

**ADDRESSING ISSUES OF
OVERCROWDEDNESS
IN EASTERN CAPE SCHOOLS**

by

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**submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree**

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in the subject

COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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NOVEMBER 1999

Acknowledgements

I thank my supervisor, Dr SM Hoberg, for her valuable advice and support for the duration of this dissertation.

I thank all the research respondents for their input in the research of this dissertation.

I thank Mrs IM Cooper for editing this dissertation.

To whom it may concern

This is to certify that this Med-dissertation, ADDRESSING ISSUES OF OVERCROWDEDNESS IN EASTERN CAPE SCHOOLS, by JACOBUS PETRUS COETZEE, has been fully edited by me, MRS I M COOPER.

I M Cooper (1922904)
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September 1999

“Class size clearly does matter ... ”

Goddard (1992:216)

Summary

Issues of overcrowdedness in Eastern Cape schools have become very prominent in the media. The qualitative research in this study reiterates its existence and its implications for both learners and teachers. A need exists to curb the declining schooling standards. Large-scale in-service teacher training in an immediate joint effort by the Education Department and the school is necessary to address these serious issues. Classroom situations with low pupil:teacher ratios, classroom atmospheres conducive to teaching and learning, and an improved quality of education should be strived for. The effective attainment of the ideals of outcomes-based education requires improved teacher management and leadership to better disciplined classes. The treatment of any backlogs and inequalities evident in overcrowded classes should aim mainly at the upliftment of disadvantaged learners, who are still suffering under the effects of the previous education dispensation. Relevant recommendations and a suggested model to rectify the situation are proposed.

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Opsomming

Oorbevolkingsvraagstukke in skole in die Oos-Kaap geniet aansienlike aandag in die media. Die kwalitatiewe navorsing van hierdie studie fokus op die voorkoms en implikasies daarvan vir beide die leerders en onderwysers. Daar bestaan 'n behoefte om dalende onderrigstandarde te verbeter. Groot skaalse indiensopleiding vir onderwysers in 'n onmiddellike gesamentlike poging deur die Onderwysdepartement en die skool is noodsaaklik om hierdie ernstige probleem aan te spreek. Daar moet gestreef word na meer voordeelige klaskameromstandighede met 'n laer leerder:onderwyserverhouding, 'n klaskameratmosfeer wat bevorderlik is vir onderrig en leer asook 'n verbeterde opvoedingskwaliteit. Die effektiewe verwesenliking van uitkomsgebaseerde onderrig verg verbeterde leerkrags beheer en leidinggewing aan beter gedissiplineerde klasse. Die behandeling van agterstande en ongelykhede wat in oorbevolkte klasse voorkom, moet daarop gemik wees om agtergeblewe leerders, wat nog onder die gevolge van die vorige onderwysbedeling ly, op te hef. Toepaslike aanbevelings en 'n voorgestelde model om die situasie reg te stel, word voorgelê.

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CHAPTER 1

Statement of the problem, objectives, method and plan of study

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The last three decades have seen a world-wide demand for education. Rapid population growth in developing countries together with poor economic performance have made the provision of secondary school education difficult (Dekker & Lemmer 1993:346). The much publicized “population explosion” contains in it an even more portentous “pupil explosion” (Faure 1975:27). The size of the projected increase in learner enrolment indicates the expected growth in the number of classes and schools which should be provided to accommodate learners (Mielaret 1979:72). However, as the school population increases, there are more dropouts and repeaters (Faure 1975:16) and the question arises: Where are these learners referred to? Regarding this, it should be noted that parents generally want their children to achieve a higher degree of education than they themselves received and both modern and traditional societies have now created conditions to enable more and more children to attend school (Faure 1975:31 and 70). In South Africa in 1988, 1 051 189 children, including those in the non-independent homelands, were not attending school (Christie 1991:118).

Overcrowding in classrooms remains one of the most pressing issues in education (Burgess & Bhayrd 1999; *Sunday Times*, 7 May 1995:7a). At the beginning of 1996 many of the 2,5 million Eastern Cape school-children who started school were faced with crowded classrooms as the province struggled to cope with the shortage of teachers. It was mainly schools in the “deep rural” areas of the former Transkei and former Ciskei that were affected by the shortage of teachers (*Daily Dispatch*, 24 January 1996:1). Overcrowding is not a new phenomenon. As early as 1991 Christie (1991:127) emphasized the fact that Black schools were overcrowded.

Currently there is still a shortage of classrooms and teachers at these schools. Facilities like laboratories and libraries are either inadequate or non-existent. The shortage of funding from the government explains some of these issues. However, education is so much easier for the teacher and the learner when good facilities are available (*Daily Dispatch*, 28 September 1995:12b).

A possible means to indicate overcrowding in schools, is to compare the number of learners with the number of teachers. This is called the pupil:teacher ratio, which is an indication of the average number of children in one class (Christie 1991:127). Almost a decade ago the pupil:teacher ratio studied for the different population registration groups reflected an educational imbalance. In 1988 the average pupil:teacher ratio for Black schools was 38:1, Indian schools 19:1, Coloured schools 18:1 and White schools 14:1. Christie (1991:120-128) argues that the pupil:teacher ratio in Black schools is unsatisfactory and more teachers are required in these schools. Dekker and Lemmer (1993:228) and the *Government's report to the nation: the building has begun!* (1998:30) state that in South Africa children are required to attend school from the first school day of the year in which they turn seven until the last school day of the year they reach the age of 16 years or complete Grade 12 (the twelfth level), whichever is the earlier. Lawton (1975:15) criticizes compulsory education by stating that it has provided an improvised literacy, which does not support an effective culture, for the majority of people. This could imply that in our complex society the school should no longer be a passive transmitter of a single culture (Van Zijl 1990:6). Race classification in the pre-1997 era constituted an important determinant of admission to schools. Until 1994 learners of different race groups were admitted to different schools. Black, Coloured and Indian learners were prohibited from attending White state schools. Dekker and Lemmer (1993:229) argue that such a classification resulted in an unequal system and contributed greatly to the rejection of the education system.

Today (1999), despite so many reports and media coverage of the issues of overcrowdedness in schools, the situation is still largely unchanged. It is unfortunate that the following can be quoted about the poor situation in some public schools in the Eastern Cape with reference to their

pupil:teacher ratio: "If you want your children to have a decent education, don't send them to Bizana, where there is just one teacher for every 67 pupils ..." (*Sunday Times*, 7 May 1995:7b). The *Daily Dispatch* (22 January 1997:1) reported that teachers in the Eastern Cape region returned from holiday to find as many as 60 learners in one class. Moreover, a teacher at Southernwood Primary School (East London) said: "The class (pupil:teacher ratio) is too big to teach adequately. It is difficult to give individual attention with so many pupils ..." (*Daily Dispatch*, 22 January 1997:1). In 1997 principals in the Eastern Cape agreed that more teachers were needed to reduce the pupil:teacher ratio. However, a spokesperson for the provincial task team for the redeployment of teachers stated that no more teachers would be employed until all those who had volunteered to be redeployed had been redeployed and all excess teachers at schools had been placed (*Daily Dispatch*, 22 January 1997:1). At present (i.e., 1999) more teachers are still required.

According to Ballantine (1983:85), equality of educational opportunities places the issues of disadvantage, poverty and discrimination in society's lap, with the clear implication that it is society's responsibility to correct the injustices suffered due to differences in quality of education for different races. Ballantine (1983:86) further argues in this respect that demands in education are for:

- equal school facilities
- experienced and trained teachers
- per learner expenditures
- an integrated racial composition
- non-preferential treatment for all learners
- affirmative action to alleviate the inequalities of the past.

The crucial problem identified is the financing of education: a shortage of schools and well-qualified teachers. According to the *Daily Dispatch* (14 January 1999:6), the single most correctable cause of the miserable failure rate in the 1998 Eastern Cape matriculation examination

is the poor performance of most of the teachers - and “in particular the South African Democratic Teachers’ Union” teachers. Furthermore, Landman, Fuller and Heyneman (Dekker & Lemmer 1993:270) identified problems with the admission of learners to schools that are expanding at a greater pace than the available resources. In this regard a question that needs to be answered is: How can the problems resulting from overcrowding be identified and treated? It is the researcher’s intention in this study to investigate the issues of overcrowdedness in schools, probe the resultant problem and make recommendations to help alleviate these issues.

Because of the severe extent of overcrowded classrooms in the Eastern Cape schools, this study will also refer to ergonomics and outcomes-based education (OBE). Hawkins and Le Roux (1986:278) define *ergonomics* as the “study of the efficiency of persons in their working environment” and Pheasant (1994:3) sums it up as the scientific study of human work. Ergonomics aims at optimizing work efficiency, for example, outstanding performance and high productivity (Pheasant 1994:4). It is noted that wherever a person becomes part of the operational system, ergonomics becomes a necessary consideration (National Safety Council 1993:2). The question asked mostly in ergonomics is whether there is adequate space at the workstation to perform the required work comfortably (National Safety Council 1993:95). Therefore it is noted (National Safety Council 1993:11) that if this is not the case, then an indicator of an ergonomic problem will be a poor product quality. If ergonomics is such an important part of the industry, it should then also be considered in overcrowded classrooms where quality education is envisaged for all young, growing children.

In answer to what outcomes-based education is, Le Grange and Reddy (1997:13) state that it concerns a shift from teacher inputs, what teachers do, to learner outcomes, what learners know and can do. It is an educational approach which is results orientated (Van der Horst & McDonald 1998:19) and, according to Spady (1994:7), it focuses on increasing the learners’ learning and ultimate performance abilities to the highest possible levels before they leave school. Spady (1994:9), the father of outcomes-based education, states that outcomes-based education’s two

ideals are: "Ensuring that all students are equipped with knowledge, competence, and qualities needed to be successful after they exit of the educational system. Structuring and operating schools so that those outcomes can be achieved and maximized for all students." Furthermore, it is noted that one of the principles of outcomes-based education is a high expectation for all to succeed (Spady 1994:10). *Curriculum 2005* (1997:26) states that learners will stand to benefit most from outcomes-based education as it will ensure that: "Many (learners), for the first time, will have access to high quality education." All learners will also have a "greater self-esteem because they will be allowed to develop at their own pace" (*Curriculum 2005*, 1997:27). According Venter (1998:4), learners are not required to pass from one year to the next in this system. This article concludes that automatic promotion is at the heart of outcomes-based education.

Although there are clearly good intentions in outcomes-based education, the burning issue is not whether there is merit in this system, but whether South Africa is ready for its introduction (*Education News*, 1997:1). *Education News* (1997:1) concludes that there is the greatest likelihood that the teachers will be left behind because there has not been sufficient time to bring teachers on board with the latest trends in issues related to overcrowding, by means of adequate in-service teacher training. This study will focus on and examine the conditions related to the issues of overcrowded classrooms, especially in the Eastern Cape schools. Furthermore, the ideals of outcomes-based education will be probed to establish whether it is in deed possible to attain these ideals in overcrowded classrooms.

1.2 THE PROBLEM AND THE DOMAIN OF THE STUDY

From the vast recent media coverage on the issue of overcrowded classrooms in schools, it is clear that it needs to be addressed urgently (*Sunday Times*, 7 May 1995:7a; *Daily Dispatch*, 28 September 1995:12a & 14 October 1996:2).

An increase in the size of schools is probably caused by an increase in the population and a movement of people to urban centres (Ballantine 1983:134). Faure (1975:246) argues that in many societies, the exodus begins at the home village. Thus, patterns of life are copied from towns. Together with other objectively good values, these inculcate values into school children which estrange them from their surroundings, thus feeding intellectual and material ambitions which are becoming more difficult to realize in a rural setting. In this way schools push young people out to the towns.

“Schooling and state policy stress the importance of equal education opportunities” for all learners (Dekker & Lemmer 1993:441). The state has a central role to play in the provision of equal education for all, the just distribution of educational goods and services and the redressing of historical inequalities. The systematic planning of the size and location of schools is therefore vital in furthering the equality of educational opportunities (Forojalla 1993:244). In this respect, Meier and Stewart (1989:31) argue that equal access to education is critical and that the latter is affected by the resources of the school district, the support from the families of the school children and the curriculum used.

Ballantine (1983:187-189) emphasizes that the classroom climate influences student attitudes towards school and learning. Thus, it can generate antischool feelings, especially in competitive and restrictive classrooms. On the grounds of the increased pupil:teacher ratio, the complexity of the education system in South Africa and the public demand for accountability, the effectiveness of the classroom teacher (Forojalla 1993:197) and a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning and teaching are questioned.

According to Anderson, Rhyan and Shapiro (1989:72), classroom size and pupil:teacher ratio in the classroom affect the nature and quality of the teacher-learner process. In very large classes teachers may find it difficult to use small group practices or interact frequently with individual learners. Furthermore, learner friendship patterns and interactions vary, depending on how the

classroom is structured. Open, flexible and democratic classrooms stress the academic and emotional growth of learners. Research by Galton (Priedy 1993:10) at Leicester University suggests that smaller schools tend to be more effective in producing quality education. Priedy (1993:10) adds that smaller classes, with fewer than 24 learners, had a positive impact on learner progress and development. In classes with 27 or more learners, the effect was less positive (Priedy 1993:10). Barton and Walker (1981:248) conclude that it should always be considered that the size of a classroom simply mirrors the individualistic ideology and hegemony structure of our social order at a micro cosmic level.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The current situation of overcrowded classrooms in South Africa is such a burning issue that it needs to be dealt with as soon as possible in order to implement solutions to alleviate the related issues. The problem statement of this study is:

Are overcrowded classrooms conducive to teaching learners who have been neglected in the past and will the learning outcomes of the learners result in a better quality education?

1.4 VALUE AND ACTUALITY OF THIS STUDY

This study focuses on the problems encountered in overcrowded classrooms and will make recommendations to help remedy the situation. This could encourage progress towards particular social goals, such as the achievement of quality education under good classroom conditions.

Further questions that will be answered in this study are:

- What is the exact nature of overcrowding in classrooms?
- How is the classroom atmosphere affected by overcrowding?
- How do overcrowded classes affect the interaction between the learners and the teachers?
- How are the learners and the teachers affected by overcrowding?
- How is the well-being of the learners affected by overcrowding?
- How is the quality of education offered to the learners affected by overcrowding?
- What should the role of the Department of Education and the school be in handling issues of overcrowdedness in schools?

Critical periods in education, such as the transformation in education currently being experienced, render systems more open and more vulnerable, and exhibit more potential for change and innovation than other times. Part of the research involves an analysis of contextual aspects of national education, with specific reference to the issues of overcrowdedness in schools. Based on the research findings, several recommendations will be made on the development of strategies to remedy this situation in South African schools.

1.5 THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

1.5.1 General objectives

The general objectives of this study are to:

- investigate how the large influx of learners to schools, particularly secondary schools, is handled

- make observations about the classroom atmosphere of a typically overcrowded classroom
- investigate the implications of overcrowded classrooms for learners and teachers
- investigate possible ways to alleviate the implications of overcrowded classrooms.

1.5.2 Specific objectives

This study aims specifically to:

- investigate the complexity and multiple issues of overcrowding in school classrooms and how overcrowding affects learners and teachers
- make recommendations to remedy and prevent these problems so that quality education is ensured for all learners.

This study concentrates specifically on secondary schools in the Eastern Cape.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

The study is empirical, using qualitative research methodology. The qualitative research employs naturalistic inquiry, and the use of non-interfering data-collection strategies to discover the natural flow of events and how participants interpret them (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:372).

1.6.1 Literature study

The literature review focuses on primary recent resources, including books, journals, magazine and newspaper articles, and reports.

The study includes an analysis of newsletters, media releases, learners', teachers', heads of departments' and principals' ethnographic interviews and participant-observations. The literature study also involved the researcher's visiting the United States of America and Canada in July and August 1997. The aim of this visit was to do research at the New York University library in New York, United States of America, and the Simon Fraser University library in Vancouver, Canada, in order to study resources not available in South Africa at the time.

1.6.2 Qualitative research methodology

Qualitative research is based on the phenomenological paradigm, which uses a variety of interpretive research methodologies (Best & Kahn 1993:183). Human behaviour is context bound and takes its meaning from and is therefore inseparable from social, historical, political and cultural influences (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh 1990:447). Furthermore, McMillan and Schumacher (1993:373) state that understanding is acquired by analysing the many contexts of the participants and by narrating participants' meanings, which can include their feelings, beliefs, ideas, thoughts and actions. Understanding the issues from the participants' perspectives will be the main concern in this study.

The qualitative research method in this study is descriptive. Data collected are transcribed and presented in report form rather than numbers. The focus is thus on the life-world experiences of the respondents (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:30 and 32) as they experience overcrowded conditions in classrooms. Purposeful sampling is used in selecting information-rich cases for an in-depth study. The respondents studied will yield many insights into the issues of overcrowdedness in

classrooms.

Structured and unstructured interviews and participant-observation are used to collect data from information-rich respondents. The research respondents include five learners, five teachers, three heads of departments and three principals from different overcrowded classes in the Eastern Cape. It is to be hoped that this research project will create an understanding of similar situations in South Africa and that the research conducted in this way could possibly be extended to other studies of a similar nature.

1.7 PLAN OF STUDY

The following is a chapter demarcation and plan of the study:

- Chapter 1 outlines the problem statement, aims, methodology and plan of the study.
- Chapter 2 investigates some of the problems related to overcrowded classrooms, with particular reference to learners and teachers.
- Chapter 3 discusses the implications of the overcrowded classroom, with particular reference to learners and teachers.
- Chapter 4 outlines the qualitative research method used during the ethnographic interviews and the participant-observation.
- Chapter 5 describes the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative research.

Chapter 1

Statement of the problem, objectives, method and plan of study

- Chapter 6 provides the results of the research, recommendations and guidelines for future research. The researcher's proposed model to alleviate the problems and implications of overcrowded classrooms is included.
-

results showed that black pupils had performed poorly.” This article also stresses the existing lack of resources. Later the *Daily Dispatch* (20 January 1999:1a and 1b) reported on the teachers’ poor attitude towards school, stating: “In some (former) Transkei schools, teachers did not turn up for the first day (of school) and hundreds of children roamed the streets” and in Umtata “some teachers ... are telling pupils that teaching may only start next week” (*Daily Dispatch*, 20 January 1999:1b). The question is posed: What could the reason be for such low teacher morale?

Equal education by the year 2000? (Anon 1989:22) reveals that teachers in former White schools encountered “little direct experience of the kind of problems” their Black colleagues, who had worked for the Department of Education and Training, faced. The historical school education system for the Black population in South Africa created a situation of cultural and social conflict. This conflict made it difficult for education to proceed smoothly (Nasson & Samuel 1990:39-40). Discipline was rated as poor, attendance irregular and criminal activity even occurred during school hours on school property. Henning (1990:40-41) summarized the parents’ fears of open schools in South Africa where all races would be admitted to one school. He questioned the lowering of standards, including those of teaching, the preservation of a culture of learning, examination results and swamping of learners in overcrowded classrooms. This raises the question of whether the problems related to overcrowded classrooms in the Eastern Cape are presently receiving the necessary attention or has the status quo of the previous educational situation remained very much the same, even under the new dispensation? In this regard Fullan (1995:57) argues that “the current high profile of education is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, higher expectations exist on the part of the society, teachers, school principals and administrators, who stand in the center of all the reform projects”, but on the other hand the “high expectation without the capacity and ideas for subsequent fulfilment is a perfect recipe for burnout”. Burnout is defined by him as a subsequent loss of initial enthusiasm and commitment on behalf of the teaching staff. Fullan (1995:57) argues aptly that one of the common assumptions of all views of teacher burnout is triggered by feelings of inconsequentiality.

Henning (1990:41) concludes that for the sake of the learner, who is expected to study and learn optimally under the difficult circumstances of overcrowded classrooms, the education system has to make an effort to find well-qualified teachers as “the number of teachers in training is falling tragically behind what is required”. In this regard, the *Daily Dispatch* (14 November 1997:1) reported on an educational crisis that was looming in the Eastern Cape when 6 000 temporary teaching posts stood to be abolished. Many school principals also expressed fears that schools would be “crippled and could even close down should they lose their temporary teachers”. Later the *Daily Dispatch* (25 February 1998:3) stressed the fact that the Provincial Departments of Education may have to retrench teachers during 1998 in order to meet commitments, such as payments of stationery and textbook accounts. This would naturally impact negatively on the already overcrowded classrooms in the Eastern Cape and the rest of South Africa. Finally, the *Daily Dispatch* (8 February 1999:3b) concludes that “as long as (the) pupil-teacher-ratios were high, good results would never be achieved in schools - where in some cases a teacher has to deal with 100 pupils”.

2.2 AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXACT NATURE OF OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS

Van den Horst and McDonald (1997:93) define the classroom climate as “the psychological and social feeling or atmosphere that exists in each classroom”. In this regard Meier (1996:12) stresses that “smallness (a low pupil:teacher ratio) is a prerequisite for climate and culture which will be conducive to learning. In such a classroom it will probably be easier to cultivate and to develop democratic habits.” Meier (1996:12) concludes that such “a culture emerges from authentic relationships built on face-to-face conversations by people engaged in common work and common work standards” and that “getting the (classroom) size (pupil:teacher ratio) right is necessary, though not always sufficient”.

- **Furniture arrangement**

Kruger and Van Schalkwyk (1993:102) stress that too many learners in a classroom make the creation of a favourable classroom environment difficult. The size of the classroom will also determine functional aspects, such as how the furniture will be arranged (Kruger & Van Schalkwyk 1993:95). Regarding ergonomics, the question may be posed: How can the furniture arrangements hamper a learner's academic outcomes? Kohn (1996:55) investigated whether the classroom climate, with particular reference to furniture arrangement, is learner-centred or not. According to him, reasons for concern are:

- desks arranged in rows or chairs all facing forward opposed to comfortable working areas, and
- teachers teaching at the front and centre of the classroom as opposed to moving between learners and working directly with them.

Kruger and Van Schalkwyk (1996:93) maintain that the classroom is the space in which a teacher should create "an environment which will be conducive to learning" and to attain this goal, "effective classroom management" is imperative. Using the classroom space, the furniture and teaching aids, a teacher should organize the classroom so that learners will want to be there and work there. Kruger and Van Schalkwyk (1996:105-106) argue that the classroom climate is also affected by the teacher whose personality influences the emotional or social climate of the classroom. In this respect, Mangierit (1994:19) concludes that "unfortunately, it is not only a school's organizational and political agendas that impede intellectual communities, but it is also the tone and atmosphere of a school and what it says regarding what education is all about". It becomes clear that the classroom climate is negatively affected by overcrowdedness. This, in turn, can decrease the learners' academic performance.

- **Classroom culture**

In a classroom, according to Mielaret (1979:25), the promotion of the learner's right to the basic aims of education is, for example, the promotion of a general culture of learning, the development of abilities and the attainment of skills, guidance towards the attainment of individual judgement and the development of a sense of moral and social responsibility. In this way learners can be enabled to become useful members of their society. Boyer (1996:7) also states that the priorities of effective schools should be "to create a climate for creative learning, to be a place for active learning, not passive learning, a place where people learn to be creative, not just conformity, where they learn to co-operate, as well as compete. Ideally, at the center of these schools there should be inspired, well-trained teachers who know how to guide learners to achieve these goals." These ideals will, unfortunately, be unattainable in the current overcrowded classrooms in the Eastern Cape schools.

Lemmer and Squelch (1993:13) regard the classroom as "a micro-culture where the different cultures of pupils and teachers meet to form one complex and unique classroom culture. People coming from different cultural backgrounds to those of the teacher and/or dominant culture, might experience cultural alienation." If experienced, an extreme cultural discontinuity can result in learners failing or even dropping out of school. Research by Lemmer and Squelch (1993:13) suggests that "the closer a pupil's culture is to that of the teacher, the greater his chance of achieving academic success will be". In this regard the teacher has an important role to play in bridging cultural gaps which may exist in the classroom. To achieve this, Lemmer and Squelch (1993:13) state that "it is necessary to acknowledge and respect the different cultures and know about the pupils' backgrounds". In the light of the problem statement of this study, the question may rightly be posed: How will it be possible to achieve these ideals in overcrowded classrooms where teachers are sometimes forced to stay in front of the class because of a lack of classroom space between the learners' desks?

- **Classroom atmosphere**

According to Kohn (1996:54), an ideal classroom climate is one that will promote a deep understanding of learning, and social and intellectual growth of the learners'. In such a classroom, learners play an active role in the decision-making processes. Teachers should work together with the learners rather than lecture to them. In this way the learners' interests and questions can contribute much to the mastering of the curriculum content. Thus, the classroom environment should support the learners' desire for discovery, facilitate the process of discovery and ultimately meet their academic, physical and emotional needs. The central issue appears to be how it will be possible to work together with the learners if the number of learners in one class will not allow a teacher to give the learners individual attention when it is required. A school with an ideal classroom climate differs from one in which educators are mostly thinking about how they can make learners work harder or merely how to follow instructions. Unfortunately, the latter is probably true regarding overcrowded classrooms where classroom discipline and management are almost impossible to maintain.

Furthermore, Kohn (1996:55) stresses further that a stark, institutional classroom atmosphere calls for concern because it is opposed to an inviting atmosphere, which will be conducive to learning. Shanker (1977:13) urges that a school should not become a place for the sale of knowledge, where teachers work as information mongers and learners are merely the customers buying learning material from a shop. Hence, according to Kohn (1996:54), in a "doing to" classroom, teachers tend to focus on the learners' behaviour in order to elicit compliance. Here the preferred methods are systems of applicable punishments and rewards. Kohn (1996:54) further states that teachers should rather strive to create a "working with" environment where the focus is on the learners' underlying motives to help them to develop positive values and a love of learning and schooling. The preferred methods here would include the creation of a caring classroom atmosphere conducive to learning and teaching. Unfortunately, the vast number of newspaper articles used in this research project support the fact that this ideal cannot be achieved

in the current overcrowded classrooms in the Eastern Cape schools.

This section described a typical overcrowded classroom, as the learner and the teacher experience it. Unfortunately, the current reality, as reflected in many media reports, still indicates no reduction in the pupil:teacher ratio in schools in the Eastern Cape. The *Daily Dispatch* (2 July 1998:6) ascribes this situation to the cash-flow problem of the Department of Education which is hampering the teacher training and school building programmes.

2.3 THE PROBLEMS WHICH LEARNERS MAY EXPERIENCE IN OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS

According to Wynne and Ryan (1993:83), classrooms are crowded places, by any standards. They are crowded with children full of energy and vitality. For young people, spending six or seven hours of the day sitting and working quietly with symbolic material, reading and writing, is not their first choice of how to spend their time. Many young people, who spend long hours in classrooms, often complain of strain. Too many learners are not given equal opportunities and feel neglected and stressed under these crowded circumstances. It is suspected that far too many learners in the current overcrowded situations are frustrated as the class environment, due to overcrowdedness, is ergonomically not suitable for the physical requirements of the learners to ensure optimum learning.

In this regard Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:95) state: "No matter what basic seating arrangement is used, it should be flexible enough to accommodate and facilitate the various learning activities that occur in a given classroom." Taking into consideration the problem statement of this study and reports such as in *The Teacher* (June 1998:5) stating that learners are "fighting for a place to sit ... students use their laps for desks ... the conditions they (teachers and learners) are forced to work in - and the government's failure to address these conditions", the

question of whether there is any possibility of meeting all the classroom conditions and requirements stated for outcomes-based education, has to be asked.

The following issues will be discussed, namely:

- an increase in impersonal lectures,
- a decline in learners' academic performance and well-being,
- learners' inadequate knowledge of the medium of instruction, and
- increased racial conflict and prejudice among learners.

2.3.1 An increase in impersonal lectures

According to Clifford (1975:50), "learner complaints of excessive class size are commonplace" and "impersonal lectures to mass learner audiences contribute to alienation". Louis and Miles (1990:8-9) argue in this respect that "large classroom size makes interventions logically more difficult and expensive". Lazerson (1985:118) adds that "few individuals can retain a commitment to the transmission of knowledge unless they themselves are involved in learning". Hence, it is evident that teachers with large classes (high pupil:teacher ratios) will not be able to provide learners with the attention they need to master the subject content (*Daily Dispatch*, 21 April 1999:2), which is a major concern in overcrowded classes. Many learners have, in fact, indicated that their teachers stand in front of the class during most of the lessons and few learners receive individual attention. It is imperative for learner and teacher to interact with each other and for a comfortable transfer of the learning material to take place during a lesson. This is unavoidably limited in an overcrowded classroom, which is not conducive to establishing a culture of learning and teaching and achieving the learner outcomes. As a consequence, both learner and teacher become frustrated.

2.3.2 A decline in learners' academic performance and well-being

Clifford (1975:50) and Davis and Arnof (1983:179) state that there is consensus among learners, teachers and parents that large classes adversely affect the learners' performance and well-being. Louis and Miles (1990:8-9) conclude that conflicts and competition over learner resources are inevitable in overcrowded classrooms. These could have detrimental implications for learners in overcrowded classrooms.

Fontana (1992:114) argues that learners who experience constant failure will probably experience "damage to their self-esteem, with all the undesirable consequences" in respect of learning outcomes and class control. This should be avoided since in an overcrowded classroom it could have a further adverse impact on learner and teacher morale and motivation and the quality of their lives in school.

Moreover, according to Boyer (1996:5), "students need to come together in a school community in which they are known by name, and have a good communication, a sense of justice, of discipline and of caring". The questions that follow are posed in the light of the problem statement of this study: Are overcrowded classrooms conducive to teaching learners who have been neglected in the past and will the learning outcomes of the learners result in a better quality education? Is it possible to know all the learners by name, have effective communication on a one-to-one basis, and have caring discipline and justice for all learners when classes are so overcrowded?

2.3.3 Learners' inadequate knowledge of the medium of instruction

The medium of instruction can be defined as the means whereby a message is transmitted with reference to speech and writing (Malamah-Thomas 1988:145). According to Doughty and Doughty (1974:76) and the *Teacher* (March 1998:6-7), learners' home language which is used

during everyday living, is adequate for their needs in their community. Hence, it is particularly suited to the needs and interests of that community. Children may have a good command of language for living in their own community, or in the social context of the school environment. However, Doughty and Doughty (1974:76) state that this does not mean that they can necessarily cope with the language which is used for instruction and learning in the classroom. They also stress that learners may encounter “problems if they come to school with an established set of ways of using a language, which is different to that which is used for instructional purposes in the school”. In this regard Wilkinson (1986:63) states that the various terms and usages in a language may influence speakers of different languages to think differently about particular topics and these learners may perceive the world differently. In addition, Fontana (1992:23) emphasizes that “children from other ethnic groups may experience language problems within the classroom. Such problems may mean that they do not understand what the teacher requires of them and their failure to comply is due therefore not to defiance, but to simple incomprehension”. In the light of the problem statement of this study, the following question needs to be answered: What are the effects for both learner and teacher if the learner has insufficient knowledge of the medium of instruction which is used in an overcrowded classroom?

In this respect Wilkinson (1986:163) concludes that children’s own language can be regarded as a very personal possession and this is an awareness of language as a form of their own personality. Woolfolk (1993:177) maintains that “culture affects communication”. It is therefore crucial to become aware of the effect of the medium of instruction in a multicultural, overcrowded classroom. In an overcrowded classroom, attention should be given to the effects on both the learners and teacher when the majority of the learners have inadequate knowledge of the language of instruction. At school where the researcher teaches, it has been his experience that many Xhosa-speaking learners have indicated that they experience difficulty in understanding explanations in English, which is the medium of instruction.

2.3.4 Increased racial conflict and prejudice among learners

Lemmer and Squelch (1993:15) define racism as “the belief that one’s own race is superior to another”. It can further be identified as a source for bullying, which is probably “the broadest single problem in school” (Stern 1995:61-62). Stern (1995:61-62) later refers to bullying as a process by which one learner hurts another or is rude to a fellow learner. Nasson and Samuel (1990:10) emphasize that the following factors provide the foundation of racial conflict in some South African schools:

- the ethnic composition of the population
- the wide differences in the cultural background between the various race groups.

In a research project Christie (1990:116) found that the analysis of open school learners’ responses indicated that race presented the most consistently significant difference amongst learners. Moreover, Christie (1990:116) found that regardless of gender or ethnicity, Black learners were consistently and significantly more opposed to the existing racial harmony than White learners were. Furthermore, open schools have offered opportunities for racial contact, which they would otherwise not have experienced, to a relatively small number of young South Africans (Christie 1990:44). Brown (1982:12) stresses that racial attitudes are learnt not so much by contact with other groups, but by prevailing negative attitudes towards them.

An increase in racial conflict amongst learners (*Rapport*, 22 March 1998:1; *Daily Dispatch*, 8 March 1999:9), especially in overcrowded classrooms, can lead to learners being humiliated. *The Teacher* (March 1998:3) and the *Daily Dispatch* (26 March 1998:19; 13 May 1999:5) reported on an outbreak of violence which led to aggravating tension among all learners. The *Sunday Times* (1 March 1998:4; 19 April 1998:7) and *Rapport* (18 April 1999:6) also focused on the continuous incidents of racism at Vryburg High School (Vryburg), stating that the “high school’s hidden hatred sparks race war”. *The Teacher* (May 1998:3) stated that racial conflict also reared its head in a Kwazulu-Natal school where “the normally serene Lindpark Secondary School in

Pietermaritzburg was turned up side down by recent racial clashes between pupils". Racism at schools is poisoning the minds of the next generation (*Daily Dispatch*, 16 March 1999:8). The South African Human Rights Commission's Report on racism in schools (*The Teacher*, November 1997:7; April 1999:4-5) shows that the country's rainbow nation is a myth and that the appalling level of "racial and violent thinking" needs to be addressed.

In overcrowded classrooms a situation such as this could become volatile. In the light of the problem statement of this study, the question is: What impact will this have on the quality of education offered by the schools especially in the light of the ideals of outcomes-based education?

2.4 THE PROBLEMS WHICH TEACHERS MAY EXPERIENCE IN OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS

Davis and Arnof (1983:179) indicate that "teachers are, if anything, very preoccupied with class size". As early as 1967 a poll, conducted by one state-wide teacher association in the United States of America, reported that "large classes disturb teachers more than does any other single irritant - well ahead of inadequate teaching materials, district fiscal problems, pressure group interference, excessive clerical duties, or pupil disrespect" (Davis & Arnof 1983:179). As long as teachers feel that class size adversely affects the learners' performance and well-being, large classes will be decried. It is a pity that this problem is still evident in the current classroom situation of the Eastern Cape, despite the efforts of a new education dispensation.

Davis and Arnof (1983:179-180) observed teachers at work in classes with 16 to 23 learners and between 30 and 37 learners, respectively. Teachers used the same teaching methods in both situations. The learners in smaller groups had a greater chance to ask questions more often than their peers in the larger group. The ultimate decisive factor, learner outcomes, was questioned. Davis and Arnof (1983:179-180) concluded that the learners in senior secondary schools who

were shifted from larger to smaller classes showed an increase in academic achievement, especially in a subject such as mathematics. Children in smaller classes in the primary grades showed a greater improvement in reading. This study questions whether teachers can facilitate learner outcomes in terms of outcomes-based education when the physical conditions in the classes are so overcrowded that it is not conducive to a learning environment.

The following issues will be discussed, namely:

- increased learner enrolment,
- lower quality of education,
- bigger non-homogeneous classes,
- increased disciplinary problems,
- greater classroom management problems, and
- increased teacher stress.

2.4.1 Increased learner enrolment

In 1981 *Growth* published an article, Education: all will gain from equal quality (Anon 1981:12-14), stating that secondary school enrolment had evidently reached the take-off point, where the number of learners in classrooms increased enormously. McGregor and McGregor (1992:109) agree with this while Henning (1990:43) indicates that the pupil:teacher ratio has inevitably become a critical factor in the school system.

According to Bush (1995:4), “open enrolment which removes artificial limits on the capacity of schools” causes the pupil:teacher ratio to increase. Parents can choose which school their children will attend and the school budgets are closely linked to learner numbers. This could lead schools to compete for learners in order to sustain or increase their income. Ashley (1990:4) predicts that between 1985 and the year 2000, South Africa’s population is expected to grow by a massive 43%. This indicates a growth from 33 million to 47 million people. By then the Black

population will comprise 78% of the total population in South Africa. Table 1 shows the predicted growth in the numbers of Black learners in the primary and secondary school phases, with a drastic increase in enrolment during the 1991 to 1995 period.

TABLE 1:THE PREDICTED GROWTH IN NUMBERS OF BLACK LEARNERS GIVEN BY THE RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING, 1987

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Primary Phase	5 893 900	6 122 300	6 366 800	6 614 200	6 863 400
Secondary Phase	1 944 800	2 027 000	2 105 600	2 197 300	2 303 700
Total	7 838 700	8 149 300	8 472 400	8 811 500	9 167 100

Source: Henning (1990:42)

The *Journal for Teachers of the Economic Sciences* (Anon 1998:16) shows a total of 2 341 566 learners in the Eastern Cape, 1996, with a total of 63 007 teachers. Therefore, one teacher per 37,16 learners. At the same time the Western Cape had a pupil:teacher ratio of only 25,20:1. According to Ashley (1990:4-5), the total number of children in South African schools will increase from 8,6 million in 1987 to between 10,6 and 11,7 million by the year 2000. Eight out of 10 learners will then be Black. By the year 2000, 61% of the Black population will be urbanized as opposed to 49% in 1985. The number of White learners will increase from 932 900 to 935 800 in this five-year span (Henning 1990:42). Maher and Sheperd (1995:2) predict that by the year 2000 learners from all the population groups will number 14 million or more. The question is how this growth will impact on an already overcrowded classroom situation.

The *Sunday Times* (29 March 1998:5) reports that in 1995 the national Department of Education estimated that South Africa could afford 360 000 teachers. However, this article also reports that a Department survey in 1997 found that there were approximately 380 000 teachers and that the average number of learners per teacher was 31. Hence, provinces will be forced to increase the number of learners per teacher to an average of one teacher for 38 learners, but if ratios higher than 35 and 40 learners per teacher prevail, inequalities between former White and Black schools will not be erased. The *Daily Dispatch* (14 November 1997:1) reports that: "In some rural areas there is already a teacher:pupil ratio of 1:80 or 1:90. These are shocking figures." In addition to the latter, *The Teacher* (November 1997:5) reports: "In terms of the learner-laboratory ratio, an alarming high of 648:1 exists in KwaZulu-Natal." Furthermore, "Of more than 300 who lined up outside the principal's office (Solomon Mahlangu Secondary School, Mdantsane, Eastern Cape), only 150 will be admitted to Standards 6 and 7" (*Daily Dispatch*, 20 January 1999:1a).

The *Daily Dispatch* (22 January 1999:2) also reports that "one of the problems the schools was still trying to come to term with was overcrowding, with most classes at full capacity ... The school has converted its science laboratory and library into classrooms. But this has not helped as they still have classes with more than 80 students." "Of the 82 517 candidates who sat for matric examinations last year (1998), there were about 32 215 failures in this province (Eastern) alone, and most of them are expected to try to find their way back to school. This could prove to be a big problem, as most matric classrooms in schools - especially predominantly black schools - are already overcrowded ... some of the reasons why schools were sending away their repeaters were overcrowding, shortage of classrooms ..." (*Daily Dispatch*, 26 January 1999:8). About nineteen matric repeaters were not re-admitted to Kusile Comprehensive School in Duncan Village (East London) in February 1999 because "there were no space for them" (*Daily Dispatch*, 9 February 1999:4). The school had more than 120 matric repeaters and could not afford to re-admit them (*Daily Dispatch*, 9 February 1999:4).

The new school year (1999) started in chaos for many schools in the Eastern Cape with the government's redeployment programme still not finished and teachers yet to receive final allocation lists (*Daily Dispatch*, 25 May 1999:2; 23 July 1999:3). This meant that some schools still did not know which teachers would be available to teach and what classes they would teach. Schools anxious not to have the number of teachers decreased were also packing their classes to capacity (*The Teacher*, February 1999:4), which led to even more overcrowding. The *Daily Dispatch* (8 February 1999:3a) states that in the "process (of redeployment) some schools will lose more than a quarter of their staff". Such an increase in the learner numbers, projected under the existing high pupil:teacher ratio, will inevitably lead to classes being even more overcrowded in the near future. This situation is unacceptable as the disadvantaged group of learners will not benefit. It is also doubtful whether teachers will be able to overcome the issues of overcrowdedness in schools to achieve the ideals of outcomes-based education.

Curriculum 2005 (1997:26) states that "learners stand to benefit most from the new education system. Many, for the first time, will have access to quality education". *The Teacher* (May 1998:6) states that the new curriculum with "its emphasis on resource-based learning, makes children more dependant on libraries and media centres than ever before". Unfortunately, school libraries are increasingly crippled by the lack of funds and staff. The South African school libraries "are not up to the challenges posed by Outcomes Based Education" (*The Teacher*, May 1998:6). With the increase in enrolment in already overcrowded classrooms, it is doubtful whether the attainment of quality education with the ideals of the outcomes-based education system is possible. Unfortunately, the former education system created a group of learners who were neglected in the past. There is concern whether the present education system will create the same backlog as a result of overcrowded classrooms. This is a problem that the education authorities can no longer afford to ignore.

2.4.2 Lower quality of education

Brimer (1971:10) states that a country which fails to provide education for its total population is failing in its duty. Thus, a massive increase in the number of learners is a necessary response to the strong individual and social demands of education. It is important to ensure that learners are educated and not merely enroled in a school at a certain time. In this respect, Mielaret (1979:53 and 69) stresses the fact that the right to education is, indeed, to be upheld, provided that it is an education of all the facets of the personality and all areas of human experience, such as feelings, emotions and social awareness. Given the problem statement of this study, the question is whether a decrease in the quality of education offered in overcrowded classrooms should be tolerated.

Raynolds (1996:33) maintains that failing to build additional schools in periods of sustained increasing enrolments will result in overcrowded classrooms in the existing schools. The fact that this process will reduce the quality of education provided to the learners is emphasized. Calloway (1974:64) aptly asks: "How can teachers teach more learners without a drop in educational standards?". According to McGregor and McGregor (1992:73), the Black learner enrolments in open schools had increased substantially by 1992 and the issue of the standard of education and the so-called character of schools became a crucial debating point.

Tsang (1994:22) discusses the quality of education further in terms of class size and refers to the input and the output of basic schooling. The quality of school input refers to the competence and qualifications of teachers, school administration, the availability of textbooks and of school buildings and equipment. The output of quality schooling is diverse. It consists of both the internal and external output. Internal output refers to the cognitive and effective learning acquired by learners in the school. The external output reflects the effects of schooling on productivity, employment and the learning of the learners. It seems to boil down to whether such a quality education can be attained when a teacher cannot move easily amongst the great numbers of

learners in one class in an attempt to provide some individual learner attention.

Brookes and Brown (1996:4) state that at a time when schools are under pressure to raise standards by improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning, it seems unwise to allow class size to continue to rise unchecked. It is of great concern to the researcher that the quality of education in the Eastern Cape could be deteriorating in the overcrowded classrooms rather than improving as was predicted by the new Department of Education.

2.4.3 Bigger non-homogeneous classes

Galloway, Ball and Blomfield (1982:136) report that teachers identified teaching a mixed-ability class as one of their principal sources of stress. Morrison (1977:158) states that “discipline would not be a problem if class members were homogeneous in their thinking, feeling and acting”. However, reality clearly indicates that classes are not always homogeneous. In fact, not only are class members different in their life circumstances, but some learners are cognitively slower than others in learning, some more emotionally confused than others and some are under more competing environmental influences than others.

According to Outcomes-Based Education (*Curriculum 2005*, 1997:8-9), this approach aims “not only to increase the general knowledge of the learners, but to develop their skills, critical thinking, attitudes and understanding”. The *Daily Dispatch* (25 March 1997:1; 8 July 1997:4) stresses the fact that teaching will become learner-centred in the outcomes-based education approach where permanent failure is eliminated, learners who have not achieved the required standard will be granted further opportunities to do so, and it will emphasize high expectations for all to succeed. Considering the problem statement of this study, the realization of these objectives in overcrowded classrooms becomes paramount. The complexity of overcrowded classrooms should be acknowledged by the education authorities. This problem could very well sink the well-defined ideals of outcomes-based education.

According to Bills (1982:136), secondary school teachers' problems are concerned mainly with the learners' characteristics. Many teachers report that learners do not use their time wisely, are lazy, are unable to think for themselves, lack interest, do not want to develop high standards, are easily satisfied with merely passing grades and that too many learners lack ambition. With learners like these, teachers seriously question how educational success can be expected. If Bills' (1982:136) argument is valid, the question is also whether learners can thrive in an environment of overcrowded classrooms. According to Potenza and Jansen (1998:55-56), the outcomes-based education system will give the teacher a "greater degree of choice about what happens in their own classrooms". In this regard there is concern for the underqualified teachers who are not able to make responsible choices on behalf of their learners in overcrowded, undisciplined classes.

In *Curriculum 2005* (1997:8) outcomes-based education aims "not only to increase the general knowledge of the learners, but to develop their skills, critical thinking, attitudes and understanding". It is stated further (1997:27) that learners are predicted to be "actively involved in classrooms". In overcrowded classrooms, as the media reports the classes to be in the Eastern Cape schools, the question remains: How can these ideals of outcomes-based education be fulfilled when learners are cramped uncomfortably in an overcrowded class?

An increase in the number of non-homogeneous learners in a classroom inevitably means that more learners will need individual attention from the teacher. According to Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:7), the outcomes-based education system believes that: "All individual learners must be allowed to learn to their full potential." If the class is overcrowded and there is a large group of non-homogeneous learners, there is reason to believe and concern that the teacher will not be able to fulfil this requirement, hence, the quality of education offered to the learners will inevitably be negatively affected.

2.4.4 Increased disciplinary problems

Morrison (1977:158) and Galloway et al (1982:136) record that “problems related to discipline are the greatest source of stress from within the class”. In this respect McKay and Allais (1995:111-112) point out that several teachers interviewed revealed that they experience problems of stress and burnout. The pressure to achieve classroom order at the expense of teaching was among the most serious stressors they referred to (McKay & Allais 1995:111-112).

According to McKay and Allais (1995:112), in South Africa the problems of disciplinary control seem more important than teaching, which is compounded by the excessively high pupil:teacher ratio. Teachers are ultimately forced to use strict control measures to enable them to teach. Several teachers indicated that teaching in overcrowded classes meant that authority and discipline had to be strictly enforced and this impairs the spontaneity and creativity of the learners. This point has been reiterated by many teachers and learners in the researcher’s experience. In this regard Haigh (1990:12) states that the class itself is given and teachers may wish they had 20 friendly intellectuals instead of 32 awkward rebels, but the choice is not theirs. Due to this rapid increase in class size, the teacher has less control over the learners and chaos could rule. This, unfortunately, is the situation in which many overcrowded classrooms in the Eastern Cape are currently functioning.

According to Ormston and Shaw (1994:147), it is easy to superficially understand why young teachers might be under greater stress than their more experienced colleagues. They are still learning the art of teaching, and have not acquired the necessary coping strategies. Relevant coping strategies to handle noise levels, inadequate equipment and disruptive learners in overcrowded classrooms should be acquired (Galloway et al 1982:135).

Brookes and Brown (1996:3-4) state that the increase in class size and consequent overcrowding of classrooms have detrimental effects on learners’ behaviour in schools because they diminish

“the opportunities for schools to provide the high quality teaching needed to enhance student learning and achievement”. In the light of the problem statement of this study, the question is whether the ideals of outcomes-based education will be attained by the learners in overcrowded classes when too many disciplinary problems are experienced.

2.4.5 Greater classroom management problems

According to Fullan (1995:107), classroom management and the conduct of instruction are major problems encountered by teachers. These problems are so critical that it is easy to overlook the equally obvious other issues, such as the evaluation of the learners, the teachers’ evaluation by administration, parent involvement, the need to develop a consistent teaching style, the need to find out how the school functions and the process of getting to know the departmental and school regulations that should be adhered to. Shutte and Bowker (1998:20) report that 10% of the total teaching time in South African schools is wasted achieving class control, which adds up to approximately 20 days.

Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:86) urge that teachers of the outcomes-based education system should “demand more sophisticated classroom management than ever before ... and should also accommodate the expanding diversity of learners and settings”. Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:110) go on to say that learning “is not only a result of sound management, but also a cause”. This raises the question of how or whether sound management can be obtained easily by underqualified teachers in overcrowded classrooms where there are disruptive learners who have an insufficient knowledge of the language of instruction and where less individual learner attention is noted.

According to Clark and Starr (1986:52), a classroom which is skillfully managed is distraction free. Learners can learn effectively in well-managed classrooms. Effective classroom management entails the creation of a climate favourable to learning and will provide the means

of learning. Clark and Starr (1986:52) conclude that for this purpose it involves organizing the physical elements of the classroom, classroom logistics, the materials and the tools of instruction, classroom interpersonal relationships and instruction itself. Asiedu-Akrofi (1981:58) emphasizes the importance of the effective use of time and space in the classroom, especially in overcrowded classrooms.

Thus, Fontana (1992:61) states that classroom control problems can be created by simply failing to provide children with the right conditions in which to work. Fontana goes on to say that cramped classrooms, “in which there is insufficient space for children to carry out practical activities and open-plan units where the noises from other groups becomes intrusive” contribute to a greater classroom management problem. Seating arrangements in overcrowded classrooms which prevent all children from easily seeing the work being presented or demonstrated by the teacher, create a further classroom control problem.

An increase in the classroom size, which inevitably increases classroom management problems, is still a current issue in the overcrowded classrooms in the Eastern Cape schools. The outcomes-based education system should have classroom organization which is a “well-developed, flexible plan of operation which has limits, but which also tolerates exceptions and variations when goals and circumstances warrant them” (Van der Horst and McDonald 1997:87). In overcrowded classrooms with enormous management problems, the exceptions and variations could be so severe that the learning process could be neglected, resulting in detrimental effects for the learners’ academic performance.

2.4.6 Increased teacher stress

Morrison (1977:156) urges teachers not to “become stagnant as a person or as a professional”. Unfortunately, teachers experience the demands for the change of method of instruction and classroom control as sources of stress. Openness to experience is possible and could well be a

rewarding avenue of growth. Although openness to experience implies doing things never done before, it also involves the expression of feelings and thoughts to secure reactions. Unfortunately, the demands for good classroom management in overcrowded classrooms places additional stress on the teacher as the educational aims are more difficult to attain in these classes. In order to maintain the quality of education offered, it is questioned whether an increase in teacher stress due to overcrowded classrooms can be justified. The education authorities should surely realize that this serious situation can adversely affect the country's youth and, more so, the future leaders of South Africa.

According to Davies, Ellison and Osborne (1990:112-113) and the *Daily Dispatch* (28 September 1995:12a), "large classes and high levels of continuous assessment work" are major stressors for teachers. The work overload caused by the increase in the number of learners in the class will ultimately result in excessive workloads. An overcrowded classroom, which ultimately causes inadequate staff facilities and ancillary support services, will increase teacher stress even further. Wynne-Potts (1996:33) emphasizes work overload which affects the teacher's family life negatively, poor physical conditions, such as inadequate classrooms, high pupil:teacher ratios, disciplinary problems in the classroom and also a lack of job security as sources of occupational stressors for teachers. *The Teacher* (March 1999a) adds that trying to control and teach a large group of children can be very stressful.

Brookes and Brown (1996:4) conclude that "increasing class sizes is a contributory factor in the growing incidence of teacher stress, which leads to absenteeism, burnout and non-age related retirements from the profession". According to Potenza and Jansen (1998:54), the "management of OBE will multiply the administrative burdens placed on teachers". Attention is also drawn to the economic costs of the reduced efficiency and loss of trained teachers from the education service as a result of occupational stress. In this regard the problem statement of this study questions how the situation of overcrowded classrooms in schools in the Eastern Cape can be alleviated or rectified, especially with the aim of realizing outcomes-based education.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Van Zijl (1990:6) concludes that many quality learning opportunities were created for the learners in the White Department of Education of the previous political dispensation and points out that this system “shielded the white child from South African realities and has unfortunately taught pupils to view the world from the confines of their own culture”. Needham (1991:8-9), on the other hand, emphasizes that, by contrast, that the Black child of “the oppressed South Africa has always had a hard life”. Circumstances, such as the occurrence of violence, fear, injury, loss of loved ones, trauma, flight and homelessness, were part and parcel of the lives of many Black children during the last decades. The survivors of this system may still bear the emotional and the psychological scars of the past inequalities. Unfortunately, the overcrowded classrooms in the current system still have the potential to create a new group of “survivors” with equally serious problems, unless the issues mentioned in this chapter are remedied speedily by the education authorities.

Fontana (1992:49) argues in this respect that it is therefore important for every school to be “aware of the needs of its individual pupils”. Ideally a school operates in a caring, constructive and positive fashion and, hopefully, in classrooms that are not overcrowded. Such a school and class are less likely to experience problems of antisocial behaviour by learners than the school that adopts a more punitive and less learner-oriented role. According to Lazerson (1985:118), for teachers, transmission of knowledge “means being able to teach under conditions that give them the time, the incentive, and the freedom to explore subject matter. This means smaller classes.” This is, unfortunately, not possible in the overcrowded school classroom conditions in the Eastern Cape.

The ideals of high academic standards, learner achievement and classroom control are almost impossible to attain in an overcrowded classroom, where the teacher cannot deal with each learner individually. The financial crisis in education in the Eastern Cape has complicated the effects of

the overcrowded classroom drastically, in that there are limited funds to continue building schools to reduce class size (*Weekend Post*, 18 April 1998:1; *Daily Dispatch*, 29 May 1998:1; 12 June 1998:1 & 19 July 1999:4). Learners should not be exposed to such conditions, which are not conducive to a good learning and teaching culture.

There is a serious need to establish a new culture of learning for all learners in South Africa. Unfortunately, it would seem that the issues of overcrowdedness in classrooms are still not receiving adequate attention by the Department of Education. Unless these issues are tackled seriously in the near future, the Department of Education and the schools stand to create a system with high ideals of achieving outcomes-based education, but with little prospect or hope of anything being done to implement the physical resources to achieve these ideals. It is evident from the literature study of this chapter that overcrowded classrooms and relevant issues are evident not only in the Eastern Cape, but in South Africa as a whole. Chapter 3 will focus on the implications of problems from overcrowded classrooms for both learners and teachers.

CHAPTER 3

The implications of problems from overcrowded classrooms for both learners and teachers

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter investigates the implications of overcrowded classrooms for both learners and teachers in the light of the problem statement of this study (chapter 1) and the problems identified in chapter 2 of this study. A comprehensive literature study follows, depicting the situation in the Eastern Cape.

According to Christie (1985:259), two of the educational aims in schools are to prepare learners for a future career and to teach them how to socialize. Regarding this, Woolfolk (1993:190) asks whether overcrowded classrooms are conducive for reaching the educational aims in the new South Africa. This study concentrates on especially the Eastern Cape where overcrowded classrooms, a legacy of the past, still seem to be a reality.

According to Fontana (1992:33), many learners may often “feel lonely and unwanted” because of the many stressful challenges they have to face on a daily basis in the world of schooling. Fontana (1992:33) found that few studies have concentrated on the implications of these feelings of the learners, especially in the South African context, because learners are often not included to discuss their obvious inner confusion and anguish. In this respect Fontana (1992:33) concludes that personal problems experienced by a learner cannot be separated from general social problems which occur in the school. Brown (1994:170-171) argues that children should not “suffer from deep personal unhappiness which leaves them withdrawn and inattentive in class, so that the teacher feels the constant need to reprimand them for allowing their attention to wander from the

lesson". In fact, learning and schooling should be a pleasant occurrence, which is the right of every learner in South Africa. The teacher who acts in *loco parentis* (Descombe 1985:24) and who is there to facilitate the optimal development of the learners is faced with serious issues when classes are so overcrowded that little attention can be provided to assist learners who experience personal problems at home or in their own private life-world.

The *Daily Dispatch* (6 September 1995:2) reports that private secondary schools promise small classes averaging 15 learners, where "eye contact, individual education, intensive extra lessons, support and supervised homework ensure that all pupils stay abreast of the learning process". Obviously, this is an ideal situation for both the learner and the teacher. This study questions whether this is tenable in public schools where, for example, too high pupil:teacher ratios for secondary schools are already a reality. It may well be argued that if the ideals of these private schools are difficult to realize in such accommodating circumstances, then the implications of serious educational neglect in overcrowded classrooms in public schools should be addressed on a quantitative and qualitative basis. These studies should focus on the direct implications and effect of overcrowded classrooms on both the learners and teachers.

According to Olivier (1997:25 and 40), when outcomes-based education is the norm, the learning process is directed and managed by means of learning objectives which are emphasized strongly throughout. In this regard the analysis, synthesis and evaluation of the contents are noted. In an overcrowded classroom where eye contact with individual attention and support to all learners are almost impossible, there is concern over what the eventual implications will be with reference to the learner and the facilitator, if these levels of outcomes-based education cannot be achieved. Hence, the question can also be posed in the light of the problem statement of this study: Will the neglected learners from the past legacy show good progress in their academic performance under these poor conditions? Overcrowded classes could affect the future generation adversely, which raises the question whether South Africa, in particular the Eastern Cape, can afford this situation.

3.2 THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE ATMOSPHERE OF AN OVERCROWDED CLASSROOM

The *Daily Dispatch* (12 October 1998:5) reports that an non-conducive, classroom atmosphere where a culture of learning and teaching is lacking, will result in possible poor matric examination results. This could contribute to a higher repeater rate and also increase the unemployment rate. This was typical of education in Black schools under the previous education dispensation. In the light of the problem statement of this study, the question arises of whether these implications should still exist under the new education dispensation in South Africa and whether this will not have a detrimental effect on the overall economic climate and citizens of the country.

Any overcrowded place, especially a classroom, is a stressful experience. Fontana (1992:41) maintains that in overcrowded classrooms, in which there is little unpredictability and in which the teacher insists on quiet and static working conditions, learners' boredom soon sets in. This could affect the extraverted learners adversely. Extraverted learners will, by definition, tend to prefer an environment in which there is plenty of social activity. *The Teacher* (March 1999b) emphasizes that boredom or frustration amongst learners leads to discipline problems. In this regard Brimer (1971:91) states that the physical classroom environment, with special reference to the availability of space, will obviously condition the child's behaviour to an extent. This could, unfortunately, lead to the repetition of grades, which is not in line with the ideals set for outcomes-based education.

According to Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:213), "In Outcomes-Based Education the learner is not a passive recipient of knowledge, but an active participant in the teaching-learning process." Given the problem statement of this study, it is not clear how this ideal could be feasible in overcrowded classrooms. Furthermore, Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:120) consider multicultural education as an integral part of outcomes-based education. This type of education consists of reform designed to improve the school environment so that many different

groups will experience educational equality and academic parity. This study questions whether outcomes-based education will enhance a positive classroom atmosphere which is conducive to learning and teaching when there are many different cultural groups who are represented in one overcrowded classroom.

The importance of the teacher setting a positive classroom climate is possibly one of the most important criteria for effective, holistic learning to take place. It is not clear how a teacher can be expected to attempt to fulfil the requirements of outcomes-based education effectively when there is hardly any space to move between learners; when there are too many learners to even remember their names, let alone their personal backgrounds and problems. The ideals of outcomes-based education are highly commendable. Unfortunately, the overcrowded situation in many classrooms in South African schools, especially in the Eastern Cape, will impact negatively on both teacher and learner and the researcher suspects that in many instances these ideals will be untenable.

3.3 THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROBLEMS WHICH LEARNERS MAY EXPERIENCE IN OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS

In terms of various studies on ergonomics, Oborne (1995:14) emphasizes that “people are the central components within the working system and ... have aims, ambitions and motivations for both the work and the system”. This approach should be applied to the classroom situation where the physical space required by each learner to perform all educational tasks comfortably and effectively is of the utmost importance. This study questions whether the aims, ambitions and motivations of learners are not adversely affected in overcrowded classes where limited space inhibits the ergonomic requirements which obviously are absent and, if so, what the implications are for the learner.

The current trend in the education of learners with special needs, such as learners with cerebral palsy, is that of inclusion in schools. If this trend is to become reality, the questions we should seriously reflect on are the effects of this on learners with special needs and also the implications of overcrowded classrooms and ergonomics which are important for physically normal people. A lack of space and an ergonomically unsuitable classroom could seriously frustrate learners with special needs.

The following issues will be discussed, namely:

- decreased individual attention and academic competency,
- poor learner academic development,
- decreased learner well-being and increased stress,
- the implications of a language proficiency problem,
- the implications of the problems related to cultural differences, and
- increased language prejudice and the negative attitudes amongst different cultures.

3.3.1 Decreased individual attention and academic competency

Henning (1990:41) states that academic achievement is vital to the learner. A decrease in individual attention and in academic performance in overcrowded classrooms will both surely affect the learner negatively. Often academically strong learners are admitted into a particular school, where on the other hand some overcrowded schools have no choice but to enrol too many weaker learners (Christie 1990:133). Habeshaw, Gibbs and Habeshaw (1992:39) clearly state that weaker learners need a lot of individual help and that in large classes, there are even more who need help. When learner admittance to classrooms reaches a certain size, it is no longer possible for teachers to offer the same level of support to them.

Lazerson (1985:118), Clark (1986:22) and Reynolds and Cuttance (1992:11) agree that due to an increase in learner numbers in one classroom and too little individual attention, very few

learners are involved in the transmission of knowledge required for academic excellence or even mere competence. Obviously, these ideals can only be achieved if learners are involved in the learning process. The fact that close teacher-learner contact is one of the goals of outcomes-based education (*Daily Dispatch*, 25 March 1997:1) the problem statement of this study raise the question of whether this goal will be obtainable in an overcrowded classroom. When there are too many learners in one classroom and increased lack of individual attention to the neglected learners from the past education dispensation, it may be asked whether a new generation of learners will be created who are even more neglected. This leads to the question of what frustrations will result from the present education system for both the learners and the teachers if they are not making any academic or competency progress in overcrowded classes.

New learners have “a whole range of different and urgent needs” (Habeshaw et al 1992:19). It can be an overwhelming, frustrating experience for staff to try and meet these needs of all learners. According to Berkey (1996:11-12), a frequent criticism of large classroom size is that learners will go by unnoticed and “fall between the cracks”. This is of great concern to the parents regarding the learner’s individual need to grow and to achieve optimally according to the ideals of outcomes-based education (*Daily Dispatch*, 25 March 1997:1; 8 July 1997:4).

- **Increased dropout rates**

Bearing in mind the problem statement of this study, it is interesting to note that Potenza and Jansen (1998:54) state that “OBE is supposed to create learner-centred classrooms, substituting understanding for memory learning”. The question that arises is how this will be achieved if the teachers are required to teach 50 or 60 and sometimes even more learners who are “crammed” into a classroom initially designed for not more than 25 learners. Ashley (1990:12) and Ayerst (1972:32) emphasize that due to the “high pupil-teacher-ratio in most Black schools, most high school teachers meet so many pupils a day that they cannot know all of them well. Nor can they

deal with them as individuals.” In overcrowded classrooms it is very easy for the learners to actually “fall through the cracks” and get lost in the crowded setting of the classroom. Moreover, Ashley (1990:12) states that “troubled boys and girls often have no one to whom to turn. As a result they may feel unwanted and inferior - they become alienated by the school.” This is a serious issue which can lead to many other school related problems, such as an increase in drug abuse and a poor self-concept when learners’ needs are not met. In this regard Clark (1986:11) aptly remarks that this situation could contribute to high dropout rates. This arouses concern over whether the implementation of outcomes-based education offered in overcrowded classrooms might not cause a greater increase in the dropout rate of weaker learners. In this respect Meier (1996:13) concludes that learners and teachers in impersonal, overcrowded classes cannot know one another well. They may mishear one another, which leaves room for many communication gaps. This, in turn, could lead to a situation where families, teachers, staff and learners may assume disrespect where none was intended.

Outcomes-based education strives to incorporate a “deep approach” to obtain quality education for all learners. This, according to Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:77), involves “thinking, looking for points of connection between different sections and playing with ideas”. The problem statement of this study raises the question of whether this will be possible when there is a lack of individual attention given to learners by the teacher in overcrowded classes. How will the quality of education be affected in overcrowded classrooms? According to Mielaret (1979:69), the most important indication of the effectiveness and academic performance of schooling is to determine whether learners complete their schooling successfully. Brimer (1971:10) states that a decrease in learner’s academic performance is indicated by wastage, referred to in education as the rate of learner failure in schools. An estimate of wastage in this sense, according to Mielaret (1979:69), includes an index of dropout, which relates premature school-leaving to the number of children who are recruited at the beginning of each year. Motala (1995:161-163) concludes that unfortunately “high repeater and dropout rates is one of the most glaring manifestations of a poor quality and the inequality in primary education in South Africa”.

According to Brimer (1971:10), educational wastage, “human learning wasted”, exists “if there is failure to hold learners within the school system”. Brimer (1971:117) found that wastage occurred due to the fact that “teachers were unable to help pupils catch up”. This could be attributed to the lack of individual attention from teachers. In overcrowded classrooms, especially in the Eastern Cape, it is questionable whether neglected learners will receive adequate individual attention in order to catch up and ultimately improve their academic performance. According to Boyer (1996:4-5), the result of too little individual attention will increase the possibility of learner dropout rates. Motala (1995:166) adds that a most significant later consequence of high dropout rates at school level is that “children are likely to leave school illiterate”. The problem statement of this study raises the question of whether the present education system did not envisage a drop in the number of illiterate young people in the new South Africa.

• **Increased failure rate**

What evidence is there that wastage occurs in South African schools? According to the *Daily Dispatch* (6 January 1999:1), there is outrage at the dismal 1998 matric pass rate in South Africa and top educators stated that “the appalling 1998 matric results at black schools in the Eastern Cape is a frightening wake-up call for the entire province”. Brimer (1971:10) answered this question three decades ago already. According to him, it is evident that through the failure of any country to achieve their educational objectives, wastage will occur. Wastage will occur when the learner fails to reach target achievement levels and then ultimately repeats a grade. Brimer (1971:10) defines repetition as a year spent by a learner in the same grade and therefore doing the same work as in the previous year. The Eastern Cape Department of Education reported that only 46% of the 1998 matric learners passed whereas in the North West, the pass rate is up from 50% in 1997 to 54,6% in 1998, and the Northern Cape’s pass rate improved from 63,8% to 65,4% (*Sunday Times*, 3 January 1999:5). The *Daily Dispatch* (5 January 1999:1) reported that the Eastern Cape matric results for 1998 showed a dismal performance at most Black schools. It stated that at least 14 Black secondary schools throughout the province produced no successful

candidates and dozens had pass rates as low as 8%. In the Northern Province only 35,2% of the province's 114 621 candidates passed the 1998 matric examination (*Sunday Times*, 10 January 1999:3). The New National Party noted that "the 55,6% pass rate for the Gauteng Education Department still meant that almost half of all pupils would have to repeat matric to get a senior certificate" (*Daily Dispatch*, 4 January 1999:4). Eleven public schools in Gauteng managed pass rates of less than 10% (*Sunday Times*, 3 January 1999:2).

- **Increased disciplinary problems**

The *Daily Dispatch* (8 July 1997:4) reports that in outcomes-based education: "All learners will succeed, but not at the same time, as each will develop at his or her own pace, and time will no longer control the learning process." Can this be achieved in overcrowded classrooms in South African schools when Fontana (1992:29) states that "repeated failure in the classroom leaves children with understandable feelings of hostility and rejection towards formal education, and since these feelings interfere in turn with their ability to cope with the new work to which they are being constantly introduced, they tend to fall further and further behind and to experience yet more failure. This is perhaps reason enough to explain some of such children's misbehaviours." In outcomes-based education, where learner participation is emphasized, it is necessary to ensure that an intolerable level of disciplinary problems does not increase amongst learners in overcrowded classrooms. The problem statement of this study raises the question of how this, in turn, will affect the quality of education offered in overcrowded classrooms.

Fontana (1992:29-32) remarks that if learners experience repeated failure, it could be made worse by a related factor, namely the learners' self-concept which is "the opinions and ideas we have of ourselves" and how we are evaluated by other important people in our own life-world. The self-concept plays an important role for the learner in classwork performance. Fontana adds that a negative self-concept "tends to leave us feeling inadequate and incompetent and often with the sense of defeatism when faced with the same tasks". These learners will frequently doubt their

ability to master new work, even though they may show intrinsic interest. Furthermore, Fontana (1992:29-32) states that this “self-doubt will lead to unrealistically low standards and goals. Clearly this negative approach to school work will of itself be likely to spark off behavioural problems, with the teacher becoming increasingly exasperated at the child’s negative attitude and the child becoming increasingly stubborn about changing it.” This raises concern over whether overcrowded classrooms will not become even more problematic if learners cannot receive the individual attention they deserve in order to maintain their academic performance. Remedies for the drop in academic performance need to be sought in order to create a system of quality education offered in South African schools.

Decreased academic performance could be extremely detrimental to this country’s future economic development. The question is how South Africa can afford to increase the number of learners who will inevitably drop out of overcrowded classrooms and also the number of learners who will leave school illiterate. South Africa’s united education system needs to rectify or alleviate these issues that arise due to overcrowded classes. Outcomes-based education might possibly not be able to alleviate illiteracy, nor may the admirable ideals possibly be realized in overcrowded classrooms. To determine whether the new education dispensation in South Africa is already guilty of “human wastage”, the matric pass rate should be studied. In this regard, according to the *Daily Dispatch* (8 January 1999:1), the 1998 Eastern Cape pass rate is currently 1,3% down from 1997 and, with a steady decline over three years, is the lowest pass rate in the province in the post-apartheid era and in “... the (former) Transkei area with the greatest concentration of pupils, [...] Only 7,9% of the 82 517 full-time learners who wrote the 1998 matric examination passed with a Matric Endorsement for university entrance and only 280 candidates obtained A aggregates.”

The low 1998 matric pass rate in the Eastern Cape makes it evident that the Department of Education needs to tackle and rectify this serious issue immediately. In the light of the problem

statement of this study, it is necessary to identify remedies for insufficient individual learner attention and a decreased learner academic competency.

3.3.2 Poor learner academic development

Vos and Brits (1990:57) and Tickle (1987:18, 19 and 33) note that the standard of service provided in the education system is determined by two main factors, namely the quality of the teacher being adequately trained and the quality of the training being received. With poor quality education and a shortage of well-trained teachers, any endeavour aimed at an education system for realizing the potential of the country's people cannot succeed. Economic growth and people's quality of life will also drop. It does not seem possible for outcomes-based education to achieve its ideals in overcrowded classrooms where learners are already showing decreased academic competency.

In 1978, almost 40% of the teachers in White schools had degrees; the remainder were matriculants. In Black schools, however, over 80% of the teachers did not even have matric, with 15% of these possessing only Grade 8 (old Std 6) and only 5% were graduates (Ashley 1990:10). In 1981 the Human Sciences Research Council (Vos & Brits 1990:58), found the following percentage of underqualified teachers: Whites (3,6%); Coloureds (66,14%); Asians (19,7%) and Blacks (85%). Ashley (1990:10) found that major under-qualification exists in the South African education system. The 1997 Annual Schools' Survey (Department of Education, 1998) indicated a national total of 358 262 teachers in South Africa and 15% of the total teachers in Kwa-Zulu Natal region only had matric and no formal training. According to this report there was a total of 68 033 educators in the Eastern Cape, but unfortunately no detailed statistics were available for this region.

From the perspective of class control, Fontana (1992:45-46) maintains that the main implication of a drop in the quality of education offered to learners is an increase in the "boredom level if

work is too far below their (learners') ability". Henning (1990:40) argues that with this decrease in the quality of education, a decrease in the personal development of learners is also noted. Habeshaw et al (1992:57) identify contributing factors to poor learner academic development, stating: "As class size increase so students experience more difficulty in seeing material which is being presented to them at the front of the room. The board becomes redundant, demonstrations seem unintelligible and without great care even projected images are impossible to read." Habeshaw et al (1992:61) add that "the larger the size of the group, the more difficult it is for students to concentrate on the lecture". Learners feel more remote from the teacher and, as a consequence, the teacher has less immediacy for them, and it is more difficult to hear what the learner is trying to convey. As members of a large group, the learners find this experience impersonal and are often left frustrated. With many other learners in the classroom, there are lots of distractions and it can easily become overheated and airless. Moreover, in large classes learners are also reluctant to ask questions because they are afraid that their fellow learners will think that they are either "ignorant or stupid" (Habeshaw et al 1992:65) and inevitably it is easy to hide among the masses for after all it is often said that there is safety in numbers. Habeshaw et al (1992:67) conclude that in large classes it can be very difficult to tell if learners are learning anything from the lesson. *The Teacher* (November 1997:12) adds that the "facilitator can only be sure that learning has taken place if the learners can demonstrate through actions that they have acquired the desired learning content". These implications of large classes will surely cause a decrease in the learners' academic performance. Therefore, general boredom, lack of interest and decreased academic performance need to be addressed in overcrowded classrooms in order to prevent a further drop in the academic competency of the already neglected learners from the former education system.

Considering the problem statement of this study, the question is what the standard of learning outcomes in outcomes-based education will be when the learners in overcrowded classes are presently already showing poor academic development.

3.3.3 Decreased learner well-being and increased stress

Stern (1995:61 and 98) states that the implications of bullying include a “permissive attitude towards aggression, an active and quick-tempered temperament, a negative, cold or uninvolved attitude of the primary caretaker ... and violent emotional outbursts by the learner”. Bullying in overcrowded classes together with teasing need to be controlled and eliminated in order to reduce their negative effects on the learners.

Thorne (1993:52) argues that an increase in teasing in overcrowded classrooms is “a prevalent form of criticism among children, teasing always has a target, evoking feelings of discomfort and humiliation, especially if there are witnesses. Teasing which takes place in a crowded setting could mean that an audience is present which may enhance the sting.” Stern (1995:61 and 98) notes that teasing has emotional and behavioural consequences for gender relations. Teasing makes cross-gender interaction risky, increases social distance between boys and girls and therefore creates gender boundaries. The risk of being teased may dissuade learners from publicly choosing to be with someone of the opposite sex. Here the phenomenon of underground friendships may result. This will adversely impact on overcrowded conditions. Hence, the question is whether decreased learner well-being in overcrowded classes will not lead to poorer academic performance and increased management problems of those learners who have become despondent and whether underqualified teachers will be able to give the necessary attention and support to learners who need advice in this regard?

Kruger and Van Schalkwyk (1996:181-182) add that a learner’s experience and observation of a problematic situation, such as teasing or bullying, may cause learner stress. Physically, the learner may be affected in that an increase in heartbeat and breathing as well as sweaty hands could result. Other physical stress symptoms which could occur include headaches, stomach cramps, rapid breathing, fever without a physical cause, neck pains and insomnia. This may affect the learners emotionally, which could have further negative effects on their well-being. These

factors have serious negative effects on the learning process. If stress is not handled correctly, the body will become tired and worn out due to the constant fighting or fleeing reactions caused by stress. Dunham (1989:1) states that intolerable stress experienced by learners could result in either psychological or physiological damage, or both. Learners can also feel overwhelmed and intimidated by large numbers.

According to Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:7), outcomes-based education states that “success breeds success”. By implication, failure will then also result in more failure. If children do not succeed and cannot take responsibility for learning in this new system, it continues to affect their well-being. Remedies need to be identified for this problem and its implications. It is important to ensure that teachers of overcrowded classes receive adequate in-service training to help them (the teachers) with the necessary coping strategies to alleviate these problems.

3.3.4 The implications of a language proficiency problem

Brimer (1971:99) states that, given that a child is fit and well, the gravest hindrance he/she can suffer in school is to be unfamiliar with the language of instruction. Christie (1990:61) notes that for many Black learners in South Africa, the transition from segregated Black schools to open schools was difficult, and many expressed problems with the medium of instruction which were not experienced by their White counterparts. This could have been because the White learners were exposed to the English language more regularly than the Black learners were. Fontana (1992:23) states that if children from different ethnic groups have language problems in the classroom it could mean that they do not understand what the teacher requires of them during the lesson. He concludes that their failure to comply is therefore due not to defiance, but to incomprehension. The *Daily Dispatch* (14 January 1999:5) states that “the poor performance by the Eastern Cape pupils in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study has been blamed on bad resources and the language barrier ... especially in Science, Std 6 pupils speaking the language of instruction (10 percent) did better than those who seldom did (68 percent)”.

This raises serious concern over whether incomprehension of the learning material in overcrowded classes will not be a further disadvantage to the neglected learners in the Eastern Cape, and South Africa as a whole.

Lemmer and Squelch (1993:27) point out that an implication of miscommunication is that “no meaningful information is exchanged”. Here the message received by the learner is different to the one intended. Hodge (1993:82) reasons that perceptual barriers, such as the difference in background where a low-status language occurs, creates a barrier between the learners through which the messages cannot penetrate. If teachers cannot understand their learners, or vice versa then, clearly, learning will be affected adversely. Furthermore, according to Baker (1994:198), there are frequent occasions when language minorities are found to underachieve in overcrowded classrooms. What could the explanation be for this phenomenon? Baker (1994:148) puts it as follows: “Failure or below average (academic) performance is therefore attributed to pupils having insufficient developed medium of instruction skills to cope with the curriculum.”

Doughty and Doughty (1974:79) reason that without grasping adequate language skills for learning, there can be no shared activity and no shared experiences between the learners in the classroom. They conclude that an inadequate language for learning may limit, or inhibit, or totally prevent learners developing the ways of writing, of speaking, and especially perhaps the ways which are as essential to their everyday life in the context of school as is their language to their life in the context of the community. Culturally, language is a central agent of socialization and learning. English-medium schools which use the language as a medium for socialisation, have severe implications for Black learners. For many Black learners, English is a second or third language. Instead of helping in their integration, the implication is that it becomes a mechanism through which these learners are alienated (*The Teacher*, September 1997:5).

Hodge (1993:19) remarks that “in every community intense judgements are made on the basis of forms of language, including accent, vocabulary and syntax. Linguistic prejudice translates these differences into judgements of mental and moral status, so that the regional or working class speech becomes a sign of inferiority.” Hodge (1993:82) notes further that different forms of a language provide an easy focus for discrimination. Learners who think that they cannot master the language of instruction stop competing in class. The consequences are anger and failure, thus confirming all the prejudices. Hodge (1993:82) concludes that, unfortunately, “language discrimination may still remain against those who learn the language and succeed in education”. Poor language skills gained by learners may have a detrimental effect on their education which, in turn, leads to poor employment prospects. According to Orkin (1998:165), the official unemployment rate in South Africa for 1994 was 19,2%, but fell to 16,9% for 1995, rose to 21,0% for 1996 and had increased to 22,0% for 1997. In the Eastern Province, the unemployment rate was 49,0% for 1998 (*Daily Dispatch*, 19 July 1999:4; Dondashe 1999). This high unemployment rate cannot be accepted. Placing learners who do not fully understand the medium of instruction in overcrowded classrooms raises the question whether this will increase the dropout rate and unemployment rate further.

Hodge (1993:96) argues that some forms of language are better to think with than others, and the simple forms of a language found among second- and third-language speakers are inherently inferior for the kinds of thinking required to succeed in school and in the boardrooms of today’s world. Hodge concludes that low-status language learners do worse educationally than those from more privileged backgrounds. Prejudice towards learners with low-status language explains this outcome. Christie (1990:115) adds that “class difference would be more evident during the compulsory phase of schooling; arguably, social class may influence pupils to drop out of school earlier”. It is questionable how learners who were neglected in the previous regime will cope in overcrowded classrooms where the medium of instruction is not their mother tongue (home language). In the light of the problem statement of this study, it is clear that the language incompetency will affect the quality of education adversely.

3.3.5 The implications of the problems related to cultural differences

Lemmer and Squelch (1993:14) point out that “cultural diversity within the classroom is a reality, and the educational implications thereof cannot be avoided”. Obviously, in a culturally diverse society, different values, beliefs and observances will not necessarily be acceptable to all. There is, indeed, a limit. The question of what is universally acceptable and what not is, of course, a complex and difficult problem. Voors (1997:20) states that members in a particular cultural group do not determine behaviour or values but make certain values and kinds of behaviour more acceptable than others. A wide variation of behaviour exists within each cultural group. When the values of a different culture are not understood or shared by learners in a class, conflict may arise as “a result of confrontation between two or more ethnocentric views”. This could have a detrimental effect on the learning process for the learner (Lemmer & Squelch 1993:14-15). Unfortunately, the emphasis placed on cultural diversity in an overcrowded classroom may lead to cultural relativism, cultural alienation, discrimination and harsh treatment (*The Teacher*, September 1997:5).

Woolfolk (1993:190) states that learners use socially significant categories, such as culturally transmitted behaviour and race and biologically transmitted physical traits, to describe themselves and others. In this regard *The Teacher* (September 1997:5) reports that the cultural integration of Black learners into former White schools in South Africa was not without problematic implications. These implications of the child who is culturally different are typified, according to Brown (1982:10-11), by “lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates and restricted career aspirations than the child of the mainstream culture”. This leads to the question of whether by having a range of culturally different learners in an overcrowded classroom, a better quality education can be envisaged in South Africa or whether this will cause a further drop in the quality of education produced.

According to Fontana (1992:21-22), cultural variables may overlap with socioeconomic variables in the sense that certain ethnic groups may experience more social and economic deprivation. He states that this “can have an unsettling effect upon the child, and can lead to resentment and to a variant of home-school conflict”. At home children are taught to respect their cultural heritage, while at school it may seem that this heritage is virtually ignored, or regarded as anachronistic or out of place. Unable to reconcile the two approaches, children may identify with their culture and regard school as essentially a threat to cherished beliefs and practices. On the other hand, they may identify with school and thus have to reject their own background and, what is more important, that part of themselves that finds identity and security within the school. Fontana (1992:22) concludes that “either way, but particularly if the child regards the school as a threat, the home-school conflict is likely to lead to difficulties within the classroom and potentially to problems of class control”. Considering the problem statement of this study, the question may well be asked whether overcrowded classes are conducive to creating a better quality education offered in the Eastern Cape schools.

Brown (1994:176) points out that “social distance and social resistance occurs between different cultures in the same environment”. He refers to social distance as the cognitive proximity of two cultures that come into contact with an individual, whereas resistance denotes the dissimilarity between two cultures. Furthermore, according to Pai (1984:38), “ethnocentrism leads pupils to judge others in terms of their own cultural norms which makes it difficult for them to see that other cultures are also effective means of dealing with the needs and problems of the respective societies. This attitude inclines children to see those who do not conform to their own norms as stupid, depraved, irresponsible, psychopathic and inferior.” Brown (1994:170-171) refers to this as culture shock, a common experience for a person learning a second language in a second culture, ranging from mild irritability to deep psychological panic and crisis. He concludes that culture shock is associated with “feelings in the learner of estrangement, anger, hostility, indecision, frustration, unhappiness, sadness, loneliness, homesickness and even physical illness.

Persons undergoing culture shock view their new world out of recentness and alternate between being angry at others for not understanding them and being filled with self-pity.”

According to the norms of outcomes-based education, the learner is an active and motivated participant in the learning process (*Daily Dispatch*, 8 July 1997:4). With so many cultures represented in an overcrowded classroom, where there is no close teacher-learner contact, the learners cannot stay motivated and interested if they are taught by underqualified teachers from a different cultural group. Clearly, this will make the attainment of the ideals of outcomes-based education very difficult. The great number of different cultures represented in one overcrowded classroom could also increase the negative attitudes learners have of each other.

3.3.6 Increased language prejudice and the negative attitudes amongst different cultures

Hodge (1993:83) states that one implication of language prejudice, on the part of the dominant culture, is that subordinate groups make defensive use of their language to preserve their identity. Such groups develop a language designed to be as different and as incomprehensible as possible, to mark their identity and to exclude those who have excluded them. In such cases, failure to learn the dominant language is not due to stupidity on the part of the learners, nor an intrinsic difficulty of the target language for these groups of learners. Such groups face a dilemma: A choice between total assimilation into the language and culture of a dominant society that does not welcome them, or a proud but impoverished separate identity where they are accepted and feel at home. This raises two questions. Would a further loss of identity or the assimilation into another culture in overcrowded classrooms decrease learner involvement? Could this situation trigger learners to lose interest in their schoolwork and show a decrease in their academic competence?

Lemmer and Squelch (1993:28) add that a negative attitude is defined as a barrier to effective communication. In this regard Brown (1994:168-169) concludes that stereotyping implies an “attitude towards a culture or language in question” and that it is intuitively clear that “second language pupils’ negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation”. Not only learners experience enormous consequences due to problems of overcrowded classrooms. Teachers too, especially those in the Eastern Cape schools, are also severely affected. Many of the consequences which teachers experience are linked to the fact that the pupil:teacher ratio is too high. If the teachers are burdened with the consequences of overcrowded classes, then the quality of education offered is questionable. Teachers are currently under pressure to ensure a high pass rate in their classes, especially for Grade 12 (old Std 10) subjects. The question may be asked in the light of the problem statement of this study: Will the additional stress, in the form of a heavy workload due to overcrowded classes, affect teachers adversely? These issues need to be addressed as soon as possible in order to keep well-qualified teachers in their profession.

3.4 THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROBLEMS WHICH TEACHERS MAY EXPERIENCE IN OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS

This study questions whether the aims, ambitions and motivations of teachers are adversely affected in overcrowded classes where limited space affects their interaction with learners, and their method of teaching.

The following issues will be discussed, namely:

- decreased quality of classroom management, and
- increased personal stress level.

3.4.1 Decreased quality of classroom management

According to Galloway et al (1982:134-136), teachers will “experience stress if they cannot cope with educational demands especially if these demands are in conflict with their own values”. An example of this is where the teacher has to sacrifice high academic standards in order to cope with disruptive learners. Hoberg (1994:46) stresses the importance of effective classroom management, the effective enforcement of classroom rules and the overall creation of a positive task- and goal achieving atmosphere in the classroom. This situation often lacks in overcrowded classes and disruptive behaviour becomes the most striking cause of teacher stress, which too often has to be borne in painful isolation. Unfortunately, for many teachers of overcrowded classes, admitting to poor classroom management is paramount to admitting that they are poor quality teachers. Teachers’ skills to ensure the success of outcomes-based education in overcrowded classrooms are questioned.

According to Galloway et al (1982:136), research has underestimated the importance of the implications of an increase in disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Fontana (1992:44-48) states that the implications of an increase in the number of impulsive and severely disruptive children in one classroom, need special attention. An increase in the number of impulsive children in overcrowded classes pose more serious class control issues for teachers. A general survey found that more than half of South Africa’s teachers would quit the profession if they could because of plummeting morale and increasing learner delinquency (*Daily Dispatch*, 19 April 1999:1). In the light of the problem statement of this study, decreased quality of classroom management should be opposed by our education system in order to uplift the quality of education offered to neglected learners in South Africa.

3.4.2 Increased personal stress level

Galloway et al (1982:133) state that “an increase in a stressor such as pressure, due to poor working conditions or conflicting demands on the teachers’ time, will cause an increase in their susceptibility to minor illnesses such as headaches. Long-term responses to pressure result in hypertension and particularly diabetes.” Furthermore, Davies et al (1990:109) emphasize that frequent changes in blood pressure caused by regular exposure to stressors could ultimately lead to cardiac illness.

Galloway et al (1982:135) identify exhaustion experienced by teachers as a major characteristic of continuous stress. According to them, this exhaustion is made worse by the lack of colleague support. Admittance of stress may result in allegations that the particular teacher may be incompetent. Hence, teachers are left to solve their own problems, presumably by a process of trial and error which may result in further serious implications. Often teachers bear their stress in painful isolation. Galloway et al conclude that “stress attacks the heart, both physically and mentally”. Beard (1990:109) states that one of the outcomes of poor work experiences is the significance of stress on the teacher’s physiology and health. He concludes that a job characteristic such as high job pressures, for example, a heavy workload is constantly related to the teacher’s ill health. In her research, Van der Linde (1990:21-23) mentions that the cardiovascular, the respiratory, immune, digestive and nervous systems and skeletal muscles can be affected by stress. According to her, these physical implications of stress can be as detrimental as the physiological consequences. Psychological consequences of stress include apathy, regression, withdraw, forgetfulness, dissatisfaction, poor self-image, a lack of sociability and increased feelings of irritability. Furthermore, a teacher experiencing stress could turn to drug abuse. Given the problem statement of this study, the issue is: Will these implications of stress experienced by the teacher of an overcrowded classroom affect the quality of education offered to the learners?

Davies et al (1990:110-111) state that “should a teacher move towards burnout, evidence of both personal and organizational symptoms will be evident”. Personal symptoms include psychological effects, an increase in frustration, tension, fear and anxiety, and physiological effects such as an increase in tensed muscles, loss of appetite and high blood pressure. Organizational symptoms will have a detrimental effect on teachers’ school effectiveness. Teachers will show an increase in absenteeism and maintain a continuous, high level of complaining. Lack of communication, trust and positive feedback will become evident. An increase in conflict and an even greater difficulty in resolving conflict will occur. Furthermore, the burnt-out teacher will have difficulty motivating the staff and learners and show a lack of co-operation and willingness to accept innovation. The high pupil:teacher ratio and stress experienced by teachers could be the cause of the teachers in overcrowded classrooms given up on the ideals of outcomes-based education. This raises two questions. Should teachers not be able to maintain a high standard of education in overcrowded classes? What can the present Department of Education do in order to restore a high level of education in South Africa? South Africa cannot afford to lose well-qualified teachers from the profession due to high pupil:teacher ratios and stressors. This would create a further dilemma in the South African education system.

3.5 CONCLUSION

According to Reynolds and Cuttance (1992:11), “factors within the school that are associated with more effective regimes are high levels of learner involvement, small overall class size and favourable pupil-teacher ratios”. Henning (1990:41) concludes that it is therefore educationally unsound to put learners in a situation in which they cannot cope due to the unreasonable implications of problems which may arise. According to Steyn (1998:1), South African schools did not offer satisfactory education for the thousands of matriculants who failed. It is pointed out that these matriculants “are the ones who will have to return to overcrowded classrooms, and who

will attempt to rewrite their matric. The chances of success this time around may be as slim as their previous attempt."

This raises the question of whether too many resources are being wasted on some learners who are endlessly and pointlessly repeating years of school? The *Daily Dispatch* (21 October 1998:1) reports that allowing serial repeaters to progress through the system without actually passing would just add to the Labour Department's unemployment statistics. It concludes that "the result will unavoidably be ... a class of people ... cultivated in the education system who cannot read or write, or who have not achieved the acceptable level of education, yet who can write the educational qualification behind their names" (*Daily Dispatch*, 21 October 1998:1).

If overcrowded classrooms should occur in schools, then alternative recommendations should be made to maintain high educational standards in schools (MacKenzie & Allester 1968:22; Motala 1995:171). Both Altbach (1989:119) and Brimer (1971:111) recommend that teachers should have a general or a specialized training to cope with the implications of overcrowded classes. The recommendations should be considered and implemented as soon as possible so that the learners in overcrowded classes are not disadvantaged any further.

Chapter 4 discusses the ethnographic research undertaken to determine whether the implications of overcrowded classes, described in the literature study in chapter 3 of this study, are being experienced by the learners and the teachers. The ethnographic interviews and participant-observation are conducted with the aim of postulating a model to alleviate the problems experienced in overcrowded classes and to make some recommendations to alleviate the issue in practice. A further aim of the research is to search for similarities and differences that are in line with the literature study of this study and that could possibly confirm or reject certain crucial arguments.

CHAPTER 4

The empirical research

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 outlined the problem statement, aims, methodology and plan of the whole study. Chapter 2 investigated some of the problems related to overcrowded classrooms, with particular reference to learners and teachers. In chapter 3 the implications of the overcrowded classroom, with particular reference to the learners and the teachers, were discussed. This chapter focuses on the empirical research to be undertaken, namely the qualitative research methodology. In the qualitative research tradition, this study makes use of ethnography. The data selection strategies, the selection of the respondents and the inductive data analysis, including reliability, validity and possible restrictions of the study, are discussed. The researcher makes use of the ethnographic interview and participant-observation. All constituents or emerging patterns from the research respondents, which reflect current issues of overcrowdedness in classrooms, are recorded. The research study therefore reflects a long period of data collection. In the light of the problem statement of this study, the researcher investigates the issues of overcrowdedness in the Eastern Cape schools.

4.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research methodology was selected for its descriptive nature as opposed to the quantitative method, which endeavours to quantify the results in terms of numbers, as stressed by Burgess (1988:1). Mouton and Marais (1990:153-167) compare the qualitative and the quantitative approaches by indicating the main differences between them. According to them (1990:155-156), the quantitative approach is "highly formalised ..., explicitly controlled, with a

range that is more exactly defined ... In contradistinction, qualitative approaches are ... not as strictly formalised, while the scope is more likely to be undefined, and a more philosophical mode of operation is adopted." Furthermore, the hypothesis of the qualitative approach is "frequently undeclared or merely in the form of a general research goal" as opposed to the hypothesis in the quantitative approach which is "stated explicitly ... (and which) can be rejected" (Mouton & Marais 1990:161). Importantly, according to Mouton and Marais (1990:162-163), qualitative observation is subjectifying and the researcher becomes involved with the phenomena. It occurs in a non-structured manner and the context is taken into account. On the other hand, the quantitative approach differs due to its objectivity and pre-planned observation which may be scalable. During the quantitative approach the context may also be controlled (Mouton & Marais 1990:162-163). In this study the qualitative approach rather than the quantitative approach was followed.

The obtained data were analysed in an inductive way, focusing on the participants' own perceptions, interpretations and meanings regarding their life-world as perceived by them (Mouton & Marais 1988:70). The researcher visited the site to be observed and interviewed the research participants in their natural setting, in this case, the school. Furthermore, an attempt was made to identify the chief concerns of the various research participants and assess their merit. To accomplish this, the researcher noted what effects the setting had on the participants. This is in line with the problem statement of this study, namely the phenomena of overcrowded classrooms.

4.3 ETHNOGRAPHY

McMillan and Schumacher (1993:406-408) define ethnography as an "analytical description of social scenes and groups that recreate for the reader the shared beliefs, practices, ... , and behaviours' of those people in an educational activity." According to them, ethnographers should perceive reality as a social construction where individuals or groups derive or ascribe their own

meanings to specific events. Thus, educational ethnography is also “a process, a way of studying human life as it relates to education” (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:406). In this regard, they conclude that ethnographic research issues should be derived from “several possible sources: common, recurring everyday events in education or personal experiences, ... and problems and ideas identified by others in the setting” (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:406-408). In this study the issues pertaining to overcrowdedness in the Eastern Cape schools are addressed.

According to the ethnographic tradition, as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (1993:405), the researcher spent extensive time at the site to “systematically observe, interview and record processes as they occur naturally”. This study is exploratory or discovery-orientated in terms of the research where the researcher endeavoured to understand the life-world of the learners’ and teachers’ and the issues concerning them in their own life-world of overcrowded classrooms. Throughout the research study the researcher will endeavour to establish good and effective relations with all the research participants. Walker (1985:49) points out that the development of a good sense of rapport between the researcher and the participants should lead to feelings of mutual trust and confidence.

In terms of objectivity during educational ethnography, Scott and Usher (1996:145) conclude that a deliberate distance should be maintained between the researcher and all the participant groups in the research project, despite the fact that the researcher becomes immersed in the classroom situation. However, the researcher adopted the role of participant-observer during the ethnographic interviews.

4.4 DATA SELECTION STRATEGIES

The data selection strategies utilized in this study are: the

- ethnographic interview and
- participant-observation.

Throughout the research the researcher endeavoured to discover and deal with some of the issues in the problems and their implications as encountered by the learners, teachers, heads of departments and principals at overcrowded schools in the Eastern Cape.

4.4.1 The ethnographic interview

The ethnographic interview was the primary data collection strategy in this study. The respondents' answers reflected their own perceptions and the issues as it is experienced by them regarding the problem of overcrowdedness in the classroom. It was hoped that a representative picture of overcrowded classes would emerge because of the different participants' perspectives. To maximise the neutrality of the approach and the consistency of findings, the researcher worked according to an interview schedule to obtain a varying perspective on the main questions in this study. Therefore, the same main questions were asked to the different participants of the same group. These main questions are recorded in the addenda A to D in this study. Further informal questions differed as the situation demanded. Therefore the informal open-ended ethnographic interview was also used in addition to the interview schedule. Interviews were conducted in the form of a conversation rather than a typical formal interview and took place in a variety of settings, including offices, classrooms and staffrooms.

The nature of the research was explained to all the respondents beforehand. It was also explained that meticulous and accurate notes would be taken throughout the interviews and the content analysed immediately after each interview. Care was taken not to influence the respondents' responses.

The questions for the research respondents were designed to enable the researcher to determine the following:

- the constituents or the emerging patterns
- to what extent these constituents or patterns are interconnected
- to what extent these constituents are a reflection of the literature study of this study
- to verify and to corroborate information obtained in the literature study of this study.

The ethnographic interview was chosen as data selection strategy because the major advantage of an informal ethnographic interview lies in its flexibility. In this regard, Vockell (1983:87) reports that research data can be recorded immediately during the ethnographic interview.

4.4.2 Participant-observation

Participant-observation is defined as “an active process which includes muted cues - facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, and other unverbalised social interactions which suggests the subtle meanings of language” (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:420). During the interviews the researcher observed the research participants closely as they divulged data concerning their situation as experienced by them in their overcrowded classrooms. Detailed descriptive, non-judgemental field notes were taken and transcribed and analysed in detail immediately after each interview.

Furthermore, the researcher sat in the overcrowded classrooms as unobtrusively as possible and observed the teacher presenting a lesson to a group of learners. The progress of the teachers and learners, and issues encountered in the overcrowded settings of the classrooms were observed. The purpose of the observations was to confirm possible interpretations that emerged from the ethnographic interviews.

The researcher was aware of the fact that participant-observation in the overcrowded classes be

influenced by the following, as suggested by Burgess (1984:39-40), namely:

- the willingness and interests of the participants,
- the inarticulateness of participants, and
- participants who did not really want to take part in the research project, but would nevertheless be present in the overcrowded classes.

The interactive social scene of overcrowded classes is complex and it was impossible to observe or to record everything that occurred. Hence, salient observations were made and descriptive details about who, where and why a social scene occurred were recorded meticulously. In the light of the problem statement of this study, the problem of overcrowded classrooms in the Eastern Cape schools was carefully observed.

4.5 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

The researcher ensured that the interviewees understood that they could respond as they wished, that confidentiality was guaranteed and that they had been selected at random. Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1995:78) state that the research data are “the property of those from whom they originate”. Therefore, to protect the schools and the research respondents’ reputations, confidentiality and anonymity of both the schools and research respondents were assured as stressed by Burgess (1984:45-46). The respondents and the schools were coded rather than referred to by name.

4.6 THE SELECTION OF RESPONDENTS

The participants and schools were selected at random. Vockell (1983:105) suggests that “with random sampling, every member ... has an equal opportunity to be in the sample”. Therefore, no

one respondent or school was selected or given special treatment by the researcher.

Five different overcrowded classes were selected at five different schools in the Eastern Cape.

The following research participant groups were demarcated, namely:

- Group I: two secondary schools in the Umtata region (one Grade 10 and one Grade 11 class)
- Group II: one secondary school in the Idutywa region (one Grade 8 class)
- Group III: one secondary school in the Butterworth region (one Grade 11 class)
- Group IV: one secondary school in the East London region (one Grade 12 class).

These five (5) overcrowded classes were observed by the researcher who attended one class period at each of these schools. From these schools the following groups of research respondents were selected at random to be interviewed, namely:

- Group A: 5 learners
- Group B: 5 teachers
- Group C: 3 heads of departments
- Group D: 3 principals.

All in all sixteen (16) research respondents were selected, thus (N=16).

4.7 THE METHOD FOLLOWED REGARDING THE GATHERING OF DATA

During 1998 the researcher visited the overcrowded classrooms at the different schools (I to IV) in the Eastern Cape. Data was recorded and analysed each day before the next overcrowded classroom was observed. In this way, the researcher visited the site to be observed and the

respondents were interviewed in the setting. The researcher first interviewed the learners (Group A), the teachers (Group B), the heads of departments (Group C) and then, finally, the principals (Group D). During the ethnographic interviews, all the data of each group of respondents was collected, analysed and interpreted before interviews were concluded with the next group of respondents.

Irrelevant data were omitted. Data was cross-checked and analysed, as stressed by Scott and Usher (1996:151). After this the constituents were recorded as the patterns emerged from the research data. These constituents were then tested through further observation and questioning, as suggested by Tuckman (1988:389).

4.8 PHASES OF DATA COLLECTION

McMillan and Schumacher (1993:383-386) suggest five phases of data collection, which the researcher followed in this study.

- **Phase 1: Planning**

During this phase the researcher analysed the problem statement and focused on the data collection strategies, which would hopefully yield relevant information regarding the problem of overcrowdedness in schools.

- **Phase 2: The beginning of the data collection**

During this phase the researcher established good rapport and trust with the research respondents. The aim was to “become oriented to the field (of study) and to gain a sense of totality of the setting for the purpose of sampling” (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:383).

- Phase 3: The basic data collection phase

Here the researcher focused on initial patterns which emerged from the data selection strategies and the patterns which need corroboration in the last phase of the data collection.

- Phase 4: The closing data collection phase

During this phase the data collection drew to a close. Here the researcher gave more attention to possible interpretations and verifications of the emerging patterns.

- Phase 5: The closing phase

The researcher looked for meaningful ways to present the data, record possible interpretations and make recommendations for further research.

4.9 DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher focused on inductive data analysis. McMillan and Schumacher (1997:502) state that this means that “patterns emerge from the data rather than being imposed on data prior to data collection ... (the) inductive process generates a more abstract descriptive synthesis of data.” In this regard, McMillan and Schumacher (1997:502-505) identify four cyclical phases of inductive analysis which the researcher pursued during this study, namely:

- continuous discovery, especially in the field but also throughout the entire study, to identify tentative patterns,
- categorizing and ordering of data collection, typically after data collection,
- qualitatively assessing the trustworthiness of the data, to refine the patterns, and
- writing synthesis of concepts.

The inductive analysis of the research data was furthermore integrated with the three steps

described by Giorgi (Omery 1983:57-58; Giorgi 1985:10-40 & Aanstoos 1986:85-88), namely to identify certain recurrent themes or constituents. These steps are:

- Step 1: Bracketing
The researcher familiarizes himself with the transcript by reading it several times to get a sense of it as a whole (Aanstoos 1986:85-86).
- Step 2: Intuiting
The researcher grasps the essential constituents through a direct eidetic intuiting. The researcher identifies constituents in the data and clarifies them (Aanstoos 1986:86-87).
- Step 3: Describing
The constituents achieved are organized into a schematic structural description in order to grasp the relation of the essential meanings through their coherence (Aanstoos 1986:87-88).

Hence, during data analysis the constituents were carefully integrated, cross-validated, compared with the all emerging constituents and synthesised in a descriptive analysis. The importance of this procedure is emphasized by Hoberg (1997:41).

4.10 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

McMillan and Schumacher (1993:385) define reliability as “the extent to which independent researchers could discover the same phenomena and to which there is agreement on the description of the phenomena between the researcher and participants”. Hence, the researcher strove for consistency within the research strategies used.

The researcher ensured that all questions were asked without biasing any of the participants' responses. All the data were collected, analysed and interpreted in the same way immediately after each ethnographic interview.

According to Vockell (1983:47), "the most important characteristic of a test" is validity. Hence, in this research study the researcher continuously examined whether or not the measurement strategies were really measuring what it purported to be measuring. The aim of this research study was to enquire insight into issues pertaining to the problem of overcrowdedness in classrooms as the research participants experience it.

4.11 POSSIBLE RESTRICTIONS OF THE STUDY

While sixteen research respondents in total took part in the ethnographic interviews, five different overcrowded classrooms at five different schools were observed. The information gathered during the ethnographic interviews focused directly on the situation and issues pertaining to overcrowded classrooms. However, it is realized that it is not within the scope of this study to focus on **all** issues of overcrowdedness in Eastern Cape schools. Moreover, this study does not imply that all the recorded issues are experienced by all the other schools in the Republic of South Africa where conditions of overcrowdedness exist.

4.12 CONCLUSION

The nature of overcrowded classrooms was studied. How learners and the teachers experience these overcrowded classes was recorded. The researcher envisaged gathering sufficient relevant information during the interviews and class visits to enable a search for emerging patterns in the data which would be corroborated by the literature study of this study. Chapter 5 analyses and

interprets the qualitative research, and draws conclusions in the light of the problem statement of this study, namely: Are overcrowded classrooms conducive to teaching learners who have been neglected in the past and will the learning outcomes of the learners result in a better quality education?

CHAPTER 5

Analysis and interpretation of the qualitative research

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research findings on the problem of overcrowded classes in the Eastern Cape schools. Interviews were conducted with Group A: five learners, Group B: five teachers, Group C: three heads of departments and Group D: three principals, and five overcrowded classes were observed. A collaborative integration of the respondents' data is presented and certain correlations with the literature study of this study are made as the constituents or patterns emerge.

5.2 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA ON THE CLASS VISITS

During the class visits the researcher focused on the physical space, atmosphere and the learners' and teachers' actions. All the classes were found to be grossly overcrowded with learners.

- **Physical space**

Resolution number 8 of 1996 (Department of Education, 1996) suggests a pupil:teacher ratio, in secondary schools, of 35 learners per teacher by the year 2000. There was an average of 54,2 learners per class observed, which reflected an average pupil:teacher ratio of 54,2:1 in very small, cramped classrooms. These classes were overcrowded. The classes were clearly too small for the number of learners as some of the learners sat cramped at shared desks. It was noted that most of the learners in the overcrowded classes shared textbooks. In all the overcrowded classes observed, the desks were arranged in rows in order to fit as many desks in a classroom as possible. All the desks faced forward and there were no open spaces between the desks, nor was

there enough space in the overcrowded classes for the teacher to arrange the desks in a suitable way for learners to participate in interesting learning activities. This correlates with Kohn's (1996:55) findings on a classroom atmosphere not conducive to learning and teaching. The classroom atmosphere of all five overcrowded classes was found to be stark and clearly unconducive to learning. The atmosphere in these overcrowded classes appeared to be very institutionalised and unsocial.

In these overcrowded classrooms the physical space per learner was limited to such an extent that some of the learners could not move freely in their shared desks. When entering or leaving the classroom, not all the learners could move freely from the back to the front of the classroom as there were too many desks and learners, which resulted in restricted movement. This caused learners to push each other around and caused an increase in the noise level.

All the learners did not receive adequate individual attention from the teacher in the overcrowded classes. The teachers did not spend equal time with all the learners who indicated that they experienced some difficulty with the learning material. When a teacher moved towards learners to assist them, it was a difficult task as the walking spaces in the overcrowded classes were cluttered with suitcases.

- **Classroom atmosphere**

A classroom atmosphere conducive to learning and teaching was clearly lacking in all the observed overcrowded classrooms. The learner involvement in all the classes was almost non-existent as the learners hardly took part in the lessons. Learners did not ask many questions and were not asked to perform any tasks which involved groupwork, demonstrations, practicals or any constructive face-to-face conversation. Some learners in the overcrowded classes merely sat with their heads resting on their arms and did not appear to be interested in or enthusiastic about the lesson. The teachers did not ask the learners to pay attention to the activities in the class, but

rather left them alone.

The changing of classes became a time-consuming activity in all the overcrowded classes. Entrances became clustered with learners, which made it difficult for anyone to move through the door openings. Clearly demarcated aisles in which learners could move easily did not exist in these overcrowded classes. This caused a haphazard way in which the learners moved around. Some learners in the overcrowded classes arrived up to 15 minutes late for their lessons and the teachers ignored their tardiness. The teachers of two of the overcrowded classes started their lessons without the full complement of learners present.

- **Language issues**

The language used by learners in the overcrowded classes reflected a language proficiency problem as the teacher had to ask some learners to repeat their comments, questions and answers more clearly. The teachers in two of the overcrowded classes were Asians and their pronunciation was not always understood by their learners. This became evident when the learners asked the teachers to repeat what was said as they could not hear the instructions or lesson clearly.

- **Disciplinary problems and noise levels**

The noise levels in all five overcrowded classes visited by the researcher were very high. The teachers had to reprimand the learners at various times and, in some cases, even pleaded for silence so that the lessons could proceed. Many learners merely kept quiet for a while and then continued talking. Most of the learners ignored the teachers' request for silence and attention. The overcrowded classrooms lacked the physical structure which is conducive to learning and concentration. Adequate air ventilation was a problem in all the classes. These classes became airless and stuffy by the mid-period. Subsequently the result was bored, uninterested and

seemingly tired learners.

All the teachers taught from the front of the classrooms and did not move between the learners due to a lack of space caused by too many desks in the classroom. Mostly they (the teachers) remained in the centre front of the classroom. The researcher sat at the back of the classrooms and experienced considerable problem in hearing the teachers at times in the overcrowded classes. The researcher found that some of the writing on the board was too small, which made the transfer of knowledge in these overcrowded classrooms even more difficult. The teachers in all five of the overcrowded classes did most of the talking and did not provide the learners with adequate opportunity to ask questions. Lecturing as method of instruction occurred in all the overcrowded classes. This resulted in one-way communication and too many learners obviously became bored. This lack of learner participation is not stimulating for the learners or the teachers and often resulted in higher noise levels and sometimes even moderate to severe disciplinary problems.

- **In conclusion**

The classroom management of the overcrowded classes left much to be desired. Classroom discipline clearly lacked in these overcrowded classes where the teachers often asked for the learners' attention and requested silence time and again. The learners mostly ignored these requests. When a teacher questioned the learners in these overcrowded classes, it soon became evident that they did not know all the learners' names. This resulted in learners who obviously became mere numbers and were depersonalised in this way. This, together with an classroom atmosphere non-conducive to teaching and learning, cannot lead to the successful attainment of the learning outcomes of the learners. A better quality education cannot be envisaged in this way. Overcrowded classrooms hold adverse effects for both the learners and teachers.

5.3 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS

The analysis and interpretation of the data gathered during the ethnographic interviews will be discussed under the following headings:

- Group A: the learners
- Group B: the teachers
- Group C: the heads of departments
- Group D: the principals.

5.3.1 Group A: the learners

The following constituents or patterns emerged from the analysis of the data gathered during the interviews with the learners from the overcrowded classrooms, namely:

- disruptive noise levels in overcrowded classrooms were reported
- the limited physical space, textbooks and equipment were obvious
- a lack of individual attention given by the teacher was evident
- learners reported that they experienced feelings of lost identity
- increased learner non-involvement was evident
- increased pupil:teacher ratios caused time constraints in classrooms
- learners reported that they could not always hear the teacher or see the writing board
- learners felt that their classrooms became airless and stuffy
- some learners experienced language proficiency problems.

5.3.1.1 Disruptive noise levels in overcrowded classrooms

All the learner respondents indicated that a high level of noise and disruption occurred in their overcrowded classes. This disruptive noise level made communication between learners and teachers difficult and interfered with their ability to concentrate during the lessons or self-study

assignments.

Due to the high noise level of their overcrowded classes, two of the learner respondents indicated that they were always told to be quiet, which decreased their enthusiasm to participate in the lessons. All the learner respondents indicated that they needed to interact and communicate more with their classmates in order to help each other to cope with difficult learning material. When the overcrowded classes became too noisy, one of the respondents reported that “the teacher would not allow the pupils to talk at all”. The learner respondents indicated that they would prefer smaller classes where the noise level would not interfere with their school work. The learner respondents reported that the high noise level in the overcrowded classes caused a decrease in their academic performance because they found it impossible to concentrate in their classes.

All the learner respondents reported that their overcrowded classes often became so noisy that they could not hear the teacher. In some cases, the teachers of overcrowded classes left their classes unattended, probably due to frustration. One respondent reported that this resulted in disruptive learners who are “‘breaking’ the class down”.

It is obvious that, in order for learners to become actively involved in the learning material, a need exists for a classroom atmosphere which will be conducive to learning and teaching. It was found that in these overcrowded classes the high noise level often resulted in a classroom atmosphere which reduced the learning opportunities of the learners.

5.3.1.2 Limited physical space, textbooks and equipment

Two of the learner respondents complained that there was too little space in their overcrowded classrooms to do interesting activities which required more space. Three of the learner respondents also indicated that they did not get to work together with fellow classmates in

overcrowded classes as the demand for space was too great.

The learner respondents reported that they were very disappointed that the Department of Education did not supply them with the necessary required textbooks. They also felt that a desk for each learner is essential. All the learner respondents reported that there was a great need for textbooks in order for them to perform academically. The learner respondents indicated that they sat in very cramped conditions in their overcrowded classes as more than one learner had to share one desk. Moreover, they (the learners) reported that they were physically uncomfortable. These learner respondents indicated that they could not move freely enough in these desks, which made it difficult to write and draw neatly and quickly. One of the learner respondents concluded that the learners who had to share desks complained that "they sat very uncomfortably".

In all overcrowded classes there were learners who did not have textbooks. Due to this shortage of textbooks, these learner respondents could not complete required assignments from textbooks. This caused problems as one of the respondents reported that "only one pupil can take the textbook home and the other pupil often finds it impossible to complete the homework". The shortage of textbooks often required the teacher to write the notes on the blackboard. Learners were then asked to copy these notes down before the end of the period. The teacher then had to erase it in order to write notes for the next class. This often caused learners' classwork books to be incomplete as not all the learners could complete the given task in time. The learner respondents indicated that in overcrowded classrooms there was an increase in the theft of textbooks and notebooks and that the culprits were very seldom caught.

A study of ergonomics indicates that adequate working space is an essential prerequisite for quality learning outcomes. When learners are squashed into a single desk and there is a shortage of textbooks and stationery it is questionable whether the learners can be expected to excel academically. Clearly, overcrowded classes are not conducive to attaining the required learning outcomes. The question is seriously posed by the researcher whether learners, who originated

from the previous dispensation and have fallen behind academically, will be able to attain the admirable ideals and learning outcomes of outcomes-based education in these overcrowded classrooms.

5.3.1.3 A lack of individual learner attention given by the teacher

Learner respondents reported that the lack of individual attention is one of the most important limiting aspects of their overcrowded class situations. It was felt that they did not receive adequate attention from their teachers and that individual attention given to them could assist the teacher to identify their problematic academic areas and help them to rectify them.

Three of the learner respondents indicated that in overcrowded classrooms the teachers did not spend enough time with individual learners. The opinion was expressed that the “clever pupils get all the attention” and that the teachers did not allow for enough time during which the learners could answer questions. Two of the learner respondents stated that the teachers did not always have the opportunity to answer all their questions immediately. In this regard the learner respondents felt that their opinions, questions and answers were unimportant. It was further noted by the researcher that the learner respondents felt neglected and depersonalised. Moreover, teachers were forced to spend more time with the disruptive learners.

Although the learner respondents realized that some of their classmates needed more academic help than others, one of the learner respondents reported that “the teachers seldom stood at my desk to offer individual help when I needed it. I feel neglected.” Due to a lack of individual attention, the learner respondents reported that lessons became impersonal and were often aimed only at the more intelligent learners. This resulted in learner respondents who reported that they would rather take a passive role in their overcrowded classrooms because they felt neglected. Two of the learner respondents felt that, due to the lack of personal attention and interest shown by their teachers, academic challenges did not exist in their overcrowded classes. It was reported

that the “development of individual thoughts was not stimulated” in overcrowded classes.

Due to the monotony created by the lecturing method which was adopted by the teachers of overcrowded classes, two learner respondents reported that it was difficult to concentrate throughout the whole lesson. The learner respondents also experienced the overcrowded classes where the teacher did all the talking, as being “very boring and unstimulating”. The learner respondents complained that their teachers seldom changed their lesson types. In this regard one learner respondent stated that he was “getting tired of it”. All the learner respondents stressed the fact that they could only pay attention for a short while as their overcrowded classes were too noisy and disruptive.

Two of the learner respondents complained that the teachers did not spend enough time checking their individual books regularly. This is due to too many learners in one class and an obvious resultant lack of time. The learner respondents reported that they could either leave their books at home or present incomplete homework without the teacher knowing it. Two of the learner respondents stated that in overcrowded classes “the teachers seldom made the effort of checking up” the academic progress of individual learners or whether homework was completed or not. The learner respondents complained that in their overcrowded classes their teachers seldom mark their classwork books individually. When the teachers actually got to mark the classwork books, they would only sign and date the book and not take any notice of their individual attempts. Moreover, it was reported that teachers of these overcrowded classes did not mark all their tests. The learner respondents indicated that they often had to mark their own tests or have other learners mark it for them. One of the learner respondents voiced the opinion that “pupils would cheat and teachers would not notice it because the classes were so full”. When teachers marked all the learners’ test books, the learners waited a long time for their test books to be returned to them. This is probably due to the fact that so many books had to be marked by the teacher. Learner respondents indicated that the teachers often relied on the learners to record their own marks. Learners often cheated about their individual mark and were never reprimanded for it.

The learner respondents felt that this was unfair.

Two of the learner respondents felt that they did not have the opportunity to do any individual science experiments in their overcrowded classes. All the learner respondents were of the opinion that they could do better in such a subject if they could be involved in the practical aspects more often.

The already disadvantaged learners, who stem from the previous dispensation, require individual attention to ensure their progress. However, this is not the case in overcrowded classes as learners are often left to their own devices which are not sufficient for the attainment of the ideals of outcomes-based education. In overcrowded classes where there is a lack of individual attention from teachers, neglected learners are even further neglected. This could lead to an increase in the failure rate with a resultant soaring dropout rate. Overcrowded classrooms are detrimental to the future of our youth, who are the leaders of the future.

5.3.1.4 Learners experienced feelings of lost identity

Most of the learner respondents reported that their identity at school was very important to them, but they experienced feelings of lost identity. They felt that they were merely reduced to a number in overcrowded classrooms. The learner respondents indicated that in their overcrowded classes the teachers were not so strict and they got away with a lot of mischief.

Three of the learner respondents complained that in their overcrowded classes the teachers did not even know all their classmates' names. All the learner respondents voiced their concern over the fact that many teachers showed very little interest in them as individuals or their personal backgrounds. This reduced learners to impersonal individuals within their overcrowded classes. It was felt that very few teachers of overcrowded classes knew where the learners stayed or how they got to school in the mornings. Two of the learner respondents complained that teachers of

overcrowded classes also showed no interest in what they did after school or how they spent their time after school hours. This has caused the learners to feel unimportant as individuals. They felt that their contribution to the lessons were worthless. The learner respondents indicated that they would rather be part of smaller classes where they could maintain their own identity and be known to the teacher by their own name.

The researcher came to the conclusion that in order to motivate learners to achieve outcomes-based education's learning outcomes it is imperative that each individual learner be regarded as important in the class situation. However, in overcrowded classes, learners often merely become part of a too large group and inevitably lose their individuality.

5.3.1.5 Increased learner non-involvement in classroom activities

All the learner respondents reported that they became unininvolved in overcrowded classes because no interest was shown in their individual efforts. The learner respondents indicated that they felt that involvement in classwork was very important and that the lack thereof had an adverse effect on their academic performance.

Two of the learner respondents felt involved only at the start of their lessons in overcrowded classes and then lost interest. It was also reported that when learner respondents became unininvolved in the subject content and continued with something else, the teacher would rather leave them alone and not attempt to involve them. According to one of the learner respondents, it was felt that as long as the learners were quiet, it seemed that their teachers were content to leave them alone. Two of the learner respondents reported that they became unininvolved because the teachers either communicated with the top learners or the most disruptive learners. It was further stated that "my teacher only communicates with the brighter pupils who would have the answers and never gives me a chance".

Two of the learner respondents indicated that they felt shy, intimidated and overwhelmed in overcrowded classes and that, for these reasons, they preferred to stay unininvolved. Often learners were not part of a certain clique and were left out of the discussions. One learner respondent noted that he was “not asked for (his) ideas”. Furthermore, the learner respondents reported that in overcrowded classes racist comments were often made to learners from foreign nationalities. Two learner respondents stated that most of the Black learners thought that the White and Indian learners were regarded as being more intelligent by their teachers.

Because classes were crowded with too many learners, three learner respondents indicated that they hardly ever had the opportunity to participate in any activities regarding the content of their subjects. This resulted in the learners being separated from the course and the syllabus content. The learner respondents indicated that, due to the overcrowdedness, the necessity for them to participate in lessons had diminished, because there were always other learners who would answer the teacher’s questions or help with demonstrations. Due to a lack of participation in practicals in subjects such as science and biology, the subjects had become very abstract to the learner respondents. These learner respondents complained that they seldom had the opportunity to actually participate in any experiments. Two of the learner respondents voiced the opinion that the teacher would not even notice if they were absent. Learners in overcrowded classes did not participate because “the activity was not presented in an interesting way”, according to one of the learner respondents.

In the light of the ideals of outcomes-based education, it is disconcerting that often many learners are unininvolved in the subject matter in their overcrowded classes. Where already disadvantaged learners are concerned, it is certainly not the ideal for them to feel either ostracised or depersonalised when they have to work by themselves or in groups. It is feared that when learners in overcrowded classes are unininvolved in the learning material, the outcomes and ideals of outcomes-based education will in all probability not be achieved.

In order for the learners to become part of the classroom situation and the learning material, they need to become involved in all the aspects of the lesson. Being uninvolved could have detrimental effects on the academic outcomes of the learners.

5.3.1.6 Increased pupil:teacher ratios caused time constraints

The learner respondents reported that the academic time spent in the class is very important to them. However, individual time spent was often reduced because the classrooms were so overcrowded. More time spent with each learner could give the learners the opportunities to ask more questions, receive more individual attention and hence improve their own academic performance.

Two of the learner respondents complained that it took longer to get to the next class and that it took longer to get into the class due to the increasing number of learners. In this regard it also took longer to get out of their overcrowded classes. Learner respondents from overcrowded classrooms complained that in this way their actual academic learning time was lost. The learner respondents in the higher grades indicated that they could not afford this cut in their teaching time as their grades would inevitably suffer.

Learners, with home language other than the medium of instruction, often asked the teacher to explain concepts again. This is a time-consuming practice as one of the respondents reported that the teachers in overcrowded classes often replied: “I do not have the time to explain again, let someone else help you later.”

Teachers in overcrowded classes require more time to answer all the learners’ questions. Extra time is required and there is no provision for this in the timetable. Limited time in overcrowded classes is clearly a major concern for the learner respondents, who want to participate in the lessons and are unable to do so.

When there are fewer learners in a class, the teacher has more time available for individual learner attention. This goal is clearly unachievable in overcrowded classes.

5.3.1.7 Learners could not always hear the teacher or see the writing board

All the learner respondents indicated that they could not always hear the teacher or see what the teacher wrote on the board. The learner respondents agreed that this caused them to take longer to understand the subject material and also to copy notes from the board. This was regarded as a waste of time by the learner respondents. The researcher also experienced this to be immensely frustrating during the class visits.

Two of the learner respondents found it difficult to understand teachers who came from a foreign nationality and did not pronounce their (the teachers) words correctly. The slightest distractions in overcrowded classes became barriers to the transmission of knowledge. The learner respondents who experienced an English language proficiency problem also found it particularly difficult to understand their teachers if there were any distractions in their classes.

Two of the learner respondents said that other learners at the back of an overcrowded classroom complained that the teacher's handwriting on the board was too small, yet they "could not move as there were no other unoccupied desks". The learner respondents also indicated that they could not see science demonstrations which the teacher demonstrated in the front of the classroom. Often learners pushed each other to get to the front of the overcrowded classroom or had to stand on top of desks to see the demonstrations. Three learner respondents indicated that the scuffle during demonstrations caused the learners to make a noise and that this often led to "arguments over a better space". The respondents confirmed that they did not enjoy such demonstrations at all. Difficulty in seeing what was happening at the front of the classroom caused the learners to lose interest and they became passive rather than active partakers.

Learners in overcrowded classes, where they cannot always hear the teacher, may experience a lack of concentration, which could lead to poor academic performance. Learners may also experience problems in understanding the learning material. All learners should be able to easily read what is written on the board and be able to copy it down. In overcrowded classes this is a problem which the learners cannot cope with. It can lead to learners becoming frustrated and bored, which, in turn, has adverse disciplinary implications for the class as a whole.

The researcher found that, for learners to become actively involved in their classes, they need to be able to hear the teacher and to see what is written on the board. This could not always be obtained in the overcrowded classes and the learners' academic performance was adversely effected.

5.3.1.8 Classrooms became airless and stuffy

The learner respondents reported that overcrowded classes became airless and stuffy. This reduced the learners' concentration span. The learner respondents reported that some learners in overcrowded classes refused to open the windows on request. This caused arguments between the learners and caused a stressful environment. Two of the learner respondents said that overcrowded classrooms overheated very quickly during the summer. In the winter the classes were cold, but they indicated that it got stuffy very easily when the windows were kept shut. This resulted in a lack of oxygen and the classroom became stuffy.

Airless, overcrowded classes are unconducive to learning and teaching. Learners tire easily and show less interest and enthusiasm during such lessons. Even if all the windows in overcrowded classes are open, the learners on the far side may not receive adequate fresh air. Airless and stuffy classrooms are uncomfortable and do not contribute to a classroom situation which is conducive to learning.

5.3.1.9 Language proficiency problems

Learner respondents with a language proficiency problem indicated that they needed more individual attention from the teachers. However, because their classes were so overcrowded, they did not receive adequate attention and therefore often failed to understand what the lesson was about. The learner respondents indicated that this reduced their opportunity to achieve in their overcrowded classes.

Two of the learner respondents complained that they did not understand the English medium of instruction well and that the teacher covered the content too quickly for them to understand it. They felt that they would be able to perform better on a higher academic level if their classes were not so overcrowded and their teachers could have the opportunity to provide them with more individual guidance. The respondents stressed further that they felt that learners whose home language was English had a language proficiency advantage over them in overcrowded classes. Two of the learner respondents experienced cultural prejudice in overcrowded classes and reported that this affected their self-confidence and self-esteem adversely.

In order for learners with a language proficiency problem to achieve well academically, they need more opportunity to ask questions and obtain the relevant answers from their teachers. During the interviews it became evident that not enough individual attention was given to all the learners, regardless of the problems which they experience in overcrowded classes. This is a serious problem that needs to be tackled. Ideally, all learners should leave school with an increased, adequate self-concept and self-esteem. This aim is clearly not possible in overcrowded classes where the medium of instruction is not understood and learners are even more neglected.

5.3.2 Group B: the teachers

During the ethnographic interviews with the teacher respondents of overcrowded classes, the

following constituents emerged once the data was analysed, namely:

- limited physical space in the classrooms
- increased mass audience lecturing method being adopted by the teachers
- neglected practical sessions
- a decreased learner interest existed
- difficult classroom management occurred
- language proficiency problems were noted
- increased prejudiced comments were made in overcrowded classes
- teachers exhibited a lack of knowledge regarding the learners
- an increased workload was experienced and reported by the teachers.

5.3.2.1 Limited physical space

The teacher respondents complained that, due to overcrowdedness, the physical space was limited and there were just too many learners in their classes. This had an adverse effect on almost every class activity. The teacher respondents indicated that the limited physical space in overcrowded classes was their main concern. This is a serious issue which needs to be dealt with immediately.

Two of the teacher respondents indicated that the great numbers of learners in their classes have became obstacles to their ability to transmit knowledge. The classrooms were just too small to handle the large number of learners. One of the teacher respondents stated that “pupils were now seated where there were aisles before which meant that it has become very difficult for us to get to all the learners at the back and on the sides” of overcrowded classrooms. According to two of the teacher respondents, the latter caused the classroom to be overflowing with people and the class was untidy. The amount of litter that the learners left under the desks was astronomical. The teacher respondents felt that when learners lean against the walls the posters were damaged very quickly. This required the continuous replacement of posters or interesting and academically

stimulating material. Furthermore, two of the teacher respondents indicated that, due to the very limited classroom space, it was impossible to create a classroom atmosphere which was conducive to learning and teaching. Two of the teacher respondents indicated that they felt that, due to the limited space, the ideals of outcomes-based education would be difficult to attain. The teacher respondents reiterated that outcomes-based education is an unattainable ideal in such overcrowded classes.

Furthermore, two of the teacher respondents stated that the limitation of space drastically affected their methods of teaching. Due to the overcrowded conditions and the resultant limited space, all the teacher respondents reported that their learners' desks or tables were arranged in rows. The teacher respondents indicated that this desk arrangement forced them to use a mass audience lecturing method.

In order for teachers and learners to be actively involved in the learning situation, spacious venues with fewer learners are required. Teachers and learners would then be able to interact with each other and the teachers would be able to reach all the learners easily and quickly. Limited space in overcrowded classes is clearly detrimental to the learning situation. It was felt that the learner outcomes would be more easily attainable in classrooms where the physical space is not limited and where enough individual learner space could contribute to an effective classroom atmosphere without any major distractions.

Adequate space in classrooms could contribute to all learners developing their own personality and give the teacher the opportunity to care for their well-being. If there were adequate classroom space and fewer learners per classroom, all the learners would be afforded equal opportunities to become more involved in the classroom activities. In this way the learners' academic performances could be improved upon.

5.3.2.2 Increased mass audience lecturing

The teacher respondents reported that they mostly used the mass lecturing method when teaching in overcrowded classes. The teacher respondents indicated that this teaching method, together with too little individual learner attention, adversely affects learner academic achievement. The teacher respondents indicated that they would like to use different teaching methods, but their overcrowded class conditions did not allow them to do so. “It is simply a case of too many learners in one class” as one teacher respondent reflected.

Three of the teacher respondents were of the opinion that they were merely lecturing to learners so that they could get through the syllabus. In this regard one of the teacher respondents said that “I am not teaching much, but merely lecturing to a big audience”. The teacher respondents indicated that they did all the talking and, in turn, created a very formal classroom atmosphere where the learners’ input was limited. In the lesson types used by teachers, little time was allocated to supervise individual projects or individual classwork. Furthermore, two of the teacher respondents found it easier to ask the learners to “continue quietly by themselves and have pupils mark each other’s work”. This fact was also mentioned by the learner respondents (Group A) and was observed by the researcher during class visits.

The teacher respondents reported that they felt that the standards were diminishing in overcrowded classes because of impaired teacher-learner contact. In the lower grades the teacher respondents indicated that they could not present any challenging subject content as some of the learners would not be able to cope at all and they (the teacher respondents) would be unable to assist them due to the fact that there are too many learners to attend to in the class.

Two of the teacher respondents found it very difficult to move to the learners at the back of the classroom or to move between the desks in their overcrowded classes. They could not assist these learners by means of individual attention. The teacher respondents also indicated that the

learners at the sides of the classrooms, where there were no aisles in which to move, were neglected. According to one of the teacher respondents, due to very little personal contact with the learners in their overcrowded classes, it became “difficult to know whether the pupils understood the learning material and whether or not they were actively involved with the learning material”. According to two of the teacher respondents, too many learners in one class caused many questions to go by unanswered. These teachers indicated that they often forgot the questions from one day to the next and that often the learners’ questions went by unanswered. This fact was also borne out by the learner respondents (Group A) during their interviews.

Two of the teacher respondents noticed that certain learners felt neglected for not being chosen to participate in classroom activities, but that they (the teacher respondents) could do very little about it due to the large number of learners in overcrowded classroom situations. This issue was also mentioned by the learner respondents (Group A). The teacher respondents indicated that where mass audience lecturing was used in overcrowded classes, an atmosphere which is un conducive to learning and teaching exists.

The use of the mass lecturing method in overcrowded classes clearly reduced two-way communication between the teachers and their learners. The teachers did all the talking and the learners were required to listen for long periods of time. Therefore, the learners are not actively involved, which contributes to their high levels of frustration and boredom, which, in turn, may lead to disruptive behaviour. In order for the learners to receive education which is in line with the ideals of outcomes-based education and where they (the learners) are actively involved, mass lecturing is not the desired teaching method. For obvious reasons group work is clearly not possible in overcrowded classes. For the realization of the ideals of outcomes-based education, the learners need to be actively involved with the learning material, other learners and the teacher.

Certainly mass audience lecturing is not the ideal teaching method for teaching overcrowded classes. However, the teacher respondents indicated that they had no other option due to the lack

of space because of too many learners in one class.

5.3.2.3 Neglected practical sessions

The teacher respondents indicated that required practical work was neglected in overcrowded classes because there was too little space for all the learners to become actively involved. The teacher respondents also indicated that it became increasingly difficult to control the large number of learners in overcrowded practicals. The possibility of injuries and damage to apparatus was far greater than with a smaller number of learners in a class.

Two of the teacher respondents, both science teachers, found it very difficult to do practical work because there were too many learners to control during these sessions. There was also the added shortage of equipment in overcrowded classes. Often learners became uncontrollable during such practical sessions and it became very dangerous to work with volatile chemicals or expensive equipment. One of the teacher respondents stated: "To have too many pupils in one practical session becomes a risk." According to two of the teacher respondents, the existing laboratories could not accommodate a whole class at once. The teacher respondents indicated that some learners were left waiting outside while teachers dealt with smaller groups of learners during practical sessions. The problem encountered was that time was wasted in repeating the same practical sessions with two or more groups at different times. Learners were also left unattended and became rowdy. One of the teacher respondents indicated that it became evident that "sufficient individual space was necessary during a practical session in order to obtain positive (academic) results".

It is important to involve learners in practical lessons, if these are required by certain subjects. Practical lessons increase the understanding of learners and stimulated them to observe and to find solutions by themselves. In overcrowded classes this is impossible as the space is limited and there are too many learners to supervise effectively.

The absence of practical lessons in the science-related subjects limited the learners who wanted to study further in a particular science related-subject because they would lack experience in practical sessions. In this regard it is felt that learners from overcrowded classes often enrol at universities and technical colleges with a limited background knowledge of practical subjects. In outcomes-based education the learners are required to discover academic and practical knowledge for themselves, but if there is a lack of practical lessons in overcrowded classes, how will these ideals be realized? A lack of practical lessons is a serious issue in overcrowded classes. All learners, where it is required, should be involved in practical lessons. This issue was also mentioned by the learner respondents (Group A).

5.3.2.4 Decreased learner interest

The teacher respondents indicated that the learners' interest in the academic subjects has decreased in overcrowded classes. Most learners in overcrowded classes did not show enough interest in lessons, appeared not to be bothered with the learning material and showed a lack of initiative during these lessons. The teacher respondents indicated that they continuously had to ask for their learners' attention and remind them constantly to take an interest in the learning material as it was examinable and had to be mastered in order to be promoted to the next grade. A lack of learner attention in overcrowded classes frustrated the teacher respondents, reduced their job satisfaction, and caused them to become despondent towards the learners and the teaching profession in general.

Although the teacher respondents found it very tiring to write larger than is normally required on the blackboard, three of the teacher respondents were very much aware of the fact that they had to write big on the blackboard so that the learners at the back of the classroom could read it easily. The teacher respondents noticed a decrease in the learners' interest if their handwriting on the board was too small or illegible from a distance.

Furthermore, two of the teacher respondents felt that it was very difficult to keep a large group of learners interested in the subject content, especially if there was very little interaction between them and the learners. These teacher respondents indicated that there was too little time during a lesson to pay individual attention to all the learners. One of the teacher respondents indicated that although teachers had noticed that some learners lost interest in the subject matter, there was “very little one could do because of the large number of pupils”. Two of the teacher respondents indicated that they felt powerless in this regard and became despondent themselves. The teacher respondents found it difficult to inspire and motivate all the learners in overcrowded classes at once, mostly because there are just too many learners. According to these teacher respondents, this could be attributed to the fact that the uncomfortable physical conditions of overcrowded classes influenced and inhibited both learners and teachers to such an extent that they often lacked a sense of humour.

Two of the teacher respondents blamed the “poor pupil academic performance on the fact that not every learner had a textbook”. The teacher respondents reported that they tried their best to make sure that textbooks were shared amongst learners who did not have textbooks. Due to the increase in the number of learners in already overcrowded classrooms, the subject budgets became depleted very quickly. Three of the teacher respondents felt that they could achieve more within the current situation if they had a larger budget to acquire more textbooks.

To create a culture of learning, learners need to show a high level of interest in the syllabus content. When learners are interested in the learning material, they easily become involved in the learning situation and are able to contribute to a positive classroom atmosphere. Learners who show interest in the learning situation increase the enthusiasm of both the teachers and the other learners in the class. This is not apparent in overcrowded classrooms in the Eastern Cape. Due to less interest shown in the learning material, the dropout rate at schools could increase. With an increase in the dropout rate, the unemployment figure could increase even further, which, in turn, may increase the crime rate. The question is: Can South Africa afford this? In order to

keep learners at school, the interest level of the learners need to be stimulated and to be kept high. Overcrowded classes are clearly not conducive to the achievement of this goal. The neglected learners from the previous dispensation could well become even more neglected learners within the current overcrowded classrooms. This issue is of a serious nature and there is an urgent need for it to be tackled and rectified.

5.3.2.5 Difficult classroom management

The teacher respondents indicated that effective classroom management became almost impossible in overcrowded classes. According to the literature study of this study, contributing factors to poor classroom management in overcrowded classes include high numbers of uninterested learners, cramped classrooms and a high level of noise and disruptions.

Disruptive and noisy learners made classroom management virtually impossible for four of the teacher respondents. Register class periods became too disruptive because there were just too many learners to manage at one time. One of the teacher respondents complained that most learners regarded the register period as a “free period”, which led to high noise levels. According to one of the teacher respondents, the ordinary day-to-day tasks of the register period became a burden in overcrowded classrooms and teachers often purposefully neglected certain duties simply because it became too difficult to keep learners quiet. All the teacher respondents reported that disciplinary problems in overcrowded classes exalted.

Two of the teacher respondents indicated that they had to spend most of their time ensuring that disruptive learners were quiet and that they (the learners) pay attention to given instructions. One of the teacher respondents felt that he could definitely “cope better with less pupils in one class where the possibility of disruptive learners would be less”. Three of the teacher respondents reported that they are tired of the high noise levels in overcrowded classes and that they had reached a point where they felt that they had to send the disruptive children out of the classroom.

However, the teacher respondents indicated that they realized that this was an educationally unsound practice. They felt that they had no other choice but to separate the disruptive learners from the ones who were at least trying to pay attention despite the uncomfortable physical situation of their overcrowded classrooms.

Two of the teacher respondents often took the most disruptive learners to their heads of departments, but found that the other learners who were then left unattended in the class would “break the classroom down”, according to one of the teacher respondents. These teacher respondents reported that the heads of departments seldom had a solution to their overcrowded classroom problems. Two of the teacher respondents concluded that, due to an increase in classroom management problems, the ideals of outcomes-based education could not be successfully reached. According to two of the teacher respondents, overcrowded classes also caused learners to move more slowly from one class to another and therefore caused a decrease in teaching time which neither the learners or their teachers could afford.

Good classroom management is necessary for the smooth running of lessons and the school. In overcrowded classes, where space is limited and where too many learners are confined in a small classroom, this is an impossible goal to achieve. Without good classroom management, a classroom atmosphere which is un conducive to learning and teaching will prevail. Uncontrolled, poorly managed, overcrowded classrooms add to the frustration of learners and teachers and withhold the possibility for quality teaching and the effective transmission of knowledge.

5.3.2.6 Language proficiency problems

The teacher respondents indicated that there was a large number of learners in overcrowded classrooms with an English language proficiency problem. All the teacher respondents reported that these learners did not always understand what was required of them and found that miscommunication became a barrier between the learners and their teachers. The teacher

respondents indicated that they did not have the necessary time in overcrowded classes to spend with individual learners who experience a language proficiency problem. This obviously contributed to the poor academic results obtained from this group of neglected learners.

According to two of the teacher respondents, there were some learners who clearly did not understand their (the teachers') instructions because they did not understand the medium of instruction well enough. Two of the teacher respondents reported that they "could not repeat (themselves) too often, because the other pupils indicated that they were bored". Teacher respondents reported that they felt very sorry for these learners, but that they could not spend extra time on their (the learners') individual problems. The teacher respondents reported that they should rather try and give equal attention to all the learners. Two of the teacher respondents indicated that outcomes-based education will be difficult to implement in overcrowded classes where learners are not fluent in the medium of instruction.

It is difficult to teach learners with language proficiency problems in overcrowded classes. These learners merely fall further behind and do not receive sufficient individual attention from the teachers in their overcrowded classes. Learners need to understand what is expected of them in a class situation and be able to communicate with fellow learners and teachers in an acceptable manner. If learners do not understand the medium of instruction, they cannot effectively contribute to the lesson or make themselves understood. These learners could become even more academically and socially neglected and possibly lose interest in school and eventually drop out of school.

5.3.2.7 Increased prejudiced comments made in overcrowded classes

The teacher respondents found that racist and prejudiced comments in their overcrowded classrooms have increased probably as a result of an increase in the number of learners per teacher. One of the teacher respondents concluded that he was constantly reminding learners to

respect each other's cultures. The teacher respondents, who came from different cultural backgrounds to that of the learners, were very much aware of racist remarks made towards fellow learners. The question may be posed: Are overcrowded classes the ideal place to teach children how to become responsible citizens?

The teacher respondents noticed an increase in prejudiced comments made about fellow learners in overcrowded classes. The teacher respondents reported that they are put in an awkward position in this situation because they did not know how to remedy this serious problem. The teacher respondents indicated that any prejudiced comments made towards fellow learners created tension in the class and contributed to a poor classroom atmosphere which was unconducive to learning and teaching. While these comments might occur in classes that are crowded, the mere physical discomfort which is endured by the learners is often the breeding ground for such negative comments.

The teacher respondents noticed negative prejudiced attitudes in overcrowded classes, which could have detrimental effects on learners. To create responsible citizens, learners need to respect and tolerate each other. In overcrowded classes it is difficult to create a classroom climate which provides each learner, regardless of race, with equal opportunities to learn. In overcrowded classes, where there is a continuous fight for space and individual attention, teachers need advice on how to handle these issues without neglecting any of the learner outcomes.

5.3.2.8 Lack of teacher knowledge about learners

The teacher respondents indicated that they did not know the names of all the learners in their overcrowded classes and that this caused learners to feel neglected and distant from the teachers and the learning situation. Three of the teacher respondents concluded that learners in overcrowded classrooms were reduced to mere numbers because they (the teachers) could not remember all the learners' names and their personal details. Three of the teacher respondents

admitted that they only knew the learners who were repeating grades, those who had other family members in the school or the very disruptive learners in their classes. This issue was also mentioned by the learner respondents (Group A).

To know learners by their first name is necessary as a starting point for teachers to create a mutual feeling of respect, trust and interest in their classes. This is clearly not obtainable in overcrowded classes where the teachers do not know all the learners' names.

5.2.2.9 Increased workload

The teacher respondents agreed that the workload for any overcrowded classroom was simply too big. Due to this, two of the teacher respondents complained that they became tired of marking tests and examination scripts until late in the evenings. One of the teacher respondents indicated that, because of the increase in the workload, she did not enjoy teaching anymore. Another teacher respondent commented: "I really feel overworked and underpaid." Two of the teacher respondents indicated that they continued marking tests during teaching time when they could rather have spent the time on the creation of a positive classroom atmosphere, which would be conducive to learning and teaching.

Three of the teacher respondents agreed that not only the marking load of an overcrowded classroom, but also the lesson preparation for each class as well as other general classroom duties have increased with the increase in the pupil:teacher ratio. Two of the teacher respondents showed concern for the fact that they were neglecting their families and their own social lives in an attempt to maintain a high standard of work in their overcrowded classes. These teacher respondents reported that they arrived tired at school in the mornings and fear stress-related burnout due to their increasing teaching activities and responsibilities in overcrowded classes.

Two of the teacher respondents indicated that, during their marking sessions, there was simply

not enough time to write any comments on the scripts and therefore marking has become a very impersonal and a formal duty. Two of the teacher respondents stated that if teachers collected classwork to mark, it took them too long to complete it and they felt that marking had lost its effectiveness in this way. This fact was also borne out by the learner respondents (Group A) during interviews. Two of the teacher respondents complained that their overcrowded classes could not present any report-backs as it took too long to give each group a turn. The teacher respondents indicated that the learners also did not receive any opportunity to present their work in front of the whole class.

Overcrowded classes, where the teacher respondents' workloads are increased, clearly negatively affected their attitudes towards teaching. The teacher respondents of overcrowded classes showed a decrease in work satisfaction and had lost interest in teaching. It was noted that some teacher respondents even considered leaving the teaching profession. These problems which the teacher respondents experienced in overcrowded classes increased their personal stress levels and contributed to the poor state of their own health. The teacher respondents voiced their dissatisfaction with overcrowded classrooms and the manner in which this impacts on their personal life. The Department of Education should provide in-service training for these teachers in order to keep them in the education system. A decrease in the pupil:teacher ratio in overcrowded classes has become a necessity.

5.3.3 Group C: the heads of departments

The constituents or patterns that emerged from the analysis of the data gathered during the interviews with the heads of departments from the overcrowded schools in the Eastern Cape will be discussed next.

- **Increased pupil:teacher ratios**

The heads of department respondents reported that an increase in the pupil:teacher ratio at their schools has increased the number of problems they have had to deal with on a daily basis. This forced increase in daily learner and teacher contact has left them with more stress and less time to manage the school effectively. These respondents indicated that overcrowded classes and their problems have increased their workload and ultimately lowered their level of fulfilment and satisfaction in their own teaching profession.

- **Disciplinary issues**

The heads of department respondents agreed that more learners in one classroom reflected an increase in the number of learner and teacher-related problems experienced in their schools. This became evident from class visits, break time duties and an inspection of the buildings and the school grounds in general. Two of the heads of department respondents indicated that, with an increase in the number of learners, there was the group of learners who would "take chances because they think that they could not be checked up on". It was the experience of the heads of department respondents that teachers did not follow up certain problems which occurred in their overcrowded classes. The reason given by the teachers, according to one head of department respondent, was that there were "too many learners and too many problems to attend to" and obviously too little time to attend to all these issues.

- **Addressing related overcrowded issues embarked on teaching time**

The heads of department respondents reported that paying attention to teacher/learner-related problems is very time consuming for them. Furthermore, teachers disturbed the heads of department respondents by bringing disruptive learners to their classes during class time. This, in turn, not only disturbed the teachers' own classes, but also that of the heads of departments'

classes. The heads of department respondents indicated that this happened more often now that the classes were more crowded at their schools.

- **Limited school budget**

The heads of department respondents showed empathy towards the teachers' complaints about the school budget, but their budgets were smaller because of a large portion of learners who did not pay their school fees. Furthermore, according to all the heads of department respondents, the Department of Education did not supply the school with stationery and textbooks as had been the case in the past. This forced the schools to cover extra unplanned textbook expenses which their budgets could not handle.

- **Limited space**

Two of the heads of department respondents complained that the general infrastructure of the school, such as classrooms, other school facilities on the school property and the toilet facilities, could not cope with the increase in the number of learners per school. It is also impossible to have all the learners, the teachers and the parents attend functions together in one hall, for example at a ceremony such as the prize giving event, as the hall was too small.

- **Management and administration issues**

The heads of department respondents indicated that they fulfil an important role in terms of the middle management at schools. They expressed the opinion that they need to be more involved in the administration of the school and less in attending to the problems experienced by the learners and the teachers which are caused by overcrowded conditions. In overcrowded classes the problems which emerged were so serious that the teachers felt inadequately trained to deal with and solve them. A great portion of the teacher's responsibility was therefore shifted to the

heads of departments, who were already over involved in the problem of overcrowdedness at their schools. The heads of department respondents found this a time-consuming exercise, which robbed them of their personal teaching time.

- **In conclusion**

If class numbers were smaller, the heads of departments would have less related issues to deal with and could possibly ensure that any problems were solved in time. The heads of departments are key figures in the effective management of schools and should not spend most of their time trying to solve the problem of overcrowded classes. However, research shows that the problem of overcrowdedness negatively affects the quality of the heads of departments' school management and administration and adversely interferes with their teaching.

5.3.4 Group D: the principals

The constituents or patterns that emerged from the analysis of the data gathered during the interviews with the principals from the overcrowded schools in the Eastern Cape are discussed below.

- **School climate and teacher morale**

The principal respondents reported that overcrowded classes are a major concern to them and that the problem of overcrowded classes needs to be addressed by the government and the school community. This is the only way to ensure the fulfilment of the ideals of outcomes-based education. All the principal respondents indicated that they were very aware of the problem of overcrowdedness, but that they did not have the solution to it. The principal respondents indicated that they are aware that the problems related to overcrowded classes are adversely affecting the learners, teachers, heads of departments and themselves. It has become increasingly

difficult for the principals of overcrowded schools to ensure a positive school climate, and learner and teacher morale.

The principal respondents indicated that their schools' classrooms were simply too small. One of the principal respondents reflected that the school was "not designed for the increase in (the) number of pupils". Classes with limited space, desks and equipment could not accommodate the vast increase in the number of learners, according to one of the principal respondents. Two of the principal respondents only agreed with the intake of more learners because the pupil:teacher ratio was prescribed by the Department of Education.

- **Staff stress levels**

Two of the principal respondents indicated that their schools had too few academic staff and too few administrative staff at present. It was reported that this is the cause of much undue concern and stress. The principal respondents indicated that their budgets could not allow for the appointment of school governing council posts. Two of the principal respondents complained that their non-academic staff could not keep up with the maintenance of their school buildings and, in particular, the cleaning of classrooms.

- **Disciplinary problems**

All the principal respondents showed concern for the number of disruptive learners who were merely chased out of their overcrowded classrooms. All the principal respondents regarded the overcrowded classroom conditions as being an educationally unsound practice which will affect the learners adversely. According to two of the principal respondents, the racist comments and bullying reported to them have also increased with the increase in the number of learners per class. According to one of the principal respondents, stealing, especially of notebooks and library books, has also increased. The principal respondents agreed that more cheating has been reported

recently in overcrowded classes. All these problems have caused endless, time-consuming meetings with heads of departments, teachers and learners, according to two of the principal respondents. The principal respondents reported that there was no “easy fix” solution to the problem of overcrowded classes as this situation was a result of too many learners in one classroom which they (the principals) cannot control.

- **Increased teacher workload**

Two of the principal respondents indicated that their teachers were doing their best to cope with the large number of learners per teacher. Two of the principal respondents agreed that the teachers were “overworked due to the increase in the marking load”. The principal respondents stated that many teachers complained to them about the unbearable physical conditions in overcrowded classes where neither teachers nor learners could move between the desks. In order to attempt to solve these problems related to overcrowded classes, principal respondents motivated teachers to attend professional growth seminars and to discuss these problems with their colleagues. According to two of the principal respondents, teachers reported not doing so because nothing has been done so far by the Department of Education and the schools to actually alleviate the problem of overcrowded classes.

- **In conclusion**

Will it be possible for principals to maintain a high standard of education at their schools where the problems of overcrowded classes have become a reality? Will principals be able to solve the problems of overcrowdedness at learner, teacher and heads of department level? Is it reasonable to place this enormous responsibility on the shoulders of the principals or should the Department of Education step in and offer a reasonable solution to the problem of overcrowded classes?

5.4 CONCLUSION

The problems related to overcrowded classes in the Eastern Cape are experienced to a serious degree by the learners, teachers, heads of departments and principals of their schools. These issues became evident from the results of the qualitative research undertaken by the researcher.

The seriousness and the implications of the problem of overcrowdedness in Eastern Cape schools should not be underestimated. Drastic measures need to be taken in order to create a positive classroom atmosphere which is conducive to learning and teaching in order to maintain a high quality of education offered in government schools. This will be necessary in order to attain the ideals of outcomes-based education. The researcher is of the opinion that the problem of overcrowded classrooms does not only exist in the Eastern Cape, but is one that affects almost all other schools in South Africa to a larger or lesser degree.

Chapter 6 makes recommendations to alleviate the problem of overcrowded classrooms, which are uncondusive to teaching learners who have been neglected in the past. A model that could be implemented in practice to improve the current situation of overcrowded classrooms in the Eastern Cape schools, is also presented.

CHAPTER 6

Results of the research, recommendations and guidelines for further research

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 outlined the problem statement, aims and methodology, and discussed the plan of the whole study. Chapter 2 investigated some of the problems related to overcrowded classrooms, with reference to learners and teachers. In chapter 3 the implications of the overcrowded classroom, with particular reference to the learners and the teachers, were discussed. Chapter 4 outlined the qualitative research methodology which was employed. Chapter 5 provided the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative research. This chapter will focus on the results of the research. Recommendations as how to address the issues of overcrowdedness in classrooms, and guidelines for further research will be made. This chapter also includes the researcher's model, which could alleviate some of the issues of overcrowdedness in classrooms.

The issues of overcrowded classrooms and their implications need to be addressed in order to provide a high quality of education to all learners. In the light of the problem statement of this study, the following question is posed: What are the Department of Education and the principals of overcrowded schools currently doing to remedy the issues pertaining to the problem of overcrowded classes?

Stern (1995:29-30) states that teaching should mean to "give all pupils equal opportunities". It is questioned whether learners in overcrowded classes in the Eastern Cape schools are currently afforded equal learning opportunities. In this regard, recommendations are made on serious issues, such as textbook shortages, poor classroom management, and a classroom atmosphere not

conducive to learning and teaching.

6.2 THE RESEARCH RESULTS

The following constituents or patterns emerged from the data gathered at the schools in the Eastern Cape during interviews and were then analysed, namely:

- a non-conducive classroom atmosphere to teaching and learning exists
- high levels of noise and disruption were encountered
- limited number of textbooks amongst learners was evident
- limited individual learner attention in the overcrowded classes was experienced by the learners
- the lecturing method was continuously used by the teachers
- an increase in learner neglect by the teachers was evident
- the classwork books were not marked regularly by the teachers
- cheating became more prominent amongst the learners
- decreased personal interest shown in the learners by the teachers was reported
- a lower learner involvement during classes and practical sessions was evident
- an increase in prejudiced comments by learners regarding fellow learners was reported
- an increase in the loss of teaching time was reported
- the language proficiency barrier with regard to English second language speakers was evident.

6.2.1 Non-conducive classroom atmosphere to learning and teaching

The respondents from all the groups (A, B, C and D) reported that the atmosphere in the overcrowded classrooms was not conducive to optimal learning and teaching. Both the learner and the teacher respondents indicated that the stark classroom atmosphere experienced in

overcrowded classes affected the learners' academic performance negatively. In overcrowded classes where time is limited and learner participation is almost non-existent, the creation of a positive classroom climate seemed to be an impossibility. The high noise and disruption levels in overcrowded classes, together with a poor classroom management system, appeared to be a good recipe for a classroom atmosphere where disrespect rules. The formation of positive learner self-esteem is not a priority in overcrowded classes where learners are neglected and their teachers do not know them by their first names.

In order for the ideals of outcomes-based education to be realized, the classroom atmosphere should be conducive to learning and teaching. The learners need to take part in the lessons and show more interest in their work and in the classroom situation. In overcrowded classes where a stark classroom atmosphere prevails, outcomes-based education can hardly be successfully implemented.

6.2.2 High levels of noise and disruption

The respondents from the group of teachers and learners experienced overcrowded classes as very noisy and disruptive. The learners felt that it was impossible to concentrate and achieve academically if there are so many disruptions in the classroom. The teachers were aware of these disruptions, but found it too difficult to control the disruptive learners in the overcrowded classes and often ignored the situation due to the time it would take to attend to recurring problems. The disruptive learners often caused the teachers to leave their classes, but then the remaining learners felt that they were being punished for the disruptive behaviour of the other learners. Often disruptive behaviour was ignored by the teacher respondents of overcrowded classes because they felt it was too tiring to attend to the same problems on a daily basis.

The heads of department and principal respondents reported that disruptive learners were brought to them too often and this kept them out of their own classes. It also left them with less time for

their administrative duties. The heads of department and principal respondents (Groups C and D) felt that they did not have the solutions to the problems related to overcrowded classes and that the Department of Education needs to step in and offer a solution and in-service teacher training.

6.2.3 Limited number of textbooks amongst learners

All the groups of respondents noted that not all learners in overcrowded classes had textbooks. According to the learner and teacher respondents, this caused decreased learners' interest and academic performance. The teachers allowed learners to sit next to each other to share textbooks. This, in turn, was an uncomfortable experience for the learners, which caused even greater disruption in classes. The learner respondents also showed a decrease in interest and involvement in the subject matter.

The heads of department and the principal respondents reported that their schools were not able to provide textbooks, stationery or equipment to all the learners in overcrowded classes. This caused many learners to go without textbooks and forced some learners to steal fellow learners' textbooks. The heads of department and the principal respondents indicated that the Education Department should provide the necessary textbooks, stationery and equipment to ensure the smooth running of their schools. The question may be posed: How are learners supposed to achieve academically without a basic necessity, such as a textbook?

6.2.4 Limited individual learner attention in the overcrowded classes

The respondents from all the groups expressed concern that teachers of overcrowded classes spent too little individual time with their learners. This became evident in the lack of adequate marking of their (the learners') classwork and tests. The learner respondents felt that individual attention could have increased their academic performance. The teachers of overcrowded classes,

on the other hand, realized this, but could not spend enough individual time with each learner as their (the teachers') time was too limited due to the large number of learners in their overcrowded classrooms.

The heads of department and principal respondents indicated their concern over the high pupil:teacher ratio in their schools and stated that there are too many learners in their schools to ensure quality individual attention from the teachers. They realized that many learners felt neglected, but that more individual attention in overcrowded classes would never be possible under the existing conditions. In order to improve the poor pass rate of the Eastern Cape's matriculants, surely the learners will benefit from more individual attention? Learners also need to feel worthy and to be given the opportunity to interact with the teachers during the lessons. Teachers who spent time with individual learners also enquired about the learner's overall well-being. In overcrowded classes this is not possible and the adverse effects thereof are clear from the negative attitudes of learners, teachers, heads of departments and principals towards the overcrowded conditions of the classes.

6.2.5 The lecturing method was continuously used by the teachers

The respondents from all the groups (A to D) indicated that the lecturing method was not the most conducive teaching method, but that in overcrowded classes it was used continuously. The learner respondents (Group A) complained that teachers always stood in the front of the class and did all the talking and seldom interacted with them. This caused the learners to become less involved with the lessons and the subject matter. The teachers of overcrowded classes found it easier to stand in front of the class and do all the teaching and instructing rather than move between the many learners in the overcrowded classes. The teacher respondents (Group B) reported that it was difficult for them to actually walk between the rows of desks in order to get to learners and encourage them to become involved.

The heads of department and the principal respondents (Groups C and D) showed concern over the learning outcomes of overcrowded classes where the only method of instruction is lecturing. These respondents indicated that they were aware of the detrimental effects that this could have on learner outcomes, but in overcrowded classes there is not enough space in which to use other teaching methods and teaching material or to have the learners engage in interesting activities which required additional space. The crux of the matter is that there are just too many learners in the classes and that space is too limited. All the groups of respondents realized that other methods of teaching could increase the pass rate of their classes and motivate their learners to become more involved in the learning situation, but in overcrowded classes this is not possible.

6.2.6 An increase in learner neglect by the teachers

All the groups of respondents (Groups A to D) indicated that the learners experienced a degree of neglect because they did not receive adequate individual attention from the teachers nor were they (the learners) known to them (the teachers) by name. In overcrowded classes the learner respondents (Group A) felt neglected because they were not given the opportunity to participate in the lessons or practicals. The teacher respondents (Group B) knew that the learners were neglected in this regard, but could not get them all involved as there was too little time, space and apparatus for all the learners to become actively involved.

The learner respondents also felt neglected due to the fact that all their questions were not always answered. The teacher respondents were aware of this problem but did not have enough time in their overcrowded classrooms to answer all the learners' questions. The learner respondents indicated that their tests were neglected because the teacher did not always mark their tests, but that they or their classmates had to mark their (the learners') tests. The teacher respondents indicated that the marking of individual tests was too time consuming. It was reported by the teacher respondents that the marking of so many scripts ultimately became a burden.

The learner respondents reported that they felt particularly neglected because the teachers did not know their backgrounds or how they spent their time after school hours. The teacher respondents indicated that they had too many learners in one class to be able to know all of them individually. For teachers of overcrowded classes it became very difficult to learn all the learners' names as there were too many individuals, especially in more than one overcrowded class.

The teacher, heads of department and principal respondents (Groups B, C and D) showed sympathy for the situation of learner neglect, but indicated that in overcrowded classes it was impossible to give continuous individual attention to all their learners.

6.2.7 The classwork books were not marked regularly by the teachers

The learner respondents (Group A) complained that their classwork books were not regularly marked, which meant that the teachers were not aware of the individuals' own learning and academic progress or whether their homework was completed or not.

The different groups of respondents showed concern over the fact that learners' classwork books were not checked by the teachers often enough. Teachers therefore did not know what the learners knew, or whether their work was up to date or whether a high academic standard was maintained by their learners. The teacher respondents reported that it was impossible for the teachers to mark all the learners' classwork books regularly because there were too many learners and too little time in overcrowded classes. The teacher and heads of department respondents indicated that they were overworked and that their workload was too big to make time to mark classwork books at home. Marking classwork and examination scripts contributed to work overload. In this regard, increased stress levels were experienced by the teacher respondents.

The teacher respondents felt that there were too many learners in overcrowded classes to mark their work individually. The teacher respondents also found it too difficult to get to all the

learners in overcrowded classes, especially those at the back of the class. The heads of department and the principal respondents were aware of this situation, but realized that their teachers' marking load was too enormous to be carried out effectively.

Taking the ideals of outcomes-based education into consideration, it becomes clear that the teachers will have to become up to date with each learner's progress. This implies a tremendous amount of continuous assessment, which is clearly problematic in overcrowded classes where the teachers do not have the time to spend with individual learners or to monitor their (the learners') individual progress.

6.2.8 Cheating became more prominent amongst the learners

Both the learner and the teacher respondents (Groups A and B) reported that cheating during tests and during the recording of marks became increasingly evident in overcrowded classes. To both groups of respondents this was an unacceptable practice, but the teachers experienced difficulty in handling the issue of cheating in overcrowded classes due to the large number of learners. The heads of department and the principal respondents (Groups C and D) indicated that cheating, as a serious offence in their schools, was the order of the day. More and more learners were cheating because they realized that it was almost impossible for their teachers to detect it when there are so many other learners in one class. It is almost impossible to stop this dishonest trend in overcrowded classes where poor classroom management and other disruptions prevail.

6.2.9 Decreased personal interest shown in the learners by the teachers

The teacher, heads of department and principal respondents (Groups B, C and D) showed great concern over the fact that so many learners were merely reduced to a number in overcrowded classes. They indicated that they did not have the time to show equal interest in all the learners because their classes were too crowded. The learner respondents (Group A) indicated that they

were entitled to individual attention, but that in overcrowded classes this was impossible. The learner respondents reported that some learners either competed for attention or merely became rebellious because of a lack of interest shown in them by their teachers in overcrowded classes. The learner respondents indicated that they would appreciate it if more interest in them and their backgrounds was shown by their teachers and that this would make them (the learners) feel more accepted at school.

The learner respondents indicated that they experienced a plethora of problems related to the fact that they did not receive adequate personal attention. These problems ranged from developing low self-esteem to experiencing feelings of alienation. The teacher respondents, on the other hand, felt that there were too many learners in their classes for them to show an equal amount of interest in each one.

6.2.10 Less learner involvement during classes and practical sessions

The teacher, heads of departments and principal respondents (Groups B, C and D) indicated that they were aware of the low learner involvement during lessons in overcrowded classes. They indicated that there were so many learners in their overcrowded classes that it was impossible for all the learners to become actively involved. The limited space in the overcrowded classes could not allow the learners to become actively involved in the learning material. The teacher respondents also indicated that the classroom atmosphere in overcrowded classes was neglected due to minimal learner involvement and that the learners needed to contribute to the formation of their classroom atmosphere.

The learner respondents (Group A) stated that they needed to become more actively involved in the learning material and practical sessions. The teacher respondents reported that there were too many learners in one overcrowded class to motivate each learner to become actively involved. The teacher respondents also indicated that more space and time per learner are necessary to

achieve maximum learner involvement.

In a lesson the teacher and the learner need to be involved, especially in practical-orientated subjects such as physical science and biology. However, there are too many learners in overcrowded classes and often they are disrupted because the learners are not involved in the lessons or practicals. Learner involvement could facilitate learner outcomes and simultaneously reduce the noise level and disruptions in overcrowded class. However, the fact that there are too many learners in these classes will not allow for this ideal learning situation to materialize.

6.2.11 An increase in prejudiced comments by learners regarding fellow learners

Both the learner and the teacher respondents (Group A and B) noted an increase in racist comments made by learners in overcrowded classes. This created a disruption and often forced the teachers to get heads of departments or the principal involved in solving their problems related to overcrowded classes. This, in turn, impacts on all the respondent groups' (A to D) time. Prejudiced remarks are a serious problem in overcrowded classes and need to be addressed in the right way. However, overcrowded classes do not always allow the learners, teachers, heads of departments and principals to deal effectively with this problem and to combat it.

6.2.12 An increase in the loss of teaching time

Both the learner and the teacher respondents (Groups A and B) agreed that more time was lost in overcrowded classes than in smaller classes. The learners lost more time during the changing of classes and while waiting for teachers to answer all their questions. Time is an important factor in the completion of the syllabi. Interruptions in overcrowded classes reduced teaching time and clearly hindered the learners from achieving academically because less time is spent on the subject matter. The principal respondents (Group D) showed concern over this situation, but they realized that the more learners in one class, the more time wastage would occur. All the

respondents indicated that the only solution to the time wastage in overcrowded classes would be less learners per teacher. In order to improve the quality of education offered to all the learners, the time wastage needs to be minimized. This is especially necessary in the overcrowded Eastern Cape schools where learners are not receiving adequate individual attention.

6.2.13 The language proficiency barrier with regard to English second language speakers

All the respondents (Groups A to D) indicated that the problem of language proficiency in overcrowded classes is inevitable because the medium of instruction is mostly the learners' second or third language.

The learner respondents (Group A) indicated that their academic outcomes would be better if they received instruction in smaller classes where they could receive more individual attention. The learner respondents with a lack of proficiency in the medium of instruction showed less understanding of the learning material and expected teachers to give them more individual attention. At the same time, the teacher respondents reported that other learners felt that it was unfair to spend more time with these learners and then, in turn, neglect them.

Overcrowded classes are clearly non-conducive to teaching learners with language proficiency problems. The learner respondents indicated that they were frustrated when the teachers explained aspects of the lesson again because there were learners who did not understand the explanation the first time. This, in turn, could lead to English first language speakers (learners) being bored, noisy and generally disruptive.

6.3 OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS: ISSUES AND OBSERVATIONS

The ethnographic interviews revealed many of the issues which were discussed in the literature

study of chapters 2 and 3 of this study, for example:

- an increase in impersonal lectures by the teachers
- a decrease in the learners' academic performance and well-being
- many problems due to learners' insufficient knowledge of the medium of instruction
- an increase in racial conflict and prejudiced comments amongst learners
- a continuous increase in learner enrolments
- a decrease in the quality of education offered to all learners
- too large non-homogenous classes are the order of the day
- an increase in disciplinary problems
- greater classroom management problems
- an increase in teacher stress
- a stark classroom atmosphere was evident
- a decrease in individual attention and a decrease in the learners' academic competencies
- overall poor academic development of learners.

6.4 OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION AND OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS

The realization of the ideals of outcomes-based education in overcrowded classrooms in the Eastern Cape is questionable. In the light of the problem statement of this study, the question can be posed: Will outcomes-based education in overcrowded classrooms with all the associated problems be conducive to teaching learners who have been academically neglected in the previous dispensation? Can the learning outcomes of these learners result in a better quality education when their classes are overcrowded and each learner is not receiving adequate individual attention during lessons? It would seem that the problem of overcrowded classrooms in the Eastern Cape will hamper the positive effect and the realization of the ideals of outcomes-based education.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the research results, learners in overcrowded classes are clearly neglected because there are too many learners in one classroom where the teacher cannot afford equal individual attention to each one. The following recommendations could reduce the problem of overcrowdedness and its implications in Eastern Cape schools.

- **It is recommended that larger classrooms be provided.**

When classrooms are larger, the teachers will have more space in which to do interesting learning activities and reduce the use of the lecturing method. This will motivate learners to increase their involvement in the classroom situation. In such classrooms the learners' desks could be spaced further apart and the learners and the teachers will be able to move more easily amongst them (the desks). The classrooms will be less cramped and cheating during tests could be curbed.

- **It is recommended that a desk per learner be provided.**

A desk per learner will increase their level of comfortableness in the class and also contribute to a sense of belonging. The learners will be less frustrated and this will contribute to a classroom atmosphere more conducive to learning and teaching.

- **It is recommended that each learner have his/her own textbook.**

If learners each have a textbook, then they will have equal opportunity to become involved in the learning material. The learners will show a greater level of understanding of the learning material and be able to complete their classwork and homework more effectively. This, in turn, will lead to the learners being less frustrated and less bored. It is clear that the learner outcomes will be

attained more easily and a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning and teaching will prevail.

- **It is recommended that more well-qualified teachers be employed.**

Should more well-qualified teachers be introduced where overcrowdedness exists, the pupil:teacher ratio would be reduced. Teachers will teach fewer learners in one classroom and be able to attend to their (the learners') individual academic needs and show more personal interest in each one. The teachers will be able to mark each learner's classwork and tests thoroughly. With more well-qualified teachers in place, the discipline of the learners will improve because the teachers will be able to manage them (the learners) better. An improved classroom management will ultimately lead to a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning and teaching, which will contribute to a higher quality of education offered to all learners. Improved classroom management will also reduce the high level of teacher stress experienced in overcrowded classrooms. Hence, learners and teachers will benefit from a smaller pupil:teacher ratio in classrooms.

- **It is recommended that more in-service training be offered to teachers.**

In-service teachers require strategies which will help them to cope with the problems of overcrowdedness. These strategies should deal with serious issues, such as prejudiced learner actions, promoting learner well-being and how to reduce the existing language proficiency barrier. In this way, effective in-service training offered to teachers will contribute to classroom atmospheres conducive to teaching and learning and in turn result in a higher quality of education offered to all learners.

- **It is recommended that a bigger education budget be provided by the government.**

In order to enlarge present classrooms, provide each learner with a desk and a textbook, decrease

the pupil:teacher ratio and provide well organised in-service teacher training, the government needs to allow for a bigger education budget. This is essential.

6.6 A PROPOSED MODEL TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES OF OVERCROWDEDNESS IN CLASSROOMS

Figure 1 (in this chapter) is the researcher's suggested model to deal with and address the issues of overcrowdedness in classrooms. In this way the possible achievement of learner outcomes and, ultimately, an increase in the quality of education is envisaged for all learners.

The following sections are discussed:

- Section A, which refers to the role of the Department of Education in dealing with the issues of overcrowdedness in classrooms
- Section B, which refers to the combined roles of the Department of Education and the overcrowded school in dealing with the issues of overcrowdedness in classrooms.

The school is representative of the learners, teachers, heads of departments and the principals. The model should be regarded as a means to tackle and reduce or solve the current issues of overcrowded classrooms in schools. It is not intended for any specific school.

Section A and Section B of the model will be discussed separately. These discussions are based on the results of the research in this study. The aims of the model are to:

- envisage a greater increase of the achievement of learning outcomes in overcrowded classes
- suggest ways in which the academically disadvantaged learners in overcrowded classes

can be uplifted

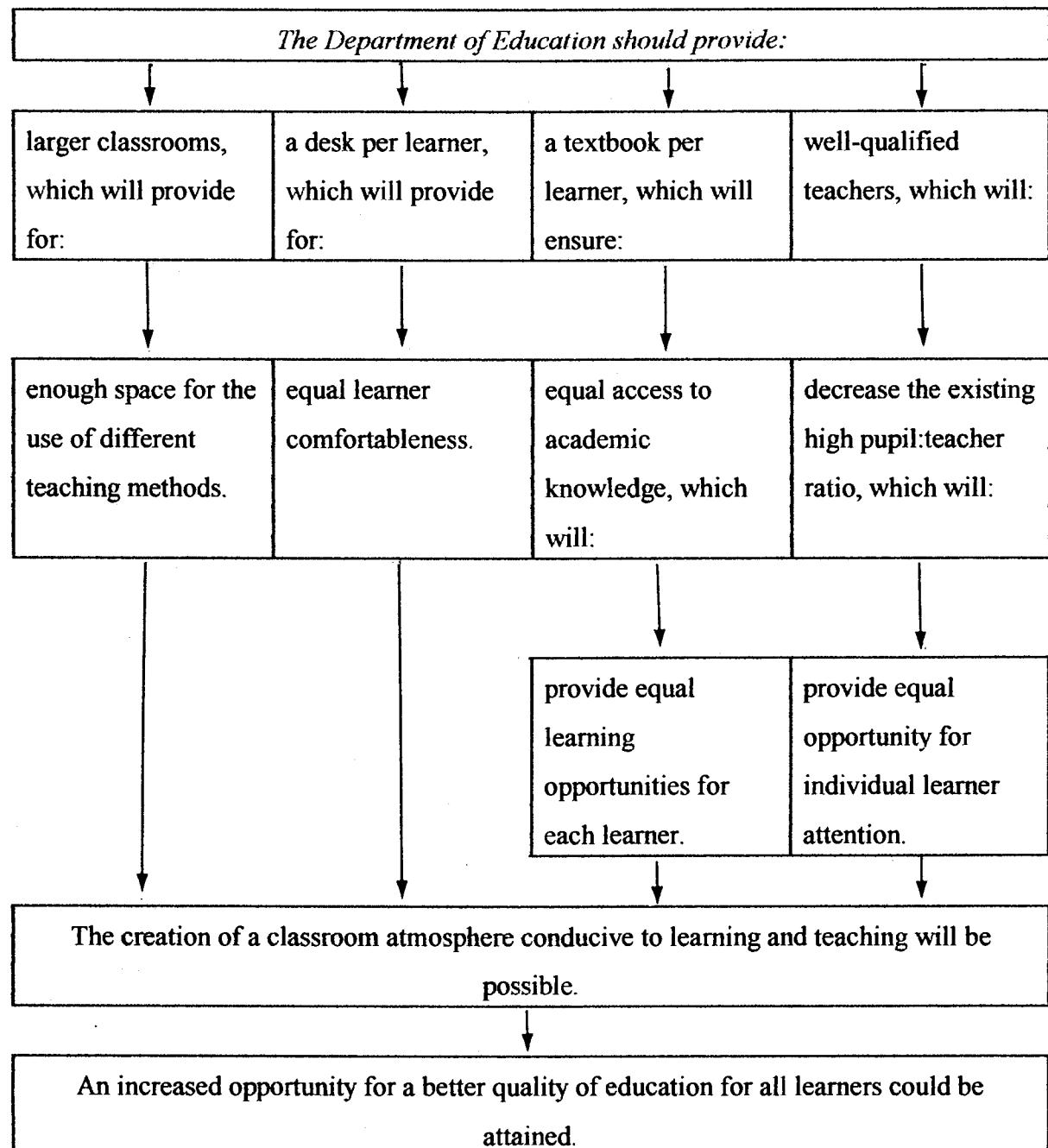
- reduce teacher stress which is experienced in overcrowded classes
- provide a better quality education to all learners.

It is envisaged that all learners would be provided with equal learning opportunities by means of increased active involvement in the learning situation. A decrease in the failure and dropout rates in the overcrowded Eastern Cape schools is a specific goal. Finally, the model suggests ways in which teachers can provide a better quality of education by means of the creation of classroom atmospheres conducive to learning and teaching and where the ideals of outcomes-based education will become tenable.

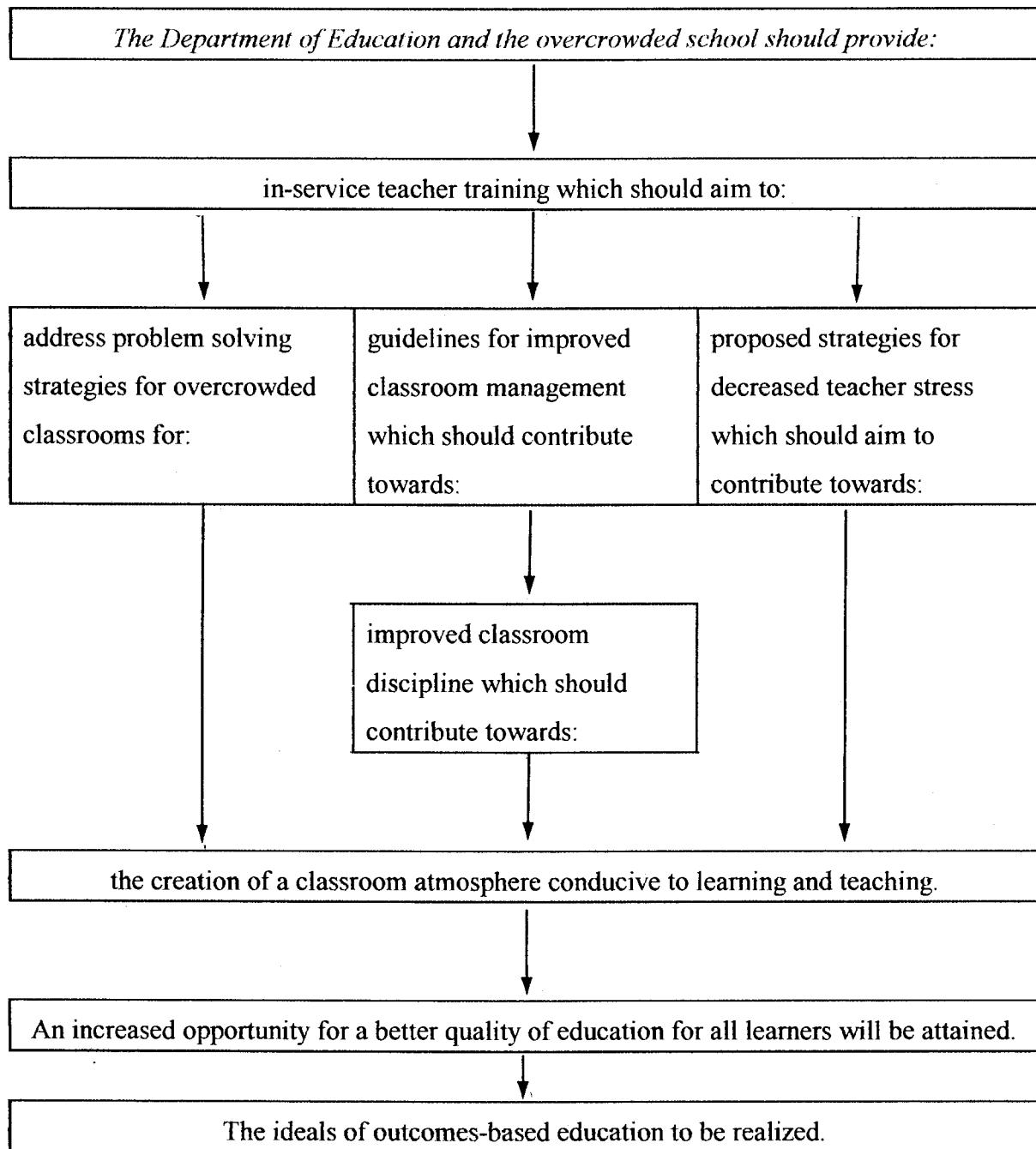
The model covers aspects such as in-service teacher training, the development of good classroom management skills, the use of anti-bullying and anti-prejudiced policies, addressing the language proficiency problem of learners and the management of teacher stress. It is hoped that the implementation of this model will ensure the attainment of the ideals of outcomes-based education.

FIGURE 1: A MODEL TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES OF OVERCROWDEDNESS IN CLASSROOMS

Section A: The role of the Department of Education in dealing with the issues of overcrowdedness in schools



Section B: The role of the Department of Education and the overcrowded schools in dealing with the issues of overcrowdedness in schools



6.6.1 A brief overview of Section A of the model (Figure 1): the role of the Department of Education in dealing with the issues of overcrowdedness in the classroom

The government needs to allow for a bigger education budget which can materialize the following:

- larger classrooms
- a desk and the necessary textbooks per learner
- well-qualified teachers.

The provision of larger classrooms will allow teachers to use teaching methods which require more space. Learner interest and involvement in the classroom activities will increase the level of successful attainment of the learner outcomes. This will allow for a better quality of education offered to all learners.

A desk per learner will offer the learners more comfortableness and a textbook per learner will ensure equal access to academic knowledge. In this way learners will receive an equal opportunity to be engaged in the learning material. Academic uplift should result.

An increase in the number of well-qualified teachers will decrease the pupil:teacher ratio in overcrowded classes which, in turn, will allow for more individual learner attention from the teacher, an increase in the achievement of learning outcomes and, ultimately, a better quality of education offered to all learners. Fewer learners per teacher will decrease the teacher workload and stress level, which will enhance a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning and teaching.

Larger classrooms, a desk and textbook per learner and a decrease in the pupil:teacher ratio will, in turn, increase the opportunity for a better quality of education for all learners.

6.6.2 A brief overview of Section B of the model (Figure 1): the role of the Department of Education and the overcrowded school in dealing with the issues of overcrowdedness in the classroom

It is important to note that this model indicates that schools cannot function separately from the Department of Education and vice versa.

The researcher suggests that in-service teacher training should provide for the following:

- recommended problem solving strategies in overcrowded classrooms
- recommendations for the development of good classroom management
- recommendations for the reduction of teacher stress.

Recommended problem-solving strategies, which cover issues such as prejudiced actions and the language proficiency barrier with regard to English second language speakers, are imperative during in-service teacher training. If implemented, these strategies will enhance classroom atmospheres conducive to teaching and learning, which will ultimately create greater opportunities for a better quality of education for all learners.

Improved classroom management is necessary for improved classroom discipline which allows for greater opportunity for a better quality of education offered to all learners. Successfully implemented strategies for a decrease in teacher stress should enable teachers to feel more at ease in their classrooms. Such teachers should be able to attend to all the learners' academic problems in a more relaxed, effective manner. Hence, a lowered teacher stress level will develop an improved quality of education offered to all learners. Finally, the realization of the ideals of outcomes-based education is envisaged.

6.7 GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER FUTURE RESEARCH

- It is recommended that further qualitative and quantitative research should be undertaken on a broader spectrum on the issues of overcrowdedness in schools in the Eastern Cape and elsewhere in South Africa.
- It is recommended that qualitative and quantitative research be undertaken on the influence of the issues of overcrowdedness in schools on the community and, in particular, teacher stress-related problems.
- It is strongly recommended that the qualitative research results of this study be verified on a much larger scale on a qualitative and quantitative basis, not only in the Eastern Cape, but in South Africa as a whole.

6.8 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Some of the limitations of this study were mentioned in chapter 4. Although the qualitative research in this study was conducted on a very limited scale, the seriousness of the issues of overcrowdedness in schools should not be underestimated.

- This research has been undertaken on a limited scale in the Eastern Cape as the four different groups of research respondents were small, namely: 5 learners, 5 teachers, 3 heads of departments and 3 principals. The researcher also only observed 5 lesson periods at 5 different schools.
- The goal of this qualitative research project was not generalization, but to probe the life-world of the respondents as they experienced the issues of overcrowdedness and to

correlate the results with the literature study. It is furthermore realized that it is not within the scope of this study to focus on all the issues of overcrowdedness in schools.

- Moreover, this study does not imply that all the mentioned problems and implications related to overcrowdedness in Eastern Cape schools will necessarily be experienced by all the other schools in the Republic of South Africa where conditions of overcrowdedness exist.
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6.9 IN CONCLUSION

A future educational situation in schools is envisaged where a minimum learner wastage, a lower dropout rate and higher adequate financial support is given is a top priority by the Department of Education to eliminate overcrowded schools.

In the light of the problem statement of this study, it is imperative that the group of neglected learners from the previous political and resulted education dispensation, who are currently in overcrowded classrooms, are provided with adequate opportunity to attain the ideals of outcomes-based education. Classroom atmospheres which are conducive to learning and teaching will result in the successful attainment of learner outcomes. Overcrowded classrooms and their implications have been ignored for too long. This issue needs to be dealt with and solved by the authorities.

It is clear that the aims, ambitions and motivations of learners are adversely affected in overcrowded classes and learners are seriously frustrated in these classes where there is a lack of space and individual attention. Furthermore, the increased teacher stress level in overcrowded classrooms is clearly negatively affecting the quality of education offered to these learners.

In a final analysis it is evident that overcrowded classrooms are not conducive to teaching learners who have already been neglected in the past. Overcrowded classrooms still remain one of the most serious issues to be solved.

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Addenda

ADDENDUM A

A LIST OF GENERAL QUESTIONS ASKED TO FIVE LEARNER RESPONDENTS DURING ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS

In your opinion:

1. How many learners are in your largest class?
2. What do you dislike most about a large class?
3. Describe the atmosphere of an overcrowded classroom.
4. What is your seating arrangements like in the largest class that you are in? How does this affect yourself and possibly your classmates?
5. How much individual attention do you and your classmates receive from the teacher?
6. How often do you have the opportunity to asked questions in class? How often are these questions answered by the teacher?
7. What is your personal involvement / participation during large classes?
8. How do you feel larger classes have affected your academic results?
9. Do all learners get along well in overcrowded classes? Provide some reasons for your answer.
10. Where does the teacher stand mostly when he/she teaches?
11. Describe the way in which the teacher handles the disruptive learners?
12. Can you always hear and see the teacher from where you sit?
13. What procedures are taken in the writing, marking, handing out of tests and the recording of marks in overcrowded classes?

ADDENDUM B

A LIST OF GENERAL QUESTIONS ASKED TO FIVE TEACHER RESPONDENTS DURING ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS

In your opinion:

1. How large are your biggest classes and how does this compare to classes some years ago?
2. Do you personally feel that there is just the right number of learners per teacher in your own classes? If so, or not, how does this affect your teaching styles?
3. Describe the seating arrangements of the learners in an overcrowded class and state how this arrangement affects the learners and yourself.
4. What is the atmosphere like in an overcrowded classroom?
5. How do you compare your workload of an overcrowded class?
6. Describe your method of teaching most often used in overcrowded classes.
7. Describe your method of testing in overcrowded classes.
8. How, according to your experiences, has larger classes affected your teaching?
9. Have overcrowded classes affected your personal life? Give reasons.
10. What are your experiences with learners with a language inproficiency in an overcrowded classroom?
11. Describe the learners' attitudes toward learning in overcrowded classrooms.
12. Describe your classroom management in overcrowded classes.
13. Are learners always on time when they arrive for class?
14. Are there more or less disciplinary problems in overcrowded classes? Please elaborate.
15. Who do you approach when you encounter major obstacles in overcrowded classes? Are there solutions available to these problems?
16. Do you think that outcomes-based education can work in overcrowded classes?
Give reasons.

ADDENDUM C

A LIST OF GENERAL QUESTIONS ASKED TO THREE HEADS OF DEPARTMENT RESPONDENTS DURING ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS

In your opinion:

1. What is the relationship between the greater number of learners in a class and the reported problems encountered in that class by the learners and the teachers?
2. Are the teachers encountering problems with overcrowded classes?
3. If the answer to the previous question is yes, then what procedures do the teachers follow in order to solve these problems?
4. How has overcrowded classes affected the heads of departments' job descriptions?
5. How are the facilities in the school handling the increase in the number of learners?
6. Do you think that outcomes-based education can work in overcrowded classes?

Give reasons.

ADDENDUM D

A LIST OF GENERAL QUESTIONS ASKED TO THREE PRINCIPAL RESPONDENTS DURING ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS

In your opinion:

1. Do you regard any of the classes in your school as overcrowded?
2. Can the school handle the increase in number of learners?

3. How is the maintenance of the school affected by an increase in the number of learners per teacher?
4. What are the greatest concerns shown for the learners in overcrowded classes?
5. What problems, if any, are more evident now that the classes are regarded as overcrowded?
6. Do teachers handle overcrowded classes effectively?
7. What provision is made for in-service training for teachers of overcrowded classes?
8. Do you think that outcomes-based education can work in overcrowded classes?

Give reasons.
