

Chapter 1

Background to the problem, formulation of the problem statement and aims

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

As early as the 1980's, Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan and Lee (1982:37) emphasised the imperative relationship between a school principal's involvement in education management and, in particular, the improvement of classroom management as an ingredient in a school's academic success. There is no single definition of *education management*. Sergiovanni (1990:16) maintains that for a school to provide quality education for all learners, education management should include effective

- planning,
- organising,
- leading and controlling,
- supervising,
- co-ordinating,
- budgeting,
- staff development,
- guidance,
- programme development, and
- leadership of the school principal.

Van der Westhuizen and Mosoge (1998:43) expand on Sergiovanni's (1990:16) definition by explicitly stating that at schools education management is irrevocably linked to the "authority structure of the ... school". Niehaus and Myburgh (1999:9) confirm that the emphasis on the managerial and leadership roles of school principals in education

management “has increased dramatically”, and that these roles need to be investigated and reviewed continually. Van der Westhuizen and Mosoge (1998:47) state that good education management by school principals is essential in education and its primary focus is on the promotion of effective teaching and learning. They (1998:47) go on to emphasise that “effective learning, therefore, forms the most crucial standard against which the success of management is to be measured”. Hence, school principals as education managers occupy unique leadership positions among the staff, learners, and parents, and exercise influence in structural, operational and instructional matters at school (Hoberg 1993:65; *The Teacher* March 2001:20).

Currently, the managerial task of school principals and, specifically, their training or lack thereof are receiving more attention than ever before at national and international levels. Sergioivanni (2000:1) stresses that the successful accomplishment of school goals, especially learner academic achievement, “will require new ways of thinking, new assignments of responsibility, new definitions of leadership roles, and new approaches to accountability” by school principals. In this regard, according to the Eastern Cape Department of Education (2001:F-2), the Head of Department in Bisho appoints the school principal as the *responsibility officer* in an institution where s/he is responsible for the “overall control of all the school’s finances and for managing all its resources and assets”.

The *Daily Dispatch* (24 January 2003:2 a) reports that “ex-model C schools excel [academically] because of good management, [adequate] resources, commitment to teaching and learning, and strong, functioning school governing bodies” and low teacher absenteeism (*Daily Dispatch* 24 January 2003:2 c). A spokesman for the Union of South African Professional Educators, Mlungisi Rwentela, maintains that high teacher absenteeism can be attributed to poor selection of school principals since “some are not capable of being principals” (*Daily Dispatch* 24 April 2003:1). Early in 2003, the Eastern Cape Province Standing Committee on Education stated that “some teachers and principals displayed weak leadership skills to administer their affairs which affected the

whole school [academic] performance ... The principals need to be held accountable for the poor performance of their schools as a result of weak management” (*Daily Dispatch* 6 March 2003:2). This statement reinforces the President of South Africa, Mr Thabo Mbeki’s warning that “school principals ... should be held accountable for poor [academic] results in their schools” (*Daily Dispatch* 13 January 2000:2 and 22 February 2000:1).

The *NUE Comment* (1998:18) and *The Teacher* (October 1999:8) state that a school under effective management will attain good matriculation results that will indicate successful utilisation of educational resources. However, according to Mthombothi (2000:22), when interpreting the poor matriculation results in the Eastern Cape Province, “education is not yet out of the woods”. The Democratic Alliance, Pan Africanist Congress, and African National Congress are later quoted as stating that education in South Africa “was already at rock bottom” (*Daily Dispatch* 22 March 2001:13). The *Daily Dispatch* (29 December 2001:3 a) reported that “teacher unions in the Eastern Cape have expressed concern and disappointment at the poor (year 2001) matriculation results which have placed the province at the bottom of the national education log”. “The Education Department in the Eastern Cape [Province] has continually produced the worst matric results in the country, said education standing committee chairperson Numsa Jajula” (*Daily Dispatch* 16 October 2001:2). Later that year, the *Daily Dispatch* (29 December 2001:3 a) announced that there was no escaping the fact that schools with high matric pass rates “were a product of good management”. The *Daily Dispatch* (6 March 2003:2) reports that “poor [matriculation examination] results were attributed to poor quality of educators, a high incidence of [learner] absenteeism due to a lack of parental supervision; shortage of educators, especially in the science and maths field; [and] general [learner] disciplinary problems”. Hoberg (1994:44) states that “strong administrative and instructional leadership” are indispensable characteristics of an effective school principal. It is, therefore, evident that there is a dire need in the Eastern Cape Province for the implementation of a logical, well-structured form of education management by the school

principals where the main aim is to improve their current, poor school practice and, ultimately, focus on the improvement of the matriculation pass rate.

The former education superintendent-general, Mr Modidima Manny, points out that school principals, as managers, should ensure “optimal operational efficiency” of their schools (*Daily Dispatch* 17 January 2001:1). This implies that school principals should develop and utilise the school's human resources optimally through effective management with the aim of improving the poor matriculation pass rates. Hence, the low matriculation pass rates at some schools in the Eastern Cape Province reflect great dissatisfaction with the management and leadership of the school principals at these educational institutions. The researcher is of the opinion that school principals are not sufficiently involved or interested in learner academic progress and that this may contribute to ill-disciplined behaviour amongst learners with its own detrimental effects on matriculation pass rates. Furthermore, as early as 1997, the South African Institute of Race Relations (1997:1) expressed concern about the fact that learners and parents had lost confidence in the quality of government schooling in South Africa. In the researcher's view, an absence of the parents' active involvement in learner academic progress further impacts negatively on learner attitudes to learning. Moreover, this adverse situation rears learners who are absent from school and turn to vandalism rather than focus on their academic progress. The researcher questions whether schools with low matriculation pass rates were focused on learner academic achievement as an integral part of their overall school vision and mission as advised by the Department of Education: Province of the Eastern Cape in the publication, *A handbook to review vision crafting in schools* (2003:44-45).

Sergiovanni (1990:41-51), Hoberg (1993:65), Blase, Blase, Anderson and Dungan (1995:32- 42), and Jacobs (2000:8) maintain that what is achieved in schools in terms of the quality of education invariably depends on the crucial leadership role of school

principals and their ability to initiate organisational commitment and the empowerment of the staff, learners and parents. In order to recommend ways to improve the existing low Eastern Cape Province matriculation pass rates, then, the researcher will necessarily focus on school principals' managerial and leadership roles. Accordingly, the researcher will investigate these unique roles of school principals as education managers at schools where improvement of the matriculation (Grade 12) pass rates is required. What, then, should the managerial and leadership roles of the school principal be in a transformation process at these schools where there are low matriculation pass rates? The main objective of this study will be to identify factors which may contribute significantly to school atmospheres that are not conducive to teaching and learning and to recommend corrective measures.

As a further introduction to the background to this study and to clarify the significance of this research study, the researcher quotes the mission and vision of the Province of the Eastern Cape Department of Education: "To provide an effective and efficient education service that will fully develop human potential, a service driven by a staff that is committed to values of accountability, equality and democracy" (Eastern Cape Department of Education July 2001). The mission of the Province of the Eastern Cape Department of Education (July 2001) is given as to

- provide quality education and training that caters for the diverse needs of society
- collaborate with stakeholders and other departments, provincially and nationally, in order to ensure a sense of relevance and ownership
- provide opportunities for learners of all ages to acquire lifelong learning and critical thinking skills
- achieve equity in a unified education system by providing facilities and resources, human and physical, for all
- encourage a participatory decision-making process, which will empower the whole

community at all levels.

Bearing the aforementioned in mind, throughout this study the researcher will refer to the view of the Department of Education regarding the role of all school stakeholders.

Suffice it to say that the issue of the current low matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province is a multi-dimensional, complex one that urgently needs to be addressed. It is hoped that this study will suggest ways, brought into service by school principals, to improve the matriculation pass rates at schools in the Eastern Cape Province. This study will take the latter as its focal point.

1.2 THE ACTUALITY AND DOMAIN OF THE STUDY

The overwhelming problems on every level of the education system of South Africa have been spiralling out of control, adversely affecting matriculation pass rates (*Daily Dispatch* 12 July 1999:4; 31 August 2000:3; 5 September 2000:3; 29 December 2001:3 b; *Sunday Times* 1 August 1999:2 b). As early as July 1999, the Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, declared “a state of emergency in education” (*Sunday Times* 1 August 1999:2 a). Asmal further questioned and prioritised ways to improve the poor matriculation pass rates in the country (*The Teacher* April 2001:2). The former Education MEC, Mr Stone Sizani also stated, “Let’s not pretend: school education in the Eastern Cape [Province] is in permanent crisis” (*Sunday Times* 30 April 2003:8). Willie Madisha, president of the South African Democratic Teachers’ Union (Sadtu) sums up the domain of this study in his statement: “We [Sadtu] must improve management systems at schools ... We, as Sadtu, are worried about education as a whole” (*Sunday Times* 1 June 2003:1).

The poor matriculation results are but one measure of how poorly the education system of

South Africa performs (*Daily Dispatch* 29 December 2000:1 a). It is evident that the poor results reflect a lack of management strategies by school principals to enhance classroom academic delivery and learner academic achievement. In May 2002, an education summit in the Mount Fletcher district in the Eastern Cape Province set out priorities to overhaul the education in the area (*Daily Dispatch* 10 May 2002:4). Delegates from political parties, unions, non-governmental organisations, government departments, teachers, school governing bodies, and traditional leaders attended the summit. There the Eastern Cape Province Education Department district director, Mr Mthobeli Gaca, said that a high matriculation failure rate, a lack of active parental participation at schools, and the allocation of resources to areas according to shortages had been identified as challenges in the area. He went on to say that learners needed to be “put back at the centre of the education service” by emphasising maximum contact between teacher and learner (*Daily Dispatch* 10 May 2002:4).

The actuality of this study can be summed up by a statement in the *Daily Dispatch* (30 December 2000:2) that there is “a call for teachers, principals and pupils to be more committed at schools that achieved poor [matriculation] results”. To further elaborate on the actuality and domain of this study, the researcher will briefly sketch the background.

1.2.1 Background to the study

The importance of the Senior Certificate Examination in South Africa is an undeniable fact and often reflects the poor quality of education offered to learners as they achieve low matriculation pass rates. The features of school effectiveness and the poor matriculation results together with the financial implications for the government are questioned. Is it

possible that school atmospheres not conducive to teaching and learning prevalent at these schools reflect the effects of a lack of effective managerial and leadership skills by school principals? The researcher will take this question as the departure point for this study.

1.2.1.1 The importance of the Senior Certificate Examination

According to Shindler (1998:3) and Herman (1995:265), the Senior Certificate Examination is one of South Africa's "annual rallying-points in education", as it is the most visible symbol of the strengths and weaknesses in the education system. In addition, it provides the "opportunity for analysis of failings and possibilities for improvements" in the current school education system (Herman 1995:265).

Briefly stated, the Senior Certificate Examination is a six-subject examination at higher or standard grade level. Each candidate is required to pass at least five subjects, one of which has to be a First Language on the higher grade. The candidate is given an aggregate score, which is the average of the scores of the individual subjects. For matriculation exemption to be obtained, at least two other subjects, apart from the First Language, need to be passed on the higher grade. For further reference, various other requirements with respect to subject choices and pass marks are specified in the *Matriculation examination handbook of the Joint Matriculation Board* (Herman 1995:265) and Circular 21 of 2000 (Department of Education 2000:1-7). In the 2001 Grade 12 final examinations, the Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, announced that as a national change in the Senior Certificate Examinations, "the country's matriculants will write standardised papers" in Mathematics, Physical Science, Biology, Accountancy, and English Second Language (*The Teacher* April 2001:2; *Daily Dispatch* 28 December 2002:1). Panels of examiners were appointed to set the examination papers while the provincial Education Departments were responsible for the printing and distribution of the

papers.

The South African school education system is examination-oriented, with a promotional examination at the end of Grade 12. This emphasises the importance of the Senior Certificate Examination. Until as recently as 2000, the successful movement out of the school system at the end of Grade 12 depended solely on a candidate's level of success in the Senior Certificate Examination. In 2001, year marks were introduced for most Grade 12 subjects and referred to as continuous assessment (CASS), which will not exceed 25,00% of the promotion mark (Department of Education 2000:1). CASS is the assessment of the learner's performance carried out on an ongoing basis by the teacher, and was introduced by the government to compel Grade 12 learners to work more consistently throughout the year in preparation for the Senior Certificate Examination. The two main objectives of CASS (*NUE Comment* May 2003:11) are to

- break down the high-stakes, once-off examination system, which meant that pupils were promoted or not promoted on the basis of one examination: at Matric level
- encourage teachers to use assessment for formative purposes as well: that is, to provide feedback to teachers and pupils which would guide learning

Despite these objectives, the *Sunday Times* (30 December 2001:1) reported that education experts criticised that continuous assessment marks, based on the matriculants' year marks, "were not standard among schools" in the country.

In an effort to underline the importance of the Senior Certificate Examination, Education Minister Kader Asmal visited schools with low matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province to determine which factors caused such poor pass rates (*Daily Dispatch* 26 April 2003:7; 30 April 2003:1). These factors will be referred to in chapters 2 and 3 of this study.

1.2.1.2 Poor quality of school education

According to *The Teacher* (February 1998:6), *Umalusi* (the former South African Certification Council, or Sascert) and the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Council attempt to maintain a high standard of examination outcomes throughout the country and aim at a matriculation examination standard that is internationally acceptable. *Umalusi* moderated and monitored the Grade 12 external examination. The recommendations on the Senior Certificate in its report to the Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, in March 2002, clearly have the “interests and contexts of the learners at heart, as well as the imperative to secure public confidence by maintaining [learner academic] standards” (*The Teacher* May 2002:5). The *Daily Dispatch* (7 September 2000:5) stated that the poor quality of education at schools in South Africa is evident in the poor matriculation examination results (see tables 1 and 2) and that it is a contentious issue due to its adverse effects on the learners’ future as well as the South African economy. All in all, the quality of school education is reflected by school pass rates, that is, “the percentages of candidates who were entered for an examination and passed it” (Gray & Wilcox 1995:51).

Davies (1994:206) and the *Daily Dispatch* (31 December 1999:3) state that all the reasons for low matriculation pass rates need to be listed and addressed so as to encourage and improve learner academic achievement. At the end of 2001, the *Daily Dispatch* (28 December 2001:3 b) reported that “the lowest (matriculation) pass rates were from the poorest provinces where black and rural communities comprised the vast majority”. In the Eastern Cape Province the low matriculation examination results currently obtained at schools are an indication of a poor quality of education offered to learners which is probably the result of the school principals’ ineptness regarding a lack of managerial and leadership skills. Furthermore, according to the Education Department

Province, the Eastern Cape Province scored the lowest matriculation pass rate in 2002: 51,80%. Regarding the foregoing, Sadtu said this low figure, reported in the 2002 matriculation examination in the Eastern Cape Province, although an improvement on 2001, “may be ascribed, in part, to a lack of stable [school principal] leadership” (*Daily Dispatch* 28 December 2002:3). The Eastern Cape Province Youth Commission chairperson, Mlungisi Lumka, made the following statement at Youth Day, 2003, celebrations at Peddie: “The youth today face unacceptable high levels of poverty and unemployment as equal and quality education is unattainable for the majority of them” (*Daily Dispatch* 17 June 2003:3). The researcher believes that the current study is imperative to improve the quality of education offered to all learners and alleviate the issues mentioned by Mr Lumka. A systematic inquiry needs to be undertaken to determine how effective school principal managerial skills can promote a better quality of education where an improved matriculation pass rate is envisaged, especially at formerly disadvantaged schools.

According to Wilcox and Gray (1996:100), in deciding whether a school is “likely to fail”, weaknesses will be prevalent in any or all of the following areas:

- the education standards achieved,
- the quality of education provided to learners by their teachers, and
- the education management role of the school principal.

The researcher suspects that weaknesses in the foregoing aspects are prevalent at schools in the Eastern Cape Province and could contribute to the history of low

matriculation pass rates. For the purpose of improving the matriculation pass rates, the researcher will undertake an investigation into the actual circumstances at schools in the Eastern Cape Province. A detailed literature study will relate to recent academia and the media. Serious issues that adversely affect the matriculation pass rate will be explored, regarding conduciveness to teaching and learning. In the light of the problem statement of this study, a further question to be asked is: How, then, do other school factors occurring in the Eastern Cape Province, such as poor school infrastructure, vandalism and overcrowding, affect the matriculation pass rates?

1.2.1.3 Features of school effectiveness

It may be asked what the main features of an effective school are. *Quality in Teaching* (1994:88-89) and Humphreys (1995:157) refer to effective schools as ones that are effectively managed by their school principals. Harber and Trafford (1999:45-46), in turn, refer to effective schools as those where learner academic achievement is high, therefore, ones with a high pass rate. In terms of learner care, learners at effective schools are treated with dignity and encouraged to participate in the organisation of the school. As a result, learners feel valued. Glatter, Preedy, Riches and Masterton (1988:118-122) identify key features of school effectiveness with specific reference to the management and leadership roles of an effective school principal. Glatter et al (1988:118 -122) summarise these factors as follows:

- purposeful leadership by the school principal where he/she is actively involved in the school's development in terms of learner academic achievement,
- a continuous work-centred classroom atmosphere, characterised by a high learner involvement through good classroom management, and
- active involvement of all stakeholders in the academic development of the learners.

Hence, an effective school is characterised by one main link, namely an effective school principal who has high expectations of both the learners and the staff through effective managerial and leadership skills. The aforementioned will be questioned throughout this study as the crux of the investigation into the issue of the low matriculation pass rates at schools in the Eastern Cape Province.

The above distinctive features of effective schools will make up an integral part of the content of the literature study in chapters 2 and 3 of this study. The researcher will question whether these features of effective schools are attainable in the schools in the Eastern Cape Province where the school infrastructure is deficient, overcrowding and poor learner behaviour are the order of the day, and there is a shortage of well qualified teachers. Taking these issues into consideration, the following questions need to be answered: Do school principals strive to develop schools with higher matriculation pass rates by means of the implementation of more efficient management and effective leadership? Are school principals addressing issues that will motivate their staff and the learners' parents to become actively involved in the improvement of matriculation pass rates?

1.2.1.4 Poor Senior Certificate Examination results

Table 1 represents various Senior Certificate Examination pass rates for 1994 to 2002.

It has been compiled by means of an analysis and comparison of the following sources: *Daily Dispatch* (30 December 1999:1; 31 December 1999:1; 7 January 2000:2; 8 January 2000:1; 29 December 2000:1; 17 January 2001:1; 7 December 2001:5; 28 December 2001:1 a, b; 27 December 2002:1; 28 December 2002:1), *Eastern Province Herald* (31 December 1999:3), *The Teacher* (January 2000:3; February 2000:3; January 2001:2), *Evening Post* (4 January 2000:6), *The Herald* (28 December 2001:1-2; 27 December 2002:1), *City Press* (30 December 2001:1, 6 a) and *Sunday Times* (29 December 2002:1).

From table 1, it is evident that there has been a continuous drop in the matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province since 1996, from 50,00% to 40,20% in 1999. These matriculation pass rates were lower than the national matriculation pass rate for this period. "The statistics show that of the 879 secondary schools in the [Eastern] Cape Province which offered matric classes in 1999, only 273 achieved a 50,00% or more [matriculation] pass rate" (*The Teacher* February 2000:3). Dismally low matriculation pass rates of 31,40% (1998) and 30,80% (1999) were reported for the Umtata region. For the year 2000, almost half of the Eastern Cape Province matriculants failed. The 2001 Senior Certificate Examination had a 45,10% pass rate in the Eastern Cape Province. Comparing the latter to the 2000 matriculation pass rate (49,80%) shows a drop of 4,70%, one of the lowest matriculation pass rates for the province recorded since 1994. It is clear from table 1 that during the recorded period 1994 to 2002, the Eastern Cape Province matriculation pass rate was lower than the national (SA) matriculation pass rate. At the end of 2002 there were 400 Matric Improvement Programme (MIP) schools, schools that achieved a matriculation pass rate of less than 50,00% in the Eastern Cape Province, most of them in the former Transkei (*Daily Dispatch* 11 March 2003:3 b). The researcher suspects that low matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province reflect the poor quality of education offered to matriculants and the lack of effective managerial and leadership skills of school principals.

**Table 1 AN INDICATION OF THE NATIONAL AND EASTERN CAPE
PROVINCE SENIOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION PASS RATES OF LEARNERS
WHO WROTE THE EXAMINATION, 1994-2002**

Year	National (SA)	Eastern Cape Province (ECP)
1994	*	48,50%
1995	*	48,10%
1996	54,40%	50,00%

1997	47,40%	46,40%
1998	49,30% of 552 862 learners	45,10%
1999	48,90% of 511 474 learners	40,10%
2000	57,90% of 489 941 learners	49,80%
2001	61,70% of 449 371 learners	45,60%
2002	68,90% of 670 636 learners	51,80% of 85 772 learners

Key in Table 1: * refers to data not available at time of research

From table 1, it is evident that there is a need to research the reasons for the low matriculation pass rates and their serious consequences for learners in order to provide guidelines to school principals for an improvement of their school management practices.

The researcher remains of the opinion that a lack of adequate managerial and leadership skills on the part of school principals could be one of the core issues that needs to be addressed by all education stakeholders.

1.2.1.5 The financial burden of a low matriculation pass rate

To highlight the importance of financial savings for the Eastern Cape Province, the *Daily*

Dispatch (7 September 2000:1) reported the Eastern Cape Province to be the poorest province in South Africa. In an effort to further outline the situation in the country between 1997 and 2002, table 2 has been compiled by means of an analysis and comparison of the following sources: Shindler (1998:11), *Daily Dispatch* (7 July 1999:6; 10 December 1999:4; 30 December 1999:1; 31 December 1999:1; 7 September 2000:1; 29 December 2000:1 a, b; 16 October 2001:1; 27 December 2002:1), *Eastern Province Herald* (31 December 1999:3), *Sunday Times* (27 February 2000:25), and *City Press* (30 December 2001:1). In 2002, it cost the South African government and taxpayers approximately R1 000,00 per candidate who wrote six subjects in the matriculation examination (Nothnagel 10 May 2002; *The Herald* 27 December 2002:2)

Table 2 NUMBER OF LEARNERS FAILING THE MATRICULATION EXAMINATION IN THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE COMPARED TO THE ESTIMATED COST INCURRED BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT, 1997-2002

Year	Number of ECP learners failing the matriculation examination	Estimated cost incurred by the SA government for ECP
1997	41 899	R 1 675 960,00
1998	45 311	R 1 857 751,00
1999	60 000	R 3 519 000,00

2000	42 746 (excluding 6 109 learners not sitting for the examination)	R 2 137 300,00
2001	28 821 (excluding 5 401 learners not sitting for the examination)	R 1 729 260,00
2002	30 482 (excluding 5 411 learners not sitting for the examination)	R 1000,00 per learner writing six subjects

The Eastern Cape Province schools commence yearly with thousands of matriculation failures; some learners failing for the second or third time (*Sunday Times* 27 February 2000:25). Although there is an extremely large examination cost incurred by the government, each learner's right to education is enshrined in the SA Constitution's Bill of Rights (*The Teacher* June 1999:4; *Sunday Times* 7 November 1999:7; *Daily Dispatch* 30 March 2001:6). With careful consideration of the high financial costs involved in low matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province, it may be asked whether South Africa's economy can afford this situation to continue. This is a contentious issue that needs to be addressed by all the school stakeholders.

1.2.1.6 A prevalent school atmosphere of non-teaching and a lack of learning

Owen (1992:182) found that the "head [school principal] has to accept responsibility for any failure of teaching" in his/her school. According to Gounden and Dayaram (1990:310), school principals are responsible for school atmospheres conducive to harmonious and productive teacher and learner academic participation. Bossert et al (1982:35) point out that it is the responsibility of school principals to "provide coherence to their schools' instructional programmes,

- conceptualising instructional goals,

- setting high academic standards,
- staying informed of policies and teachers' problems,
- making frequent classroom visits,
- creating incentives for learning, and
- maintaining student discipline”.

Bossert et al (1982:35) are of the opinion that a school atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning is one “free of disciplinary problems and vandalism”. Parker and Day (1997:97) add that “creating a positive school climate in which teaching and learning can take place ... [is] a situation where learning is made exciting, where teachers and learners are supported and where there is a shared sense of purpose ... learning will not be difficult”. There is a need to investigate these issues in the Eastern Cape Province and determine their exact impact on the matriculation pass rates.

According to Potter and Powell (1992:10-12), *The Teacher* (January 2001:4), and the *Daily Dispatch* (14 January 2002:5), school atmospheres which are not conducive to teaching or learning result in very little or no learner academic achievement. Low matriculation pass rates are thus inevitable at such schools. According to the Eastern Cape Department of Education (2001:B-4), part of a principal's role as leader and manager is to create a school atmosphere conducive to learning and teaching. The Department (2001:B-4) adds that the following are some of the features that define such a school atmosphere:

- Individuals are given the responsibility, freedom and independence to take initiative.
- Staff members are encouraged to be creative and innovative.
- Individuals are allowed to take risks.
- The school has clear objectives and performance expectations.

- Different structures in the school are encouraged to work together.
- Managers provide clear communication, assistance and support to staff.
- Staff and learner behaviour is controlled through direct supervision.
- Everybody in the school community identifies with the school as a whole.
- Rewards are given fairly, consistently and in line with performance rather than through favouritism.
- Everybody in the school can talk openly about conflicts and criticisms.
- Communication within the school is NOT restricted to the formal hierarchy of authority.

Bearing in mind the foregoing idealistic school atmospheres conducive to teaching and learning, the researcher suspects that learners at schools with low matriculation pass rates are rather absorbed into a culture of non-teaching where they often arrive at school late or merely stay at home, roam the streets or turn to vandalism and crime rather than focusing on their academic work. Mosoge (1991:32) concludes that under adverse school conditions, good school-based education becomes virtually impossible and the result is learners who are often unprepared for their final matriculation examinations. It is imperative that school principals focus on resolving these pertinent issues in order to contribute to the attainment of improved matriculation pass rates.

1.2.1.7 The school principal's pivotal role

The *Evening Post* (4 January 2000:4) reported that "some of the blame for poor [Senior Certificate Examination] results must lie with the Eastern Cape Province schools themselves: with the attitudes and motivation of principals, teachers and learners". Hence, the school principal's crucial management and leadership role is a contentious issue that needs to be addressed should improved matriculation pass rates be envisaged at schools in the Eastern Cape Province.

Niehaus and Myburgh (1999:9) emphasise that in the South African context, school “principals find it increasingly necessary to make choices and to take decisions, often with far reaching consequences. Unfortunately, they are not always sufficiently equipped to make carefully considered decisions in meeting situational demands”, especially in overcrowded schools and where learner disciplinary problems are rife. According to Gounden and Dayaram (1990:310), and Poston, Stone and Muther (1992:102), there is considerable discontent with the education management of secondary schools in South Africa as a whole. For the purpose of this study and a sound foundation for future research, there is a need to determine to what extent the schools in the Eastern Cape Province are managed by their school principals in terms of their (the schools’) goals, personnel, learner activities, finances, and physical resources. If the areas mentioned are poorly managed, then these schools may suffer severe, adverse consequences such as poor matriculation results. As far as possible, there is a need for all educational obstacles to higher matriculation pass rates to be eliminated by the school principal in collaboration with the staff, the learners, the parents of the Grade 12 learners, and the Department of Education.

The necessary changes in the school system to improve the matriculation pass rates are only possible through the action of school principals whose effective management contributes to a school culture where “teachers teach, learners learn and managers manage” (*Evening Post* 4 January 2000:6). The researcher suspects that this is not currently the practice in the Eastern Cape Province schools that obtained low matriculation pass rates.

1.3 FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Johnson and Christensen (2000:47), the problem statement in a qualitative research study represents “a statement of the purpose of the study”. With the actuality and domain of this study in mind, the problem statement is postulated as follows:

Are school principals, who lack effective managerial and leadership skills, partly responsible for the continuous low matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province?

In the light of the problem statement, the questions listed below will form an integral part of the research study:

- Is the academic upliftment of neglected learners from the previous education dispensation regarded as a top priority by school principals at schools that obtained low matriculation pass rates?
- Do school principals empower and motivate all school stakeholders, by means of an open communication system, to contribute to the attainment of an improved matriculation pass rate?
- How effectively do school principals contribute to school atmospheres that are conducive to teaching and learning to improve learner academic achievement?
- Are educational school resources allocated accountably by school principals in order to maximise learner academic achievement?
- Is a poor school infrastructure supportive of high quality teaching and learning?
- Are school finances managed effectively by the school principal to support an improvement of the matriculation pass rate?
- Are school principals actively involved in curbing learner misbehaviour by encouraging proactive teacher classroom management based on the principle of learner involvement?

1.4 AIMS OF THE STUDY

1.4.1 General aims

In view of the problem statement, the general aims of this study in the Eastern Cape Province are to

- investigate the factors which adversely result in low matriculation pass rates,
- identify whether the lack of effective school management and leadership quality skills of school principals contributes to low matriculation pass rates,
- define the effective managerial and leadership roles required by the school principals to motivate all stakeholders to make a concerted effort to improve matriculation pass rates,
- identify ways in which the school principals, teachers, learners and parents can contribute to higher matriculation pass rates, and
- investigate what tasks and actions need to be carried out by school principals in terms of school management and leadership to improve the low matriculation pass rates.

1.4.2 Specific aims

The specific aims of this study are to

- investigate and discuss the apparent lack of managerial and leadership skills of school principals and how this culminates in low matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province schools,

- undertake a literature study to investigate the issue of the low matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province in terms of the problem statement of this study,
- undertake an empirical investigation in the qualitative tradition in terms of the problem statement, and
- make recommendations to develop the education management and leadership skills of school principals in practice so as to improve the poor matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province.

The above general and specific aims will be critical to the researcher for deciding which data to report and what relevant literature to cite.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 Literature study

An in-depth literature study will be undertaken where recent, primary and secondary sources, including books, journals, magazine and newspaper articles will be analysed and interpreted in the light of the problem statement. The crucial management and leadership roles of school principals will be questioned, in the light of the problem statement, throughout the literature study. The management of schools with low matriculation pass rates will be probed. In the literature study in chapter 3, the researcher will focus on the influence of learners, teachers and parents on the matriculation pass rates. The full

literature study is regarded as an introductory phase to the qualitative research to follow in chapter 4 of this study.

1.5.2 Qualitative research methodology

In this study a qualitative empirical research project will be conducted to validate the theoretical basis. According to Burgess (1988:1-2) and Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (1990:447-448), this method employs naturalistic inquiry to establish the natural flow of events at schools and how participants interpret them.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher adheres to McMillan and Schumacher's (1997:531) definition of ethnographic research as describing "the context of the naturalistic event", that is, in terms of qualitative research, an analytical description of a group of participants' shared beliefs and practices in an education activity. In the case of this study, the phenomenon of a lack of managerial and leadership skills of school principals and how it may result in poor matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province, will be investigated. The intent of this qualitative study will be exploratory and descriptive, revealing issues in their complexity. The descriptive account will constitute the main contribution the researcher has to make. The researcher will start with a description of the setting and events, and before analysing the research results, will present sufficient data to support his analysis.

1.5.3 Data-collection strategies

Data-collection strategies will include the ethnographic interview and participant observation which will be applied to investigate the problem statement and aims of this study. Throughout the qualitative research, the researcher will refer to artefacts.

- **The ethnographic interview**

According to Tuckman (1988:393-394) and Walker (1993:117), interviews used as a data-collection strategy can be perceived as data-collection devices that attempt to capture the varying perspectives of participants to standardised questions that intend to be minimally interventional. The researcher will prepare questions in an interview schedule allowing for further, unplanned questions to be asked in order to clarify certain responses.

- **Participant observation**

The researcher plans to observe all participants with the intent of linking and comparing findings made from the literature study and ethnographic interviews. During participant observation, the researcher will adopt a passive role that will ensure the minimum contamination of the setting.

- **Artefact collection**

McMillan and Schumacher (1997:455) describe artefact collection as a “non-interactive strategy for obtaining ethnographic data with little or no reciprocity between the researcher and the participant”. Artefact collections in this research study will describe the participants’ experiences, knowledge, actions and values. The researcher will investigate personal and official documents, such as minutes of meetings and registers. Using qualitative research methodology, the researcher hopes to be taken into the situation under investigation and obtain information-rich descriptions from the participants.

1.5.4 Research participants

Research participants from four schools with low matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province will consist of

- four school principals,
- four teachers,
- four learners, and
- four parents of Grade 12 learners.

Therefore, a total of sixteen research respondents (N=16) will be selected at random to participate in the four research schools where the ethnographic interviews and participant observation will be conducted together with artefact collection. This study will provide research information which is corroborated by means of an empirical study undertaken and concluded during a field research project in 2002 at four schools with low matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province.

1.6 CHAPTER DIVISION

The chapter division of the study will be as follows:

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the study and includes a brief historical overview of the existing problem, the problem statement, and the aims of the study.

Chapter 2 will provide a literature study regarding the management and leadership roles of school principals with special reference to school atmospheres.

Chapter 3 will continue the literature study on how learners, teachers and parents can adversely influence the matriculation pass rates.

Chapter 4 will present the empirical research to be employed.

Chapter 5 will discuss the research results and give an analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data.

Chapter 6 will discuss the findings and recommendations for the alleviation of the low matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province. Recommendations will be made for further research. Finally, a flow model will be postulated to address the problem of low matriculation pass rates in practice.

1.7 POSSIBLE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE STUDY

The specific procedure followed in the collection of data will include the random selection of only four schools with low matriculation pass rates.

- A total of only sixteen research respondents will be interviewed and observed.
- The data gathered during the ethnographic interviews will focus on the situation in the Eastern Cape Province schools with low matriculation pass rates.
- The data collected will not reflect all the managerial and leadership levels of all school principals in the Republic of South Africa where low matriculation pass rates exist.
- A further possible source of error in this study could be the potential bias of the researcher.

1.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the researcher indicated the route he wishes to follow in the course of the study. The methodology and research design were briefly discussed as well as the importance of emphasising school principals' roles as effective managers and leaders at schools where improved matriculation pass rates are envisaged as a school goal. Hence, the primary purpose of this study is to postulate a flow model to address the low matriculation pass rates in the Eastern Cape Province.

Chapter 2 deals with an in-depth literature study on school principals' management and leadership roles. The researcher will refer to school principals' responsibilities towards the school infrastructure, and school atmospheres conducive to teaching and learning.
