middle class (see Box 10).

Figure 4: National household income by socio-economic quintile, 2000 (pre-tax %)<sup>1</sup>



Wildeman, 2003: 9, Income and Expenditure Survey 2000, StatsSA

<sup>1</sup> The average income of each quintile was multiplied by the total number of respondents in that quintile. This provided the sum of the collective incomes in that group. This total was then expressed as a percentage of the sum of the entire income distribution.

#### Box 10: Household income

- The average annual income of white households was six times higher than African households in 2000.
- According to the thresholds set by Statistics South Africa for the October Household Study of 1999, 52% of Africans, 17% of Coloureds, and less than 5% of Indians and Whites are poor (OHS, 1999).
- Female-headed households are twice as likely to be poor than male-headed households (*ibid*).
- Poverty is concentrated in the rural areas. 40% of non-urban households were in the bottom poverty quintile and only 4% in the top in 2000.
- Incomes of the richest 10% of African households have risen by 17%, while incomes of the poorest 40% of African households have fallen by 21% (Taylor Report, 2002: 19).
- The average annual household income among African-headed households was R32 000 in 1995 compared to R26 000 in 2000, a significant decline of 18.7%.
- Among white-headed households, the average annual household income was R137 000 in 1995, compared to R158 000 in 2000, a 15.3% increase.

Hirschowitz, 2002

## 5.2 Unemployment

There are approximately nine-million South Africans employed in the formal sector and about two-million in the informal sector (StatsSA, 2003; LFS, 2001). There are seven-million unemployed people between the ages of 15 and 65 in South Africa. Forty percent of the rural population are unemployed. Analysts say that South Africa suffers from higher unemployment levels than most developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (McCord and Borhat, 2004). Increased unemployment is a consequence both of poor growth in formal sector employment and the growth of the economically active cohort (DFID, 2002: 10).

The patterns of unemployment continue to reflect apartheid divisions. Unemployment among Africans is disproportionately high, and growing more rapidly than amongst other South Africans (Aliber, 2001; LFS, 2002; StatsSA, 2002). Race is a more significant determinant of unemployment than gender and location (McCord and Borhat, 2004). Broad unemployment definitions (which include “discouraged” workers who have given up the pursuit of work) show that almost half (47%) of African, female, non-urban people are likely to be unemployed. By contrast, only 13.1% of white women are unemployed.

There is a close correlation between unemployment and poverty. There is a danger that poor African households are becoming poorer (Taylor *et al*, 2001). The number of “workerless” African households grew from 32% in 1995 to 38% in 1999 (Lehohla, 2001). This equates to a rise from 1.9-million to 3.1-million workerless households. The categories of job-seekers least likely to find work are the young unemployed with no labour market experience (35%), and the poorly educated rural (27%) and urban (17%) unemployed (Klasen and Woolard, 1997, cited in May, 2000).

The incidence of unemployment is highest among under-30s. Fifty-six percent of under-30s are unemployed, with unemployment peaking at age 24, with 845 000 unemployed. There has been a significant rise in unemployment of matriculants (25% to 35%) and those with tertiary education (6% to 12%) over the period 1995 to 1999, with Africans in these categories having the greatest difficulty in finding work (McCord and Borhat, 2004). Unemployment affects school drop-outs most profoundly. Between 1995 and 1999, 41% of primary-school-level entrants to the labour market found work, while only 27% of those with incomplete secondary education were able to find work.



Informal sector employment rates have stabilised at about two-million workers, after rapid growth in the 1990s (McCord and Bhorat, 2004). Africans predominate in the informal sector. Three-quarters of informal sector workers earn less than R1 000 per month (Taylor *et al*, 2002: 21). One in five informal workers receives no income, either “helping without pay in a family business” or working as subsistence agriculturalists. Women account for 1,5-million of informal sector workers. Female African and coloured informal sector workers outnumber men, often working as domestic workers (Lehohla, 2001, p.65).

### **5.3 Social grants**

In 2003, 5.8-million South Africans received social grants from the government. The number of beneficiaries has increased by 81.3% over the last four years (DoSD, 2003). More than half of all beneficiaries live in the poorest and most rural provinces: KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo. The two most important state interventions are the State Old Age Pension (SOAP) and the Child Support Grant (CSG). The SOAP is the largest social assistance programme, benefiting about two-million old-age pensioners (DoSD, 2003). There is evidence that these resources are highly concentrated in child welfare (Barbarin and Richter, 2001: 144).

Even so, 76% of children live in households with no pensioners, and are unlikely to benefit from this income (*ibid*: 58). The Child Support Grant (CSG) is arguably the most important programme impacting on the livelihood of young children. This grant was introduced in April 1998 to provide R100 per child per month for children under seven years old, within a means test. Importantly, the grant was designed to “follow the child”, making the grant independent of the child’s family structure. The stated policy of this programme was to reach three-million children within five years, and to phase in extensions in eligibility to age 14 by 2007. In 2003, the number of children receiving grants reached 2.6-million. While there remain concerns about the grant size, access, and the means testing associated with the grant, this intervention is a key state intervention in the lives of poor children.

### **5.4 Nutrition**

A child who does not have sufficient nutritional intake in the early years of development is susceptible to physical and cognitive underdevelopment. Lack of daily and adequate nutrition in the school years is an important underlying factor in poor classroom concentration, weak performance, absenteeism and drop-out.

In 1994, the government prioritised school feeding schemes, with the result that by 2001 some 4.7-million children in 15 000 primary schools were being fed during school hours (DoE, 2003b). There remain problems with the reach, scope and administration of feeding schemes. Some of the poorest children in the most remote areas are not being reached. Neither out-of-school children nor secondary school learners are currently reached by feeding scheme programmes. Despite the primary school feeding scheme, too many of South Africa’s children continue to demonstrate poor basic nutrition profiles (see Box 11).

Box 11: Child nutrition

- 25% of African children demonstrate stunting<sup>2</sup>; 10% of African children demonstrate signs of malnutrition. Both wasting and stunting are more prevalent in rural areas than urban areas.
- Poor growth status is caused by insufficient dietary intake, poor quality of diet, high levels of energy expenditure and/or infectious load.
- One in two children has an intake of less than half the recommended levels of important nutrients.
- One out of two households experienced hunger, one out of four was at risk of hunger, and only one out of four was food secure.
- A significantly higher percentage of households in rural areas and informal settlements experienced hunger. The four most seriously affected provinces were the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Limpopo and Mpumalanga.

National Food Consumption Survey, 2000

## 5.5 Household educational access

Studies show that the educational level of parents/caregivers is one of the most important factors differentiating the performance of learners on literacy and numeracy tests (Chinapah *et al*, 2000; DoE, 2003c: 24). Educational performance is enhanced as children learn to read from an early age and receive more confident and active support for school work.

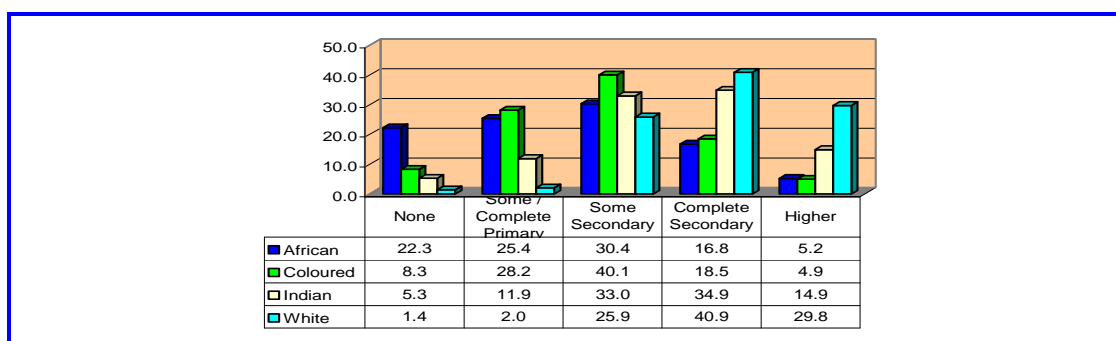
Approximately 15% of adults in South Africa can neither read nor write (OHS, 2000). Almost one in five South Africans over the age of 20 has received no formal education. The numbers are highest in the rural province of Limpopo, where one in three adults over twenty years old has no formal education, as compared to the more urban province of the Western Cape where only one in twenty has no formal education (StatsSA, 2003 20). Racial and rural-urban divides in educational achievement, inherited from the apartheid era, continue to be dominant (see Box 12 and Figure 5).

Box 12: Educational qualifications—adults over 20 years old

- 50% of Africans have no higher than a primary education, compared to 3.4% of white adults.
- 30% of white adults have higher education qualifications, compared to only 5% of Africans.
- 16% of those aged 20 years or more cannot read in at least one language. 16% of African adults, compared to 0.5% of white adults, cannot read in at least one language.
- 26.6% of African non-urban women cannot read in at least one language. 0.3% of white urban women are unable to read in at least one language.

StatsSA, 2003

Figure 5: Highest educational levels, adults over 20 years old—by race group, 2001



Census 2001, StatsSA, 2003

<sup>2</sup> Stunting refers to children who have not grown as tall as they should have for their age (according to international references) and is an indicator of long-term under-nutrition. Wasting refers to low weight-for-age amongst children, and is an indicator of more recent under-nutrition. Both stunting and wasting have negative implications for children's long-term well-being with respect to physical health, psychological development and social capacity (Richter and Griesel, 1994).



## 5.6 Access to stable housing

The absence of a secure home contributes to difficulties in maintaining educational access. Residential insecurity, migration and overcrowding are some of the most important factors which complicate meaningful participation in schooling (Porteus *et al*, 2001). Repetition, dropping out and poor flow-through rates are strongly linked to residential instability.

Like most other basic necessities, access to housing reflects racial privilege. In 2001, more than one-third of African households were living in either traditional dwellings or informal households, mostly without proper sanitation and electricity. Only 1.4% of white households were in the same position. One in five African households shared one room, while about half of all households were living in three or fewer rooms (StatsSA, 2003). Almost a third of learners live in homes with more than eight people permanently residing in them. The prevalence of high-density homes is worst in the rural provinces (about 40% of homes in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal), while only 15% of homes in Gauteng and the Western Cape have more than eight people living in them (DOE, 1999). In contrast, the vast majority of white-headed households, even those in low-income brackets, have access to formal housing, with significantly more room space per household member (Hirschowitz *et al*, 2000).

The number of informal houses is growing because of migration from rural to urban areas, and the relatively low growth in numbers of formal urban dwellings. Between 1995 and 2000, there was an absolute national increase of 653 000 informal dwellings (or 125 000 per year)—the overwhelming majority of which were in urban areas without access to basic services (SAIRR, 2000/01).

## 5.7 Access to basic services

There have been significant gains made in regard to the provision of the basic services of water, electricity and sanitation. However, many learners remain in households without access to basic services; there are vast inequities in service provision according to both race and the rural-urban divide (see Box 13).

Where services are lacking, children in poor communities—and especially girls—are often involved in the time-consuming tasks of fetching water and wood. Lack of water, lighting and fuel for cooking affects both the day-to-day lives and educational experience of learners.

Box 13: Basic services provision

- 17.9% of African households have access to piped water inside their dwelling compared to 80.2% of coloured, Indian and white households. 15% of people access water from rivers and vendors. This disproportionately affects rural and urban informal dwellings.
- 62% of Africans use electricity for lighting as compared to 99% of white South Africans.
- 39% of Africans use electricity for cooking as compared to 97% of white South Africans. Nearly two-thirds of households in Limpopo rely on firewood as the primary source of energy for cooking.
- 30% of African households used electricity as the main source for heating in 1996, as compared to 39% in 2001. While 70% of households have access to electricity, some 20% of these cannot afford to use electricity.
- Only half of all South African households have access to a flush or chemical toilet. The number of households with no toilet facility increased between 1996 and 2001 (12.4% to 13.6%). Fewer than 4% of households in Gauteng have no access to a toilet facility, while more than 30% of households in the Eastern Cape have no access.

Statistics South Africa, 2003

## 5.8 Civic documentation

One of the less well-known challenges of poverty is access to documentation that facilitates basic civic participation. Some of the most marginalised children in South Africa are excluded from consistent participation in schooling because they lack the necessary documentation for school entry. Estimations made using the 1996 census data and the updated population register for the same year indicate that only 58% of children were registered at the time of their birth. For many children born into poor households, and particularly those born outside a hospital, the task of accessing a birth certificate is overwhelming. Children who are subject to residential instability and migration, and who drop in and out of schools as a result, often have difficulty keeping a school transfer record. The absence of either school transfer documentation and/or birth certificates often makes school re-entry difficult for learners (Porteus *et al*, 2001).

## 5.9 Diseases of poverty and access to health care

Health is an important factor in the ability of children to access quality schooling and to enable consistent attendance at school. Poverty, poor nutrition and ill-health are often interconnected. One of the most significant problems in health care provision is the increasing differential in resources available to service poor communities (HST, 2002). The lines of inequity fall along race, gender and rural-urban divides (see Box 14). While health policy has moved to make health care free for all using public primary healthcare facilities, the distribution of these facilities and access to them is not always within easy reach of the poor. In addition, less than half of health expenditure services the public health system, as much of health spending subsidises the well-resourced private sector, which caters for 15% of the population (Taylor, 2002: 31).

Box 14: Health care

- 15% of South Africans belong to private medical aid schemes. 85% of pharmacists and 60% of medical specialists are employed in the private system.
- 54 out of every 1 000 rural African infants die before age one; 39 out of every 1 000 urban African infants die before age one; 11 out of every 1 000 white infants die before age one.
- 81 per 1 000 under-5s die in the Eastern Cape; 13 per 1 000 under-5s die in the Western Cape.

Health Systems Trust Report, 2002

## 5.10 HIV/AIDS

The single most important challenge facing education and its transformation is the impact of HIV/AIDS both on the teaching cadre and on learners. Analysts estimate that there are currently 660 000 AIDS orphans in South Africa (UNAids, 2002). Some 400 000 South Africans die of AIDS annually (Sunday Independent, 14 March 2004). The implications of HIV/AIDS and its negative effect on schooling are likely to be dramatic, as some children can no longer be supported by parents and caregivers, and as others are called upon to care for terminally ill parents and younger siblings. Currently, the highest prevalence rates of HIV are recorded in the poorest, most mobile and least stable housing communities. These are the communities where access to schooling is already compromised by difficult living conditions and poverty. Prevalence rates are also highest among the African section of the population (see Box 15).

Studies of the effects of HIV/AIDS on the teaching cadre and on teacher supply and demand suggest that we need to be training some 30 000 more educators per year at a time when teacher training facilities have been reduced (Crouch and Lewin, 2000).

- Life expectancy has fallen from 62 years in 1990 to 48 in 1999.
- The national prevalence rate of HIV in South Africa is approximately 11%.
- The prevalence rate of people between 15 and 49 is approximately 15%.
- Highest rates of prevalence are in the Free State (14.9%), Gauteng (14.7%), Mpumalanga (14.1%) and KwaZulu-Natal (11.7%).
- Prevalence for Africans is 18.4%, for whites 6.2%, coloureds 6.6%, and Indians at 1.8%.
- HIV appears to flourish in the context of a wide range of social vulnerabilities (including labour migration, mobility, and dislocation) facing African communities.

Nelson Mandela Foundation/HSRC Household Survey of HIV/AIDS, 2002

## 6. Thinking ahead...

At the beginning of this paper, we reflected on the basic purpose of education. Drawing on the Constitution, education policies and legislation, and contemporary thinkers, we suggested that the most important purpose of education in South Africa relates to deepening democracy and the processes of social development. Six core objectives of education were derived from this purpose. The paper provided a cursory review of achievements in these six areas, and then considered factors both within and beyond the school gates that impact upon the lives of vulnerable learners.

The paper is not intended to evaluate the performance of the government during the first ten years of democracy. It is primarily intended as a discussion document to stimulate public dialogue about critical issues facing education as we move beyond our third election and into the second decade of democracy. This paper does not specifically dwell on the range of successes that we have achieved in education. The basic reorganisation of a non-racial education system and the transformation of curriculum represent massive successes in the brief period of our democracy. Rather than focus on these successes, however, we identify core challenges that continue to face our transformation agenda.

We conclude, first, that the deep-seated effects and practices of apartheid are proving far more difficult to eradicate than was expected in 1994. They remain extremely resistant to change. At the time of the birth of democracy, it was difficult to appreciate the intractability of the historical, spatial, economic and particular vested interests that remain in school communities and society at large. Change has been slow to impact upon the poorest schools despite some farsighted and bold policies across a wide range of educational areas.

Secondly, we conclude that many barriers remain to the reconstruction of the education system. One of the most important achievements in education—the achievement of greater access in enrolment in primary schools—is tempered by indications across a spectrum of systemic evaluations that all is not well in how learners learn. Many of the challenges relate to quite fundamental educational problems. These include the paucity and uneven distribution of educational resources, the slow pace of change in classroom practice and of educator development, the under-resourcing of early childhood development, and a lack of implementation of sound educational language policy and practice.

Our third conclusion relates to the interdependence of socio-economic development and education. While quality education can help propagate social development, deep social and economic “unfreedoms” undermine the quality of education. While individual children living in poor neighbourhoods may excel in education, the link

between social deprivation, poverty and unfulfilled educational potential is well documented. Poor nutrition and health, inadequate housing and services, and unemployment and household poverty all play a role in compromising the educational pathways of the poor. Despite important interventions—including the success of the child support grants—gains have not yet been great enough to work against the momentum of inequity facing the nation's young. The structure of the economy, combined with a range of global pressures, has worked to support the meta-structure of poverty facing South African children. The continuation of deep poverty and severe inequity threatens the educational project in the long term.

Perhaps the most disturbing conclusion, then, is the persistence of “two worlds in one nation”, where inequality endures despite policy reforms and efforts at redress. Suburban schools with grassy playing fields, state-of-the-art educational facilities, and highly motivated educators still serve a small minority of middle-class (predominantly white) children, while the majority of children experience education in poorly-resourced township and rural schools, with broken windows, leaky roofs, a paucity of learning resources and often, despite exceptions, under-trained or under-motivated educators. In such a divided system, the right of all children to a quality education is undermined. The persistence of a divided system (despite policy intentions) represents a threat to the long-term process of democracy and nation building.

The persistence of “two worlds” is no more apparent than in the divide between urban and rural areas. Policy intentions have not yet had a significant impact upon rural learners. Schools still do not offer choices and adequately prepare rural learners for livelihoods. How can schools cater to rural learners—both in exposing them to the wider choices of life, as well as maintaining relevance for creating visions of the possibilities of rural community development?

The global environment has proven a difficult one for democracy building and the privileging of aggressive educational redress. The values most dominant in the global economy emphasise competition over cooperation, detachment over compassion, the private over the public, the individual over the social. Further, globally dominant ideas seek to play down the role of the state in mediating and ameliorating the basic welfare of its people and, particularly, of its most vulnerable members.

The persistence and, in some ways, deepening of inequity signals a most important phase in the process of educational change where, unless decisive measures are taken to deal with the divisions of the past, we run the risk of their becoming further entrenched for future generations of South African children. The continuation of a divided society presents a frightening threat for the future of our nation. As we move into the second decade of democracy, we are faced with several questions. While there are pressures from the global environment for specific social policy choices, how can we push forward more aggressively on issues of basic redress? How can we resist the individualistic tendencies of global ideas and insist upon livelihoods of dignity for all South Africans? How can we find ways, both within and beyond the educational system, more aggressively to support the lives of young children born into poverty?

Finally, we conclude that a new vocabulary for education is needed to motivate the transformation required in the second decade of our democracy. It is not enough to talk about the health of the schooling system in terms of the conventional performance indicators that have become the dominant vocabulary of systemic improvement. The success of schooling cannot essentially be captured in league tables, or even in the state of classroom facilities. The vocabulary of performance

indicators, while having its role, must be superseded by a vocabulary of democracy, social hope, compassion, and a sense of personal and community agency. This new vocabulary should shift the conversation of education toward its most important goals—preparing young people and their communities to participate increasingly in our democracy and to confront the development challenges of our times.

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